**Odyssey Summaries:**

**Books 2,3,4,6,7,8,13,14,15,18,19,20,23,24**

**Book 2**

When the assembly meets the next day, Aegyptius, a wise Ithacan elder, speaks first. He praises Telemachus for stepping into his father’s shoes, noting that this occasion marks the first time that the assembly has been called since Odysseus left. Telemachus then gives an impassioned speech in which he laments the loss of both his father and his father’s home—his mother’s suitors, the sons of Ithaca’s elders, have taken it over. He rebukes them for consuming his father’s oxen and sheep as they pursue their courtship day in and day out when any decent man would simply go to Penelope’s father, Icarius, and ask him for her hand in marriage.

Antinous blames the impasse on Penelope, who, he says, seduces every suitor but will commit to none of them. He reminds the suitors of a ruse that she concocted to put off remarrying: Penelope maintained that she would choose a husband as soon as she finished weaving a burial shroud for her elderly father-in-law, Laertes. But each night, she carefully undid the knitting that she had completed during the day, so that the shroud would never be finished. If Penelope can make no decision, Antinous declares, then she should be sent back to Icarius so that he can choose a new husband for her. The dutiful Telemachus refuses to throw his mother out and calls upon the gods to punish the suitors. At that moment, a pair of eagles, locked in combat, appears overhead. The soothsayer Halitherses interprets their struggle as a portent of Odysseus’s imminent return and warns the suitors that they will face a massacre if they don’t leave. The suitors balk at such foolishness, and the meeting ends in deadlock.

As Telemachus is preparing for his trip to Pylos and Sparta, Athena visits him again, this time disguised as Mentor, another old friend of Odysseus. She encourages him and predicts that his journey will be fruitful. She then sets out to town and, assuming the disguise of Telemachus himself, collects a loyal crew to man his ship. Telemachus himself tells none of the household servants of his trip for fear that his departure will upset his mother. He tells only Eurycleia, his wise and aged nurse. She pleads with him not to take to the open sea as his father did, but he puts her fears to rest by saying that he knows that a god is at his side.

**Book 3- the first stop of Telemachos journey**

At Pylos, Telemachus and Mentor (Athena in disguise) witness an impressive religious ceremony in which dozens of bulls are sacrificed to Poseidon, the god of the sea. Although Telemachus has little experience with public speaking, Mentor gives him the encouragement that he needs to approach Nestor, the city’s king, and ask him about Odysseus. Nestor, however, has no information about the Greek hero. He recounts that after the fall of Troy a falling-out occurred between Agamemnon and Menelaus, the two Greek brothers who had led the expedition. Menelaus set sail for Greece immediately, while Agamemnon decided to wait a day and continue sacrificing on the shores of Troy. Nestor went with Menelaus, while Odysseus stayed with Agamemnon, and he has heard no news of Odysseus. He says that he can only pray that Athena will show Telemachus the kindness that she showed Odysseus. He adds that he has heard that suitors have taken over the prince’s house in Ithaca and that he hopes that Telemachus will achieve the renown in defense of his father that Orestes, son of Agamemnon, won in defense of his father. Telemachus then asks Nestor about Agamemnon’s fate. Nestor explains that Agamemnon returned from Troy to find that Aegisthus, a base coward who remained behind while the Greeks fought in Troy, had seduced and married his wife, Clytemnestra. With her approval, Aegisthus murdered Agamemnon. He would have then taken over Agamemnon’s kingdom had not Orestes, who was in exile in Athens, returned and killed Aegisthus and Clytemnestra. Nestor holds the courage of Orestes up as an example for Telemachus. He sends his own son Pisistratus along to accompany Telemachus to Sparta, and the two set out by land the next day. Athena, who reveals her divinity by shedding the form of Mentor and changing into an eagle before the entire court of Pylos, stays behind to protect Telemachus’s ship and its crew.

**Book 4**

In Sparta, the king and queen, Menelaus and Helen, are celebrating the separate marriages of their son and daughter. They happily greet Pisistratus and Telemachus, the latter of whom they soon recognize as the son of Odysseus because of the clear family resemblance. As they all feast, the king and queen recount with melancholy the many examples of Odysseus’s cunning at Troy. Helen recalls how Odysseus dressed as a beggar to infiltrate the city’s walls. Menelaus tells the famous story of the Trojan horse, Odysseus’s masterful gambit that allowed the Greeks to sneak into Troy and slaughter the Trojans. The following day, Menelaus recounts his own return from Troy. He says that, stranded in Egypt, he was forced to capture Proteus, the divine Old Man of the Sea. Proteus told him the way back to Sparta and then informed him of the fates of Agamemnon and Ajax, another Greek hero, who survived Troy only to perish back in Greece. Proteus also told him news of Odysseus—that he was still alive but was imprisoned by Calypso on her island. Buoyed by this report, Telemachus and Pisistratus return to Pylos to set sail for Ithaca.

