

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Tales from the Odyssey  
Book Two: The Land of the Dead  
*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 Six: Another Journey   | Notes/Questions/Comments |
|--|--------------------------|
| <p>In the days that followed, Odysseus and his men enjoyed the warmth and luxury of Circe's palace. They rested and ate good meat and drank sweet wine.</p> <p>As they refreshed themselves on the enchanted island, time passed swiftly. The days turned into weeks, and the weeks into months. After a full year, Odysseus' men came to him.</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">"Should we not leave this palace soon?" one asked.</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">"Have you forgotten Ithaca?" said another. "Shall we never see our homeland again?"</p> <p>Odysseus' heart was stirred by the words of his men. He thought of home -- of Penelope and Telemachus, and of his mother and father. A great yearning to see them rose up in him. He hurried to Circe's chambers.</p> <p>"My men and I are strong again thanks to your kindness," he said. "But remember the promise you made me? You said you would help us return safely to Ithaca, once we had rested and regained our strength."</p> <p>"And I shall," said Circe. "But you must take another journey first. You must seek counsel from Tiresias, the blind prophet of Thebes. Tiresias sees the future. Only he can tell you how to get home."</p> <p>"But Tiresias of Thebes is dead," said Odysseus, puzzled.</p> <p>"Yes, Tiresias is dead," said Circe, "but he still has all the wisdom he had on earth."</p> |                          |

"I do not understand," said Odysseus. "How can one who lives in the Land of the Dead give counsel to a living man?"

"You must travel to the Land of the Dead," said Circe. "There you will speak to the ghost of Tiresias."

Odysseus could not speak. It seemed an unbearable terror for a living man to visit the dark world ruled by the god Hades, and his queen, Persephone.

"No man has ever found the Land of the Dead," he said in a hushed voice. "Only the spirits know how to travel there. What ship will take me? What wind will blow?"

"You cannot travel all the way there in your ship," said Circe. "The North Wind will take you to the edge of the sea, to Oceanus, the river that circles the world. Once you have sailed across Oceanus, you may enter the Land of the Dead."

"What must I do then?" Odysseus asked.

"You must disembark from your ship and travel on foot through a grove of willows and poplars," said Circe. "When you come to the place where two rivers meet -- the River of Groans and the River of Flame -- dig a trench. Pour honey, milk, wine, and white barley meal into it, as gifts to the spirits of the dead. Then sacrifice two sheep and pour their blood into the trench. After you have done this, stand guard until the ghost of Tiresias appears. Allow him to drink from the trench, and he will tell you how to find your way home to Ithaca."

Odysseus bowed his head. He knew he could not avoid this dreadful journey if he wanted to see his home and family again. He tried to gather his courage, as he so often ordered his men to do. He looked up at Circe and nodded.

Then, without another word, Odysseus pulled on a fine cloak and strode through the palace, waking each of his men.

"Rise now," Odysseus said. "We must leave this place today." The men were relieved, for they imagined they were about to set sail for home. But when the Greeks had gathered outside the palace, Odysseus revealed their true destination.

“Soon we will set sail for Ithaca,” he said. “But first we must go on another journey. We must travel to the Land of the Dead. There I will speak with the ghost of the wise prophet Tiresias.”

The men cried out in protest. But Odysseus told them he had no choice.

“Only Tiresias can tell me how to find the way home,” he said. “Please, come with me. Give me company on my journey to the Land of the Dead.”

Their heads bowed in anguish, the men followed their leader down to their ship. They climbed aboard. They hoisted their sails and pushed out to sea.

As the black ship sailed over the waves, Odysseus felt a gust of warm gentle wind. He sensed that Circe was close by.

The enchantress sent fresh breezes all day. She filled the sails of the black ship and sent it flying over the waves.

### Questions

1. Who is Tiresias? Why does Odysseus need to visit him?

---

---

---

---

2. What could go wrong in the Land of the Dead? Make a prediction.

---

---

---

3. Where is the Land of the Dead? How will Odysseus get there?

---

---

---

---

### **Chapter Seven: The Land of the Dead**

When the sun had gone down and darkness had fallen, Odysseus and his men arrived at the edge of the sea. They sailed through a gray mist into the deep waters of Oceanus, the river that flows around the world.

Then they sailed across Oceanus and finally came to the Land of the Dead.

The Greeks moored their vessel on a dark riverbank shrouded in fog. As they stared into the mist, the men shook with terror, afraid to venture into the haunted realm. Odysseus himself trembled at the thought of what lay ahead. But with firm resolve, he stepped ashore and ordered his men to follow him with two sheep from Circe's island.

Odysseus and his men traveled on foot through a grove of poplars and willows. They stopped when they came to the place where two rivers met, the River of Flame and the River of Groans.

