

Great Books: *The Odyssey*: Teacher's Guide

Grade Level: 9-12

Curriculum Focus: Literature

Lesson Duration: Two or more class periods

Program Description

The journey of Trojan War hero Odysseus back to his kingdom in Ithaca is one of the world's greatest epic adventures. Homer's poem has been plundered for images and phrases by creative artists for centuries. Join experts, scholars, and actors as they explore the timeless appeal of Homer's great story.

- I. Introduction (13 min.)
 - II. Homer's Poem (13 min.)
 - III. A Hero Is Born (13 min.)
 - IV. Homecoming (9 min.)
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Lesson Plan

Student Objectives

- Students will understand that literature originally presented in one genre can, with care, be adapted to another genre.
- Students will understand that when turning a written work into a drama, the adapter must consider dialog and stage directions.

Materials

- *The Odyssey*, by Homer
- Paper
- Pens and pencils

Procedures

1. Divide the class into small groups, and tell students that they will choose a section involving two or more characters from Books XVII through XX. They will then convert the section into a dramatic scene and act it out.

2. As a class, review the important elements of a dramatic scene:
 - A scene usually deals with a single incident and occurs in a single setting.
 - The characters do not have to resolve a problem, but the scene must end in a satisfying way rather than simply trail off.
 - The scene's script must contain both dialogue (the conversations and asides of the characters) and stage directions (descriptions of setting, characters, and action). Not all descriptions show up in stage directions, however; sometimes playwrights drop descriptions of setting and of characters right into characters' dialogue.
3. In a series of mini-lessons, as enumerated here, teach or review with students how to proceed from making prewriting notes for a scene to writing it and then revising and editing the scene. Give the groups time to apply each mini-lesson.

Pre-writing

- As previously mentioned, the scene must have at least two characters. The two characters may be friends or enemies. Each group must select a section of text with a clear beginning and end point – and with at least two characters.
- The characters need to have at least one problem or issue to discuss and try to figure out or resolve. Students in each group should note the most important problem or issue in their section of the epic. They should make notes about how to introduce the problem or issue and then how to move it along.
- Each group should imagine how the characters look (including how they dress), sound, and act, jotting down notes for later use.
- Each group must determine where and when the scene takes place, then jot down thoughts on background scenery, furniture, and props.

Writing

- When students in each group are ready to move from prewriting to writing, let them figure out how multiple authors can work together.
- Introduce the matter of language: Do students want their characters to speak the language as presented
- in your edition of *The Odyssey*, or do students want to rewrite the dialogue as contemporary speech?
- Review with the groups, if necessary, the mechanics of listing characters and of writing stage directions and dialogue.
- Advise students to follow Homer's order of events and their own prewriting notes to unfold the scene, introduce characters and the problem or issue, build suspense, if appropriate, and wind up at a satisfactory stopping point for the scene. Students should, however, be free to abandon any prewriting notes that may take them to dead ends and rethink how to dramatize the scene.
- Students should now title their scene, if they haven't already.

Writing and Editing

- Share with students a checklist such as the following, and have them use the checklist to review their scenes.
 - **Content:** Does the dialogue or stage direction clearly show characters contemplating a problem or an issue? Does the scene end naturally or artificially?
 - **Style:** Is the dialogue realistic and easy for an actor to say?
 - **Grammar, Usage, Mechanics:** Have you checked to make sure capitalization, spelling, and matters such as agreement, comparison, and pronoun reference are correct?
 - Give students time to revise, as necessary, so that they can answer yes to all the questions on their checklist.
 - Make sure that every student in the group has a copy of the final, edited and revised manuscript.
4. Give each group the chance to read and perform its adaptation in front of the class. Here are pointers for how to proceed:
- Ask the group's spokesperson to announce to the class the section from Books XVII to XX that the group has adapted.
 - Then the members of the group should share their scripts with the rest of the class. Students should read all or perform all stage directions and dialogue – with or without props.
5. After each performance, the audience should comment on strengths of the adaptation and discuss any areas that were unclear or need improvement..

Assessment

Use the following three-point rubric to evaluate students' work during this lesson.

- **3 points:** Students actively participated in class discussions; worked cooperatively in adaptation groups; actively participated in their group's prewriting, writing, revising, and reading processes. The group scene reads very clearly and in a well-paced manner, contains all key ingredients from the selected section of the text; clearly introduces the problem or issue and develops or resolves it.
- **2 points:** Students somewhat participated in class discussions; worked cooperatively in adaptation groups with some teacher assistance; somewhat participated in their group's prewriting, writing, revising, and reading processes. The group scene reads clearly and in a well-paced manner, contains most key ingredients from the selected section of the text; introduces but does not develop the problem or issue.
- **1 point:** Students did not participate in class discussions; were unable to work cooperatively in adaptation groups; did not participate in their group's prewriting, writing, revising, and reading processes. The group scene reads poorly, omits key ingredients from the selected section of the text, does not focus on a problem or issue.



Vocabulary

archetypal

Definition: Typical of an original model or pattern from which succeeding representations are copied

Context: Every time you pick up *The Odyssey*, you are on the edge of talking about something archetypal, something that is always with us, something that is wonderfully generalized.

primordial

Definition: Primitive, primeval, or fundamental

Context: Homer created the first novel, and that is primordial in a sense.

template

Definition: A mold that establishes or serves as a pattern for future copies

Context: Homer's works were the templates for the western literary tradition.

wily

Definition: Crafty, tricky, or sly

Context: Indiana Jones is like wily Ulysses.