Meanwhile, the suitors at Odysseus’s house learn of Telemachus’s voyage and prepare to ambush him upon his return. The herald Medon overhears their plans and reports them to Penelope. She becomes distraught when she reflects that she may soon lose her son in addition to her husband, but Athena sends a phantom in the form of Penelope’s sister, Iphthime, to reassure her. Iphthime tells her not to worry, for the goddess will protect Telemachus.

**Book 6**

That night, Athena appears in a dream to the Phaeacian princess Nausicaa, disguised as her friend. She encourages the young princess to go to the river the next day to wash her clothes so that she will appear more fetching to the many men courting her. The next morning, Nausicaa goes to the river, and while she and her handmaidens are naked, playing ball as their clothes dry on the ground, Odysseus wakes in the forest and encounters them. Naked himself, he humbly yet winningly pleads for their assistance, never revealing his identity. Nausicaa leaves him alone to wash the dirt and brine from his body, and Athena makes him look especially handsome, so that when Nausicaa sees him again she begins to fall in love with him. Afraid of causing a scene if she walks into the city with a strange man at her side, Nausicaa gives Odysseus directions to the palace and advice on how to approach Arete, queen of the Phaeacians, when he meets her. With a prayer to Athena for hospitality from the Phaeacians, Odysseus sets out for the palace.

**Book 7**

On his way to the palace of Alcinous, the king of the Phaeacians, Odysseus is stopped by a young girl who is Athena in disguise. She offers to guide him to the king’s house and shrouds him in a protective mist that keeps the Phaeacians, a kind but somewhat xenophobic people, from harassing him. She also advises him to direct his plea for help to Arete, the wise and strong queen who will know how to get him home. Once Athena has delivered Odysseus to the palace, she departs from Scheria to her beloved city of Athens.

Odysseus finds the palace residents holding a festival in honor of Poseidon. He is struck by the splendor of the palace and the king’s opulence. As soon as he sees the queen, he throws himself at her feet, and the mist about him dissipates. At first, the king wonders if this wayward traveler might be a god, but without revealing his identity, Odysseus puts the king’s suspicions to rest by declaring that he is indeed a mortal. He then explains his predicament, and the king and queen gladly promise to see him off the next day in a Phaeacian ship.

Later that evening, when the king and queen are alone with Odysseus, the wise Arete recognizes the clothes that he is wearing as ones that she herself had made for her daughter Nausicaa. Suspicious, she interrogates Odysseus further. While still withholding his name, Odysseus responds by recounting the story of his journey from Calypso’s island and his encounter with Nausicaa that morning, which involved her giving him a set of clothes to wear. To absolve the princess for not accompanying him to the palace, Odysseus claims that it was his idea to come alone. Alcinous is so impressed with his visitor that he offers Odysseus his daughter’s hand in marriage.

**Book 8**

The next day, Alcinous calls an assembly of his Phaeacian counselors. Athena, back from Athens, ensures attendance by spreading word that the topic of discussion will be the godlike visitor who recently appeared on the island. At the assembly, Alcinous proposes providing a ship for his visitor so that the man can return to his homeland. The measure is approved, and Alcinous invites the counselors to his palace for a feast and celebration of games in honor of his guest. There, a blind bard named Demodocus sings of the quarrel between Odysseus and Achilles at Troy. Everyone listens with pleasure except Odysseus, who weeps at the painful memories that the story recalls. The king notices Odysseus’s grief and ends the feast so that the games can begin.

The games include the standard lineup of boxing, wrestling, racing, and throwing of the discus. At one point, Odysseus is asked to participate. Still overcome by his many hardships, he declines. One of the young athletes, Broadsea, then insults him, which goads his pride to action. Odysseus easily wins the discus toss and then challenges the Phaeacian athletes to any other form of competition they choose. The discussion becomes heated, but Alcinous diffuses the situation by insisting that Odysseus join them in another feast, at which the Phaeacian youth entertain him and prove their preeminence in song and dance. Demodocus performs again, this time a light song about a tryst between Ares and Aphrodite. Afterward, Alcinous and each of the young Phaeacian men, including Broadsea, give Odysseus gifts to take with him on his journey home.

