

Name: _____

Due: _____

Tales from the Odyssey
Book Six: The Final Battle
By: Mary Pope Osborne

Answer all questions at the end of each chapter. Make sure to **use complete sentences** and that you read the questions fully. You should highlight unknown words, new characters, and important or interesting points within the story when you are reading. **Write notes on the side - it lets me know what you're thinking when reading.** If you have questions that come up when reading, write them down on the right hand side - sometimes asking yourself questions when reading helps you better understand the text.

Chapter 6: Stringing the Bow	Questions/Notes/Comments
<p>After breakfast, Penelope went to the storeroom of the palace and picked up the huge bow that had once belonged to Odysseus. She carried it out to the hall and set it down before all the suitors.</p> <p>“Listen to me,” she said to them. “For a long time, you have overrun this house. You have drunk my husband’s wine and slaughtered his livestock. You say you are only waiting for me to choose one of you to marry. Well, here is your challenge. If one of you can string the bow of Odysseus and shoot an arrow through the rings of twelve ax handles in a row, that is the man I will marry.”</p> <p>The suitors eagerly took up the challenge. One by one, they tried to string Odysseus’ mighty bow. But even though they greased it with hot tallow and warmed it near the fire, the strong bow would not bend.</p> <p>While each suitor took his turn with the bow, the old swineherd and the cowherd who had long tended Odysseus’ cattle slipped out of the hall. They were sickened by the sight of their enemies handling their master’s bow.</p> <p>Odysseus saw the two men go and hurried after them. “Wait!” he called. “I have a question for you both. If Odysseus were to drop from the sky and appear before you today, would you fight for him? Or would you fight on the side of the suitors?”</p>	

“Oh, if only Zeus would hear my prayer and lead our master home,” said the cowherd, “you would quickly see my strength in fighting for him.”

The swineherd nodded and uttered his own desperate prayer for Odysseus’ return.

Odysseus was certain he could trust his two old servants. “You must know, then, that your prayers have been answered,” he said. “I am Odysseus. And if we defeat these suitors, I will honor you both.”

The two men were speechless. They could not believe that the wretched beggar standing before them was truly their master, Odysseus.

Odysseus lifted his ragged cloak, revealing the long white scar above his knee. “Remember the wound inflicted by the tusk of the boar when I was young?” he asked.

The swineherd and cowherd fell upon their long-lost master and wept.

Odysseus embraced them. “Cease your tears, now or someone will see us and tell the others,” he said. “Listen carefully to my orders. When we go back inside, give me the bow, so that I may have a turn in the contest. After I have it in my hands, make certain that all the women are locked in their rooms, and throw the bar across the courtyard gate.”

When Odysseus and his two loyal servants returned to the great hall, they found that none of the suitors had been able to string the bow. “Why do you not resume your contest tomorrow?” Odysseus said. “Perhaps the archer god will help one of you then. But for now, let me hold that smooth bow. I should like to see if there is any force left in my hands, or if my hard travels have taken all my strength away.”

The men reacted angrily. “You fool, do not dare to touch that bow,” said Antinous. “Hold your tongue, or we will throw you out to sea.”

Penelope stood up. "Our guest says he comes from a noble family," she said. "give him the bow and let him try to string it."

"Mother, return to your chamber and your weaving," said Telemachus, for he knew that a bloody battle was about to begin. "I am master of this house. I will be the one to invite our guest to string the bow."

Penelope was surprised by the sharp words of her son, but she lowered her head and returned to her chamber. As she lay on her bed and wept for Odysseus, the goddess Athena closed Penelope's eyelids and sent her into a deep slumber, sparing her from the horror of what was about to happen.

In the great hall below, the swineherd and cowherd took the mighty bow and quiver of arrows and handed them to Odysseus. Then they hurried from the room to give orders to the maids and lock the outside gate.

Odysseus slowly examined the bow. Then he bent and strung it effortlessly, as if he were a musician stringing a harp. When he finished, he plucked the taut cord. It sang like a swallow's note.