There, in a place never touched by the rays of the sun, Odysseus dug a deep trench. He poured in the mixture of honey, milk, wine, and white barley meal. He offered prayers for the spirits of the dead. Then he ordered his men to slay the two sheep as a sacrifice to the gods.

As soon as Odysseus poured the blood of the sacrificed animals into the trench, ghostly beings appeared out of the mist -- the spirits of old men and women, the spirits of warriors still wearing their armor, the spirits of young women who had mourned for their lost men and died of broken hearts.

Thousands of ghosts began moving slowly toward the Greeks. Drawn to the scent of the blood, they made strange wailing noises.

Odysseus' men shook and trembled. Odysseus himself turned pale with fear. But he drew his sword to keep the spirits away until the ghost of Tiresias, the blind prophet, appeared.

While Odysseus fiercely guarded the trench, his gaze came to rest on one of the spirits floating through the ist. With shock and horror, he recognized someone he loved very dearly.

Moving toward him was the ghost of his own mother.

Questions:

1. Describe the Land of the Dead.

---

---

---

---

---

## Chapter Eight: Like a Shadow or a Dream

Odysseus wept. He had not seen his mother for more than ten years, not since he had left Ithaca. He knew now that one of his worst fears had been realized -- while he had been away, his beloved mother had died.

He called her name. But the spirit of his mother did not speak to him -- she did not seem even to recognize him. She seemed only to yearn for a taste of the sheep's blood in the trench.

In spite of his great sorrow, Odysseus held up his sword and would not let his mother's ghost come closer. He kept guarding the trench, waiting for the spirit of Tiresias to appear.

At last a frail figure drifted out of the mist. Carrying a golden scepter in his hand, the ghost of an old man moved through the swirling gray air toward the animal blood. Odysseus lowered his sword and allowed the spirit of Tiresias to drink from the trench.

Once the ghost had had his fill of the sheep's blood, he rose and turned to Odysseus. In a clear, cold voice, he said:

“Odysseus, you have come to ask me about your journey home. The gods are making your voyage very difficult. They will not allow you to escape the anger of Poseidon for blinding his son, the Cyclops.”

Odysseus felt a wave of despair. The curse of the Cyclops seemed too terrible for him to endure.

“Do not lose hope,” the ghost said. “You may still return to Ithaca. But you must heed my warning. On your way home, you will pass the island of the sun god. On this island there are many beautiful sheep and cattle. Do not let your men touch even one of these creatures. They are much adored by the sun. Any man who tries to slay them will meet his doom.”

Odysseus nodded.

“Tell your men to leave these herds untouched and think only of returning home,” the ghost said. “If they do not obey this command, they will die, and your ship will be destroyed. You alone might escape. But if you do, you will be a broken man. And you will find great trouble in your house.”

Odysseus was grateful for the wise man’s warnings. He resolved to keep his men from touching the cattle and sheep of the sun god.

“Many years from now, death shall come to you from the sea,” the ghost of the soothsayer said finally. “Your life shall leave you when you are old and have found peace of mind.”

Odysseus nodded. “If this is the will of the gods, so be it,” he said. As Tiresias started to move away, Odysseus called after him. “Wait, please, before you leave --”

The ghost turned back.

“Can you tell me why my mother’s spirit does not speak to me when I call her name?” Odysseus asked.

“Your mother’s ghost can speak only if you allow her to taste the blood in the trench,” answered the ghost of Tiresias. “Until then, she has not life enough to speak.”

The spirit of the wise prophet turned away and Odysseus watched him fade back into the mist.

Odysseus then bid his mother’s ghost to come forward and taste the blood from the trench.

Once she had tasted the sheep’s blood, the spirit of Odysseus’ mother seemed to gain strength. When she looked again at her son, she cried out in surprise.

“My beloved!” she said. “You are not a spirit! Why are you here?”

Odysseus gently explained to his mother the reason for his journey to the Land of the Dead. Then he asked her many questions: “How are Penelope and Telemachus? Did Penelope bury my memory and marry another? How is my father? Is he still alive?”

The ghost looked at her son sadly.

“Your family has been broken by sorrow,” she said. “Your wife still waits for you. But she spends her days and nights weeping. Your son is strong and brave. Though he is young, he guards your home, your fields, and your livestock. He also mourns your absence, as does your father. Your father lives in the country and never goes near town. In winter, he wears only rags and sleeps on the floor. In summer, he sleeps in the vineyard. He weeps for you all the time.”

Odysseus was grieved to hear this news of his family. “And you, Mother?” he asked. “What sad fate has befallen you?”

“Your absence weighed too greatly on my heart,” she said. “As I grew more and more certain you would never return home, I became too sad to live.”