At dinner that night, Odysseus asks Demodocus to sing of the Trojan horse and the sack of Troy, but as he listens to the accomplished minstrel he again breaks down. King Alcinous again notices and stops the music. He asks Odysseus at last to tell him who he is, where he is from, and where he is going.

**Book 13**

The account of his wanderings now finished, Odysseus looks forward to leaving Scheria. The next day, Alcinous loads his gifts on board the ship that will carry Odysseus to Ithaca. Odysseus sets sail as soon as the sun goes down. He sleeps the whole night, while the Phaeacian crew commands the ship. He remains asleep even when the ship lands the next morning. The crew gently carries him and his gifts to shore and then sails for home.

When Poseidon spots Odysseus in Ithaca, he becomes enraged at the Phaeacians for assisting his nemesis. He complains to Zeus, who allows him to punish the Phaeacians. Just as their ship is pulling into harbor at Scheria, the prophecy mentioned at the end of Book 8 is fulfilled: the ship suddenly turns to stone and sinks to the bottom of the sea. The onlookers ashore immediately recognize the consummation of the prophecy and resolve to abandon their custom of helping wayward travelers.

Back in Ithaca, Odysseus wakes to find a country that he doesn’t recognize, for Athena has shrouded it in mist to conceal its true form while she plans his next move. At first, he curses the Phaeacians, whom he thinks have duped him and left him in some unknown land. But Athena, disguised as a shepherd, meets him and tells him that he is indeed in Ithaca. With characteristic cunning, Odysseus acts to conceal his identity from her until she reveals hers. Delighted by Odysseus’s tricks, Athena announces that it is time for Odysseus to use his wits to punish the suitors. She tells him to hide out in the hut of his swineherd, Eumaeus. She informs him that Telemachus has gone in search of news of him and gives him the appearance of an old vagabond so that no one will recognize him.

**Book 14**

Odysseus finds Eumaeus outside his hut. Although Eumaeus doesn’t recognize the withered traveler as his master, he invites him inside. There Odysseus has a hearty meal of pork and listens as Eumaeus heaps praise upon the memory of his former master, whom he fears is lost for good, and scorn upon the behavior of his new masters, the vile suitors. Odysseus predicts that Eumaeus will see his master again quite soon, but Eumaeus will hear none of it—he has encountered too many vagabonds looking for a handout from Penelope in return for fabricated news of Odysseus. Still, Eumaeus takes a liking to his guest. He puts him up for the night and even lets him borrow a cloak to keep out the cold. When Eumaeus asks Odysseus about his origins, Odysseus lies that he is from Crete. He fought with Odysseus at Troy and made it home safely, he claims, but a trip that he made later to Egypt went awry, and he was reduced to poverty. It was during this trip, he says, that he heard that Odysseus was still alive.

**Book 15**

Athena travels to Sparta, where she finds Telemachus and Pisistratus, Nestor’s son. She tells Telemachus he must hurry home to Ithaca before the suitors succeed in winning his mother’s hand. She also warns him of the ambush that they have set and explains how to avoid it. Finally, she instructs him to head first for the home of the swineherd Eumaeus, who will convey the news of his safe return to Penelope.

The next day, Telemachus announces his departure and accepts gifts from Menelaus and Helen. As Telemachus pulls away from the palace in his chariot, an eagle carrying a goose stolen from a pen swoops down beside him. Helen interprets the incident as an omen that Odysseus is about to swoop down on his home and exact revenge on the suitors.

Once at Pylos, Telemachus has Pisistratus drop him off at his ship, insisting that he has no time to spare to visit Nestor again. The ship is about to set off when Theoclymenus, a famous prophet’s descendant who is fleeing prosecution for a crime of manslaughter that he committed in Argos, approaches Telemachus and asks to come aboard. Telemachus welcomes him and offers him hospitality when they get to Ithaca.

In the hut of Eumaeus, Odysseus tests the limit of his hospitality by offering to leave in the morning, a false gesture that he hopes will prompt Eumaeus to offer to let him stay longer. He urges the old man not to go out of his way and says that he will earn his keep working for the suitors, but Eumaeus will have none of it. To get mixed up with those suitors, he warns, would be suicide. Odysseus and the swineherd then swap stories. Eumaeus explains how he first came to Ithaca: the son of a king, he was stolen from his house by Phoenician pirates with the help of a maid that his father employed. The pirates took him all over the seas until Laertes, Odysseus’s father, bought him in Ithaca. There, Laertes’ wife brought him up alongside her own daughter, the youngest born.