Thunder rumbled in the sky. Odysseus smiled, for he knew the thunder was another sign from the god Zeus. As the suitors watched in stunned silence, he picked up an arrow and set it against the bow. He aimed at the row of axes. He drew the arrow back, and let it fly.

The arrow sailed perfectly through each of the twelve ax rings.

Odysseus put down his bow and looked at Telemachus. "The stranger you welcomed into your home has not disgraced you," he said.

Telemachus nodded. The battle was about to begin.

Questions:

1. What is the challenge Penelope gave to the suitors in order to marry her?

Chapter 7: Death to the Suitors

Odysseus threw off his rags and leapt onto the stone threshold of the hall. He glared down at the suitors.

“*That* contest is over,” he said. “But now there is another target for my bow. Help me, Apollo, god of archers --” And with those words, Odysseus took aim at Antinous, the leader of the suitors, and sent an arrow straight into the villain’s throat.

As Antinous fell to the floor, the other suitors sprang from their seats. “You will pay for this!” one shouted at Odysseus. “The vultures will soon eat *you!*” They all then rushed about in great confusion, searching for their weapons. But no spears or shields could be found.

“Dogs!” Odysseus shouted at them. “I -- Odysseus -- have come back! You never thought you would see me again, did you? But now your final hour has come!”

“Use the tables for shields to block his arrows!” one of the suitors shouted. “Attack him with your swords!” The man rushed at Odysseus with his sword, but Odysseus swiftly slew him with another arrow from his bow.

Another suitor ran toward Odysseus, but Telemachus hurled his spear and killed him, too. Then Telemachus hurried from the room to get arms for swineherd and the cowherd.

Odysseus held off the suitors with his arrows until Telemachus returned with shields and spears and gave the weapons to their two allies. Then the four men stood together against the crowd.

One of Odysseus' enemies ran upstairs to the storeroom and found the door unlocked. He grabbed twelve spears and brought them to the others.

With the enemy now armed, it seemed impossible to Odysseus that he and his three comrades could defeat the scores of men. But suddenly the goddess Athena appeared in the hall.

"Join us in our fight!" Odysseus shouted to her.

Athena's eyes flashed. "You must prove yourselves first!" she said. Then she turned into a swallow and flew up to a roof beam to watch.

One after another, Odysseus sent his arrows streaking through the air, killing many of the suitors. Then he and his three comrades hurled their four spears at the enemy. When four of the suitors went down, Odysseus and his men pulled the spears from their bodies and hurled them again.

The suitors hurled spears, too. But Athena kept sending them astray. Finally, the goddess sent a vision that struck terror into the suitors' hearts. A dark cloud appeared over the great hall. The cloud took the shape of Athena's mighty shield. The suitors knew that a vision of Athena's shield meant certain death.

Ruthlessly, Odysseus, Telemachus, and their two comrades slew man after man. Odysseus spared the life of the minstrel, for the singer sang songs sent from the gods. And he spared the herald, for he wanted him to spread the news that the men of this earth should do good and not evil.

But to all others, Odysseus showed no mercy. By the end of the battle, every suitor had been slain. Their bodies were heaped on the floor like dead fish thrown from a net onto the sand.

The god Hermes appeared in the great hall. Holding his golden wand, he led the suitors' ghosts from the palace.

Squeaking like bats, the ghosts followed Hermes over ocean waves. They followed him past snowy rocks. They followed him beyond the sun's gate and beyond the place of dreams, until they arrived at last in the mist-shrouded Land of the Dead.

Questions:

1. How do you think Odysseus felt when Athena said that he had to "prove" himself before she would help him defeat the suitors?

2. What two people did Odysseus spare? Why?

3. Why did Hermes show up?

Chapter 8: Reunion

Standing in a pool of blood, surrounded by the corpses of the suitors, Odysseus called for the maidservant Euryclea. When the old woman saw the carnage, she shrieked with joy and relief, for she knew the palace was finally free of

the villains who had tormented Odysseus' family for so many years.

"Be silent," Odysseus commanded her. "It is wrong to exult over the dead."

"Let me at least go and tell Penelope," said the maid. "She has slept through the whole battle."