Academic Standards

Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL)

McREL's Content Knowledge: A Compendium of Standards and Benchmarks for K-12 Education addresses 14 content areas. To view the standards and benchmarks, visit link:

<http://www.mcrel.org/compendium/browse.asp>

This lesson plan addresses the following national standards:

- Language Arts – Writing: Uses the general skills and strategies of the writing process, Gathers and uses information for research purposes; Reading: Uses reading skills and strategies to understand and interpret a variety of literary texts
- Arts – Theatre: Demonstrates competence in writing scripts

The National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE)

The National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) and the International Reading Association have developed national standards to provide guidelines for teaching the English language arts. To view the standards online, go to <http://www.ncte.org/about/over/standards/110846.htm>

This lesson plan addresses the following NCTE standards:

- Students apply a wide range of strategies to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and appreciate texts. They draw on their prior experience, their interactions with other readers and writers, their knowledge of word meaning and of other texts, their word identification strategies, and their understanding of textual features (e.g., sound-letter correspondence, sentence structure, context, graphics).



- Students employ a wide range of strategies as they write and use different writing process elements appropriately to communicate with different audiences for a variety of purposes.
 - Students apply knowledge of language structure, language conventions (e.g., spelling and punctuation), media techniques, figurative language, and genre to create, critique, and discuss print and non-print texts.
 - Students use spoken, written, and visual language to accomplish their own purposes (e.g., for learning, enjoyment, persuasion, and the exchange of information).
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Support Materials

Develop custom worksheets, educational puzzles, online quizzes, and more with the free teaching tools offered on the [DiscoverySchool.com](http://school.discovery.com) Web site. Create and print support materials, or save them to a Custom Classroom account for future use. To learn more, visit

- <http://school.discovery.com/teachingtools/teachingtools.html>
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DVD Content

This program is available in an interactive DVD format. The following information and activities are specific to the DVD version.

How To Use the DVD

The DVD starting screen has the following options:

Play Video – This plays the video from start to finish. There are no programmed stops, except by using a remote control. With a computer, depending on the particular software player, a pause button is included with the other video controls.

Video Index – Here the video is divided into four parts (see below), indicated by video thumbnail icons. Watching all parts in sequence is similar to watching the video from start to finish. Brief descriptions and total running times are noted for each part. To play a particular segment, press Enter on the remote for TV playback; on a computer, click once to highlight a thumbnail and read the accompanying text description and click again to start the video.

Curriculum Units – These are specially edited video segments pulled from different sections of the video (see below). These nonlinear segments align with key ideas in the unit of instruction. They include onscreen pre- and post-viewing questions, reproduced below in this Teacher's Guide. Total running times for these segments are noted. To play a particular segment, press Enter on the TV remote or click once on the Curriculum Unit title on a computer.

Standards Link – Selecting this option displays a single screen that lists the national academic standards the video addresses.



Teacher Resources—This screen gives the technical support number and Web site address.

Video Index

I. Introduction (13 min.)

An introduction to one of the Western world's first action-adventure novels, *The Odyssey*, and its companion story, *The Iliad*. A look at the Greek myths and *The Odyssey's* lessons of morality.

II. Homer's Poem (13 min.)

A discussion of Homer and the little knowledge we have of this ancient poet; a look at the tradition of oral storytelling and Odysseus, the main character of *The Odyssey*.

III. A Hero Is Born (13 min.)

Odysseus is faced with numerous tests, including an encounter with the sirens. The influence Homer and *The Odyssey* have had on Western literature and a discussion of the now-familiar heroic traits first seen in Homer's characters.

IV. Homecoming (9 min.)

Odysseus returns home to Penelope but must make one final journey to offer thanks to the gods for ensuring his safe return. The theme of homecoming in *The Odyssey* and our daily lives.

Curriculum Units

1. Introduction: *The Odyssey*

Pre-viewing question

Q: Come up with a personal definition of the word "odyssey." Does Homer's story fit with your definition?

A: Answers will vary.

Post-viewing question

Q: What are some reminders of *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* that can be found in today's world?

A: Product and place names, such as Ajax and Ithaca; sayings such as "an Achilles heel" and "Beware of Greeks bearing gifts."; and references in contemporary works of art, such as *O Brother, Where Art Thou?*

2. Odysseus' Journey

Pre-viewing question

Q: Do you think it is possible to live a life without adventure?

A: Answers will vary.

Post-viewing question

Q: What was Odysseus' first big mistake?

A: Telling the Cyclops his real name. Because of this ego blunder, the blinded Cyclops, Polyphemus, is able to tell his father, Poseidon, exactly who to take revenge on and Odysseus' short journey home becomes a 10-year voyage.



3. Coming Home

Pre-viewing question

Q: Why does the theme of homecoming appeal to everyone?

A: Everyone can relate on some level to the emotions involved with coming home, be it from a long journey like Odysseus' or from a short trip.

Post-viewing question

Q: Why does Penelope not agree to marriage even after 10 years of waiting for her husband to return?

A: She knows that if she marries, she will lose her kingdom to her new husband and will have nothing left for herself and her sons.

4. Homer: Our First Poet

Pre-viewing question

Q: Do you think *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* have been more or less influential throughout time than other great works of literature, including William Shakespeare's plays?

A: Answers will vary.

Post-viewing question

Q: Who would be our modern-day equivalent of Greek bards?

A: Possible answers include oral historians, songwriters, spoken word artists, and filmmakers.

5. A Lasting Hero

Pre-viewing question

Q: Why do we consider civility an important trait?

A: We think of civility as a necessary part of civilization and tend to see it as a sign of cultured, prosperous societies.

Post-viewing question

Q: What has Odysseus learned through his journeys?

A: Life is better than death. Stay alive at all costs. Keep your ego in check.