The next morning, Telemachus reaches the shores of Ithaca. He disembarks while the crew heads to the city by ship. He entrusts Theoclymenus to a loyal crewman, Piraeus. As they part, they see a hawk fly by carrying a dove in its talons, which Theoclymenus interprets as a favorable sign of the strength of Odysseus’s house and line.

**Book 18**

Another beggar, Arnaeus (nicknamed Irus), saunters into the palace. For a beggar, he is rather brash: he insults Odysseus and challenges him to a boxing match. He thinks that he will make quick work of the old man, but Athena gives Odysseus extra strength and stature. Irus soon regrets challenging the old man and tries to escape, but by now the suitors have taken notice and are egging on the fight for the sake of their own entertainment. It ends quickly as Odysseus floors Irus and stops just short of killing him.

The suitors congratulate Odysseus. One in particular, the moderate Amphinomus, toasts him and gives him food. Odysseus, fully aware of the bloodshed to come and overcome by pity for Amphinomus, pulls the man aside. He predicts to Amphinomus that Odysseus will soon be home and gives him a thinly veiled warning to abandon the palace and return to his own land. But Amphinomus doesn’t depart, despite being “fraught with grave forebodings,” for Athena has bound him to death at the hands of Telemachus (18.176).

Athena now puts it into Penelope’s head to make an appearance before her suitors. The goddess gives her extra stature and beauty to inflame their hearts. When Penelope speaks to the suitors, she leads them on by telling them that Odysseus had instructed her to take a new husband if he should fail to return before Telemachus began growing facial hair. She then tricks them, to the silent delight of Odysseus, into bringing her gifts by claiming that any suitor worth his salt would try to win her hand by giving things to her instead of taking what’s rightfully hers. The suitors shower her with presents, and, as they celebrate, Odysseus instructs the maidservants to go to Penelope. The maidservant Melantho, Melanthius’s sister, insults him as an inferior being and a drunk; Odysseus then scares them off with threats. Hoping to make Odysseus even more angry at the suitors, Athena now inspires Eurymachus to insult him. When Odysseus responds with insults of his own, Eurymachus throws a stool at him but misses, hitting a servant instead. Just as a riot is about to break out, Telemachus steps in and diffuses the situation, to the consternation of the suitors.

**Book 19**

When the suitors retire for the night, Telemachus and Odysseus remove the arms as planned. Athena lights the room for them so that they can see as they work. Telemachus tells Eurycleia that they are storing the arms to keep them from being damaged.

After they have safely disposed of the arms, Telemachus retires and Odysseus is joined by Penelope. She has come from the women’s quarters to question her curious visitor. She knows that he has claimed to have met Odysseus, and she tests his honesty by asking him to describe her husband. Odysseus describes the Greek hero—himself, capturing each detail so perfectly that it reduces Penelope to tears. He then tells the story of how he met Odysseus and eventually came to Ithaca. In many respects, this story parallels those that he told to Athena and Eumaeus in Books 13 and 14, respectively, though it is identical to neither. He tells Penelope that, essentially, Odysseus had a long ordeal but is alive and freely traveling the seas, and predicts that Odysseus will be back within the month.

Penelope offers the beggar a bed to sleep in, but he is used to the floor, he says, and declines. Only reluctantly does he allow Eurycleia to wash his feet. As she is putting them in a basin of water, she notices a scar on one of his feet. She immediately recognizes it as the scar that Odysseus received when he went boar hunting with his grandfather Autolycus. She throws her arms around Odysseus, but he silences her while Athena keeps Penelope distracted so that Odysseus’s secret will not be carried any further. The faithful Eurycleia recovers herself and promises to keep his secret.

Before she retires, Penelope describes to Odysseus a dream that she has had in which an eagle swoops down upon her twenty pet geese and kills them all; it then perches on her roof and, in a human voice, says that he is her husband who has just put her lovers to death. Penelope declares that she has no idea what this dream means. Rising to the challenge, Odysseus explains it to her. But Penelope decides that she is going to choose a new husband nevertheless: she will marry the first man who can shoot an arrow through the holes of twelve axes set in a line.