"No, do not wake her yet," said Odysseus. "Gather all the maids who once danced with the suitors. Order them to carry away the dead and wash the blood from the walls and floors."

Euryclea did as Odysseus commanded her. When the palace was scrubbed clean, Odysseus told her to make a fire to purify the house. Finally, as the fire sent its smoke through the halls and courtyard, Euryclea hurried upstairs to Penelope.

"Wake up!" she cried, shaking the sleeping queen. "Your beloved husband has returned! He waits for you now! Wake up!"

When Penelope opened her eyes, the old woman told her the story of the great battle and how she had found Odysseus and Telemachus standing over the corpses of the suitors.

"Do not raise my hopes that it is truly Odysseus," said Penelope. "Surely, it is one of the immortal gods in disguise. My beloved husband is either far away on a distant island, or he is dead."

"Go and see for yourself!" urged Euryclea. "I saw the scar on his leg -- from the tusk of the boar. Come with me now! He waits for you by his own fireside!"

"Old woman, you do not know the minds of the gods . . . or how they can trick us," said Penelope. "But I will go and see my son."

Penelope went downstairs. She found Odysseus sitting by the fire. His rags were covered with blood. Sweat and blood covered his dirty face and hair.

Stunned by Odysseus' savage appearance, Penelope turned away.

Telemachus rebuked her. "Mother, can you not even look at him? Is your heart so hard?"

But Odysseus was patient. He smiled and turned to Telemachus. "Let us wash ourselves and dress in fresh tunics," he said. "Then tell the minstrel to play a cheerful dance tune as if he were playing a wedding song. We must fool the neighbors, and delay the news of the slaughter from reaching the relatives of the slain. When they hear about it, they will surely seek revenge."

Odysseus left the hall, and servants bathed him and rubbed him with oil and dressed him in a clean tunic. Then the goddess Athena magically took away his beggar disguise and made him look younger and taller.

As handsome as a god, Odysseus returned to the hearthside. He sat opposite Penelope. But still she was silent. Odysseus' transformation had made her even more mistrustful. Was this man truly a man? Or was he a god trying to deceive her?

"What a strange woman you are," said Odysseus. "After twenty years, you will not let your husband take you in his arms." When Penelope did not speak, Odysseus went on. "Well, then, I suppose I must sleep alone."

"What a strange man you are," said Penelope, "if indeed you are a man, and not playing a trick on me." Then Penelope thought of a trick of her own. Long ago, Odysseus had built their marriage bed from an olive tree that grew through the floor of their bedchamber. Only she and Odysseus himself knew the secret of its construction.

"I know not who you truly are," Penelope said, "but I will tell my maid to prepare my own bed for you. Euryclea!" she called, "have the servants place my bed outside my chamber and pile it with fleeces and sheets of linen."

Odysseus' eyes flashed with anger. "What happened to the bed I made for us long ago?" he said. "That bed could

never be moved -- one of its posts is the trunk of an olive tree still rooted in the ground! Has a thief cut that post and stolen our bed?"

Penelope gave a shout of joy and rushed into Odysseus' arms. "Only you would know this secret of our marriage bed!" she exclaimed tearfully. "Forgive me for doubting you!"

As his wife's arms closed tenderly about him, a deep ache rose in Odysseus' breast -- the ache of a swimmer in a stormy sea who has long yearned for the sun-warmed earth. Holding Penelope in the flickering firelight of his own hearth, he wept with sweet grief.

As his mother and father embraced, Telemachus hushed the dancers and the servants. The hall was darkened, and everyone went to bed.

Odysseus and Penelope retired to their chamber, and to the bed with the post made from the olive tree. There they spent many hours of the night telling each other stories of all that had happened during Odysseus' absence.

While they talked, the goddess Athena held back the horses of Dawn -- Firebright and Daybright -- so the joyful couple could spend more time alone.

Questions:

1. How did Penelope react when she first saw Odysseus?

2. What trick did Penelope try to play on Odysseus?

Chapter 9: Peace

When dawn finally came, Odysseus told Penelope that he must go to country and see his father Laertes. Mad with grief, Laertes had mourned his lost son for twenty years. The old man refused even to live in the palace, preferring to sleep in rags in one of Odysseus' vineyards.

