

***The Odyssey* Character list**

Ithaca:

Odysseus

Penelope, his wife

Telemachus, his son

Laertes, his father

Eurycleia, Telemachus's nurse, house slave

Suitors, including Antinous, Eurymachus, Leocritus

Icarius, Penelope's father

Halitherses, old warrior

Pisenor, Ithaca's herald

Telemachus's journey:

Nestor, king in Pylos

Pisistratus, Nestor's son

Menelaus, king in Lacadaemon, Sparta

Helen, Queen and wife to Menelaus

Megapenthes, son of Menelaus and a slave

Hermione, Helen's only child

Eteoneus, advisor to Menelaus

Odysseus's journey:

Eurylochus, sailor on Odysseus's ship

Alcinuous, King of Phaeacia

Arete, queen and wife to Alcinuous

Nausicaa, their daughter

Echeneus, eldest lord of Phaeacia

Tiresias, dead seer, blind prophet

Famous people, as from the Trojan War:

Agamemnon, brother to Menelaus, killed by Aegisthus

Clytemnestra, wife of Agamemnon

Orestes, son of Agamemnon, killed his murderer Aegisthus

Aegisthus, stole Clytemnestra and killed Agamemnon

Dead heroes including Ajax, Achilles, Patroclus, Antilochus

King Priam, king of Troy

Cassandra, Priam's daughter

Deities and magical creatures:

Zeus, king of the gods

Athena

Hermes, messenger

Poseidon, lord of ocean

Circe

Calypso, a nymph-goddess

Polyphemus, strongest Cyclops and son of Poseidon

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The Odyssey Timeline

Years	Odysseus Events	Ithaca events
1-10	Trojan War	
11	Odysseus tries for home	(assumed) They are waiting for his return
12	w/Circe, other troubles	Suitors may begin to appear
13		
14	Odysseus is with Calypso	
15	"	
16	"	
17	"	Penelope starts weaving trick
18	"	(Menelaus gets home)
19	"	
20	Odysseus gets to leave	Weaving discovered. Athena sends Telemachus searching.

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The Odyssey Table of Contents

Books	Topic	Pages	Number of pages
1-4	Telemachus: sails to find out about his father	77-151	74
5-8	Odysseus: Calypso send him to Phaeacia	152-210	58
9-12	Odysseus tells his own story at a Phaeacian feast	211-285	74
13-14 15 16	Odysseus gets home Telemachus goes home Odysseus and Telemachus meet	286-353	67
17-24	Ithaca	354-488	134

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Important Background Information for *The Odyssey*

Greek kingship – Kingship was determined not by birth but by acclaim, superior wealth and achievement. No one is automatically the next king in Ithaca, even if he does marry Penelope; however, the marriage would help a suitor become king.

Hospitality/Courtesy – Hospitality was crucial to the ancient Greeks. As sailors and travelers through wild countries, they depended on strangers. They might ask to be hosted, fed and given gifts as guests. At same time, they might raid, kill, steal, & kidnap women. Odysseus does both.

Magical elements – Prophecies were common elements in Greek tales. They often lend irony to a story, as a character does not realize a prophecy is coming true until it has happened. Curses were also common; an effective curse required clearly identifying the offender – as by name and home – so the gods could find and punish him. Oaths, as in promises, were absolutely binding; breaking them would be punished by the gods.

Athena's fury with the Achaeans – Athena was enraged when an Achaean man named Ajax (not the famous one) tried to rape Trojan King Priam's daughter Cassandra, who had taken refuge in Athena's temple. When the Achaeans failed to punish Ajax, Athena sent storm winds that kept them from going home. Ajax was killed; Menelaus wandered for 7 years, and Odysseus for 10. When the Odyssey opens, Athena is on Odysseus's side; this change is not explained. Probably, she felt he'd paid his debt to her.

Helen – The Trojan War happened because Menelaus called all his Greek allies (Greece was not all one country yet) to help get back his wife and the many treasures stolen by Paris. Did Helen go willingly with Paris? The answer is...we don't know. Paris chose Aphrodite as the most beautiful goddess, (angering Athena and Hera, by the way) and the goddess promised to get him Helen. Some sources think Helen wanted to go with him, but others describe it as abduction and rape. Maybe Aphrodite magicked Helen to go with Paris, and this magic later wore off. Maybe she really liked him better, but played all lovey with her husband back at home to protect her life.