**Book 20**

Penelope and Odysseus both have trouble sleeping that night. Odysseus worries that he and Telemachus will never be able to conquer so many suitors, but Athena reassures him that through the gods all things are possible. Tormented by the loss of her husband and her commitment to remarry, Penelope wakes and prays for Artemis to kill her. Her distress wakes Odysseus, who asks Zeus for a good omen. Zeus responds with a clap of thunder, and, at once, a maid in an adjacent room is heard cursing the suitors.

As the palace springs to life the next day, Odysseus and Telemachus meet, in succession, the swineherd Eumaeus, the foul Melanthius, and Philoetius, a kindly and loyal herdsman who says that he has not yet given up hope of Odysseus’s return. The suitors enter, once again plotting Telemachus’s murder. Amphinomus convinces them to call it off, however, when a portent of doom appears in the form of an eagle carrying a dove in its talons. But Athena keeps the suitors antagonistic all through dinner to prevent Odysseus’s anger from losing its edge. Ctesippus, a wealthy and arrogant suitor, throws a cow’s hoof at Odysseus, in response to which Telemachus threatens to run him through with his sword. The suitors laugh and laugh, failing to notice that they and the walls of the room are covered in blood and that their faces have assumed a foreign, ghostly look—all of which Theoclymenus interprets as portents of inescapable doom.

**Book 23**

Eurycleia goes upstairs to call Penelope, who has slept through the entire fight. Penelope doesn’t believe anything that Eurycleia says, and she remains in disbelief even when she comes downstairs and sees her husband with her own eyes. Telemachus rebukes her for not greeting Odysseus more lovingly after his long absence, but Odysseus has other problems to worry about. He has just killed all of the noble young men of Ithaca—their parents will surely be greatly distressed. He decides that he and his family will need to lay low at their farm for a while. In the meantime, a minstrel strikes up a happy song so that no passers-by will suspect what has taken place in the palace.

Penelope remains wary, afraid that a god is playing a trick on her. She orders Eurycleia to move her bridal bed, and Odysseus suddenly flares up at her that their bed is immovable, explaining how it is built from the trunk of an olive tree around which the house had been constructed. Hearing him recount these details, she knows that this man must be her husband. They get reacquainted and, afterward, Odysseus gives his wife a brief account of his wanderings. He also tells her about the trip that he must make to fulfill the prophecy of Tiresias in Book 11. The next day, he leaves with Telemachus for Laertes’ orchard. He gives Penelope instructions not to leave her room or receive any visitors. Athena cloaks Odysseus and Telemachus in darkness so that no one will see them as they walk through the town.

**Book 24**

The scene changes abruptly. Hermes leads the souls of the suitors, crying like bats, into Hades. Agamemnon and Achilles argue over who had the better death. Agamemnon describes Achilles’ funeral in detail. They see the suitors coming in and ask how so many noble young men met their end. The suitor Amphimedon, whom Agamemnon knew in life, gives a brief account of their ruin, pinning most of the blame on Penelope and her indecision. Agamemnon contrasts the constancy of Penelope with the treachery of Clytemnestra.

Back in Ithaca, Odysseus travels to Laertes’ farm. He sends his servants into the house so that he can be alone with his father in the gardens. Odysseus finds that Laertes has aged prematurely out of grief for his son and wife. He doesn’t recognize Odysseus, and Odysseus doesn’t immediately reveal himself, pretending instead that he is someone who once knew and befriended Odysseus. But when Laertes begins to cry at the memory of Odysseus, Odysseus throws his arms around Laertes and kisses him. He proves his identity with the scar and with his memories of the fruit trees that Laertes gave him when he was a little boy. He tells Laertes how he has avenged himself upon the suitors.

Laertes and Odysseus have lunch together. Dolius, the father of Melanthius and Melantho, joins them. While they eat, the goddess Rumor flies through the city spreading the news of the massacre at the palace. The parents of the suitors hold an assembly at which they assess how to respond. Halitherses, the elder prophet, argues that the suitors merely got what they deserved for their wickedness, but Eupithes, Antinous’s father, encourages the parents to seek revenge on Odysseus. Their small army tracks Odysseus to Laertes’ house, but Athena, disguised again as Mentor, decides to put a stop to the violence. Antinous’s father is the only one killed, felled by one of Laertes’ spears. Athena makes the Ithacans forget the massacre of their children and recognize Odysseus as king. Peace is thus restored.