

The Odyssey Socratic Seminar

Please review the pre-seminar questions I have provided for you. We will begin the seminar using these questions. During the course of the discussion, you might ask a follow up question or ask a question that takes the discussion a different direction. When the discussion needs to move onto a different question, it is up to you to take that initiative. It is not important that we speed through the questions, but it is important that we have a deep analytical discussion of The Odyssey. You should print this document and bring it to class with you.

Rules for Participating in a Socratic Seminar:

- The class sits in a circle allowing all participants to make eye contact.
- One student speaks at a time.
- Do not raise your hand during the discussion.
- Do not interrupt another person. Begin speaking when he or she has finished.
- Be respectful of all participants' opinions.
- Disagreement is fine. Do so in a respectful manner.
- Do not direct your comments to the teacher– direct to everyone.
- Do not be afraid to ask questions!
- Remember... there is not only one “RIGHT ANSWER.”

Opening: (Identify main ideas and start with round robin response (everyone must answer this question – teacher picks one to begin the discussion.)

- What do you think was Odysseus' worst or best action of his wanderings and why?
- How long should have Penelope waited for Odysseus? Why do you think she stayed true waiting for him for 20 years?
- What was your favorite adventure from the text? Why?

Core: Focus/analyze on textual details.

- In many cultures, epic myths like *The Odyssey*, were used as educational tools to instruct young men in the ideals & values of a culture; thereby passing the ideals & values to a new generation. What values might Odysseus have represented? Does Telemachus possess the same ones?
- Undeniably, Odysseus is one of the first great heroes in Western Civilization, perhaps even defining a certain type of heroism. He goes on an amazing journey, accomplishes extraordinary things, and transforms himself. But today, we use the word hero to describe mothers doing ordinary things and athletes doing trivial things. What's the discrepancy between these two meanings of the word, hero? Do they share anything in common?

- What outstanding personal, even heroic, qualities enable Odysseus to survive all of his dangerous adventures and to rise above all obstacles to return home safely?
- *The Odyssey* is about a family. Home matters in the poem not simply because Odysseus wants to get there, but also because it gives life its meaning. Without one's home, human life is not conceivable. Discuss the importance of family and home in the story.
- Has the definition of "family" changed in our society?
- Odysseus maintains a vision, a goal, of getting home to his family. How can a goal focus and motivate our lives?
- The song's lyrics state, "Back to the place where I belong, and where your love has always been enough for me..." Has Penelope's love truly been enough motivation for Odysseus?
- Also stated in the song is, "And the pain you feel's a different kind of pain." Do you believe Odysseus felt any pain during his journey? How could his pain be like the pain you feel when you struggle with a situation?
- The song says, "I don't regret this life I chose for me." Did Odysseus choose his life and his journey?
- Do you think Odysseus was a good leader? Why or why not?
- What kind of roles do women play in *The Odyssey*? Which females hold the most power? Why do you think this is?
- How does the *Odyssey* define love? Why are Odysseus's affairs with Circe and Calypso not considered true love? Is he justified to have any of the affairs?
- Imagine that a messenger delivers a letter to Penelope detailing the affairs of Odysseus with other women. Should Penelope stay married to Odysseus? Why or why not? Would you wait for your loved one for twenty years?
- What do you think about the structure of the *Odyssey*? What is the effect of Homer starting *in media res* (in the middle of things)?
- Hubris (pride) is one of the major downfalls of most characters in Ancient mythology. Find some examples of this in *The Odyssey*. Make some connections to examples today regarding people with too much pride.
- Choose eight new members for Odysseus' crew using any heroic figures (fictional or historical). Why would you choose these individuals? How could they help Odysseus?

- Is it possible for a modern reader to accept Odysseus's killing of the suitors? If not, how does this change in values affect our enjoyment of Homer's poem?
- What movies or books follow the structure of *The Odyssey* (the main character's quest to return home despite multiple obstacles)?
- What movies or books contain the characteristics of an epic in today's society? Epics contain adventure, have a central heroic figure, the setting is vast (large), there are supernatural forces involved, and an elevated style (serious tone of voice) is often used.
- Explain how the struggles of Odysseus to reach Ithaca are a contest between Poseidon and Athena as well.
- In what ways does Odysseus develop as a character as the story progresses?
- One of the most important cultural values in the *Odyssey* is that of *xenia*, a Greek concept encompassing the generosity and courtesy shown to those who are far from home. Why might hospitality have held more significance in Homer's time than it does in today's world? How is hospitality established as a key value in the epic?

Closing: (Personalize/apply the text - Round robin response question)

- Why are deep, meaningful bonds (like family connections) necessary in life?
- How were Odysseus and his family resilient?
- What does it mean to be resilient?