"While I am gone, lock yourselves and your maids in your rooms and speak to no one," Odysseus said to Penelope. "For I must warn you -- by the end of this day, word will have spread about the death of the suitors -- and their kin will surely come seeking revenge."

Odysseus then woke Telemachus, and the swineherd and cowherd, and asked them to go with him to see his father. Though it was bright morning when they set out, Athena shrouded the four men in darkness until they came to Laertes' vineyard far from town.

"Go to the house and prepare a meal for us," Odysseus told the others. "I will go into the fields and find my father."

In one of the fields of the vineyard, Odysseus saw an old man hoeing the ground. Bent over his hoe, the man wore a filthy tunic and a tattered hat made of goatskin. It grieved Odysseus to see his father Laertes looking so weary and ragged.

"Forgive me for disturbing you," Odysseus called out. "I am looking for a friend of mine. He once stopped at my island and stayed in our house. He said he was from Ithaca and that his father was Laertes."

The old man lowered his head and wept. "That must have been my son, my unfortunate son, Odysseus," he said. "He has long been dead. Far from home, he was eaten by the fish of the sea or perhaps by wild beasts on land."

"Indeed?" said Odysseus. "It has only been a few years since I saw him. I gave him gifts and sent him on his way. I thought the omens for him were good. We had every hope of meeting again."

Laertes nodded and his eyes filled with tears. Then the burden of his grief became too much for him. Groaning with misery, he picked up a handful of dirt and poured it over his head.

Odysseus could not bear to see his father suffer a moment longer. He rushed forward and threw his arms around the sad old man. "Father, I am your son," he said. "I have returned. And I have destroyed all those who tormented you and my wife and son."

Laertes stammered in disbelief. "Can -- can you give me proof that you are truly my son?" he asked.

"I can show you this hunting wound," said Odysseus, revealing the scar above his knee. "And I can tell you about the trees in your orchards. When I was a boy, you gave me thirteen pear trees and ten apple trees and forty fig trees."

Hearing these words, Laertes collapsed to the ground in a faint. Odysseus held his father tightly to his chest, until Laertes opened his eyes again. A smile of joy spread over the old man's face -- then a look of fear.

"I am afraid that soon the families of the slain suitors will come seeking revenge," said Laertes.

"Do not worry about them now," said Odysseus. "Come, let us go to the farmhouse and have a meal together with your grandson, Telemachus."

Odysseus helped his father to the house, where a great feast awaited them. There the old man bathed and dressed in a fine cloak. The goddess Athena gave youthful energy to his frail limbs and made him taller and stronger.

In the midst of their celebration, an angry shout came from outside. Armed men had indeed come seeking revenge for the death of the suitors.

Odysseus, his father, and his son quickly pulled on armor and went outside. Laertes hurled his spear through the air and killed one of the men. Odysseus and Telemachus held up their swords and prepared to meet their enemy.

At that moment, Athena appeared. "Hold back!" she cried. "Stop, before another drop of blood is shed!"

Odysseus' foes turned pale at the sight of the great goddess. They dropped their weapons and fled in terror. Odysseus let out a savage battle cry. He swooped like an eagle after them.

But mighty Zeus threw a thunderbolt to earth. Seeing this sign, Athena called Odysseus back. "Cease fighting, Odysseus, before you anger the gods!" she cried. "All fighting must end! Let there be peace from now on!"

Odysseus was relieved to hear these words. He gladly gave up the pursuit of his enemies. He knew that with the blessing of the gods, all his battles were over -- battles against Trojan warriors, against monsters of the deep, against terrible storms, and against enemies at home. Odysseus had survived each and every one, and was finally reunited with his beloved family.

From that day on, and for many years to come, peace reigned on the island of Ithaca, and the gods looked favorably upon Odysseus, his wife, and his son.

Questions:

1. Who does Odysseus go looking for?

2. What is your final thoughts about the Odyssey?
Why do you think it is a story that has lasted thousands of years?

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