Odysseus reached out to embrace his mother’s ghost. Three times he tried. But each time, she slipped away from his as if she were made of air.

“Mother!” he cried. “Why are you not there when I try to embrace you?”

“My son, I am only a spirit,” she said gently. “Leave the Land of the Dead, now. Find the light of day while you still live.”

To Odysseus’ great sadness, the spirit of his mother then faded from his sight, like a shadow or a dream.

Questions:

1. What did Tiresias tell Odysseus he and his men must not do?

---

---

---

---

2. Tiresias says Odysseus will die when and where?

---

---

---

---

## Chapter Nine: The Warrior Ghosts

When the ghost of Odysseus' mother had gone, more spirits came forward to drink from the trench.

Odysseus drew his sword and ordered them to approach one at a time.

First came the spirits of the wives and the mothers of slain Greek heroes. Then came the ghosts of the great kings and warriors themselves. Among them was the ghost of Agamemnon, High King of the Greek forces during the Trojan war.

"My lord, king of us all!" Odysseus cried. "You are here!"

As soon as he had tasted the sheep's blood, Agamemnon recognized Odysseus. He tried to lift his arms to embrace him, but there was little strength or power left in his ghostly being.

Odysseus wept tears of pity. Until now he had not known that Agamemnon had died. Now they sat and talked with one another -- the living man on one side of the trench, and the ghost of the mighty king on the other.

"What fate brought you here?" asked Odysseus. "Did you drown in a terrible storm at sea? Did an enemy strike you down in some great fight?"

Agamemnon told Odysseus that he had been slain by his own queen.

"But you will not meet the same end, Odysseus," the ghost of Agamemnon assured him. "Your wife, Penelope, is loyal to you. She is a most admirable woman. When you left her, she was little more than a girl. When you return, she and your son will be waiting to embrace you and work with you on your farm."

As Odysseus and the spirit of Agamemnon sat weeping and talking, the ghosts of warriors came and sat with them, warriors who had fought valiantly in the Trojan war. Among them was great Achilles, the bravest of all the Greeks.

"Odysseus, what a daring thing you do now," said Achilles. "Why have you traveled here to be with the ghosts of the dead?"



Odysseus told Achilles and the others about his journey and how he had come to meet with the ghost of Tiresias. He praised Achilles, calling him a prince among the dead.

“Ah, perhaps,” said Achilles, “but I would rather be a poor man’s servant in the world of the living than a king of kings in the Land of the Dead.”

The ghosts of other dead warriors each told Odysseus their sad tales, and to each ghost, Odysseus gave news about the living.

Then Odysseus saw Tantalus, a king whose great pride had angered the gods. Their punishment for him was eternal hunger and thirst. Tantalus was forced to stand in water up to his chin, with fruit trees drooping overhead, their branches laden with pears, apples, and figs.

Whenever Tantalus lowered his head to drink the water, the water dried up. When he reached up to clutch the fruit, the wind blew the branches into the air.

Next Odysseus saw Sisyphus, a cruel king whom the gods had condemned to forever roll a huge rock uphill. Every time Sisyphus reached the top of the hill, the rock rolled back down the slope, and Sisyphus had to start all over again.

Odysseus then saw the mighty Heracles. The great warrior stared into the distance, holding his bow in his hands, his arrow on the string. For all time he would stand poised to take aim.

As Odysseus looked through the mist for the spirits of more heroes, he saw that thousands of ghosts were moving slowly toward him. Their voices were soft at first. Then they grew louder and louder. The spirits were crowding close around Odysseus, crying out for his help.

Odysseus felt a wave of panic. In terror, he turned and fled from the spirits of the dead. His men followed him back through Persephone’s grove until they came to their ship.

Odysseus led the way on board and ordered the Greeks to set sail at once.

The men rowed swiftly across the river of Oceanus. They kept rowing until they felt a breeze and opened their sails.

As dawn's rosy light glittered on the wine-dark sea, Odysseus finally caught his breath. His mind roamed over the past year -- the nightmare of the cannibal giants, the long stay in Circe's palace, and his visit to the haunted realm of Hades and Persephone.

Odysseus grieved for his dead mother and felt more anxious than ever to see his father before the old man also died. More than anything, he longed to be reunited with his loving wife and son before harm came to them.

Odysseus' heart ached almost more than he could bear. Still, he rejoiced that he was in the world of the living and not trapped forever in the dark Land of the Dead.

Questions:

1. Who is Tantalus? What was his punishment in the afterlife?

---

---

---

---

---

2. Who is Sisyphus? What was his punishment in the afterlife?

---

---

---

---

3. Which punishment do you think is worse? Why?

---

---

---

---