

from the *Odyssey*, Part 2, by Homer

Literary Analysis: Epic Poems

An **epic poem**, such as the *Odyssey*, deals with the adventures of a great hero. Epics originally began in the oral tradition and were later written down for people to read and enjoy.

Because these stories were long and involved, they were often developed in poetic form to help the storytellers remember them. In addition, there was usually musical accompaniment to make the stories more entertaining. Besides these qualities, what else makes a poem an epic poem? Traditionally, epic poems contain the following elements:

- heroes of larger-than-life status
- a lengthy and complicated journey
- fateful or prophetic actions and deeds
- divine interventions
- a vast setting
- a mixture of historical events and figures with fictional events and characters
- formal speeches made by the characters
- universal themes that teach readers about life

DIRECTIONS: Identify the characteristics of an epic poem in the *Odyssey* by completing the following chart. You can use examples from Part 1 as well as Part 2. The first one has been done for you

characteristic	Example from <i>The Odyssey</i>
1. hero of larger-than-life status	Odysseus
2. a lengthy and complicated journey	
3. fateful or prophetic actions and deeds	
4. divine interventions	
5. a vast setting	
6. a mixture of historical events and figures with fictional events and characters	
7. formal speeches made by the characters	
8. universal themes that teach readers about life	