This version of the selection alternates original text with summarized passages. Dotted lines appear next to the summarized passages.

NOTES

The poet, Homer, begins his epic by asking a Muse\(^1\) to help him tell the story of Odysseus. Odysseus, Homer says, is famous for fighting in the Trojan War and for surviving a difficult journey home from Troy.\(^2\) Odysseus saw many places and met many people in his travels. He tried to return his shipmates safely to their families, but they made the mistake of killing the cattle of Helios,\(^3\) for which they paid with their lives. Homer once again asks the Muse to help him tell the tale.

The next section of the poem takes place 10 years after the Trojan War. Odysseus arrives in an island kingdom called Phaeacia, which is ruled by Alcinous. Alcinous asks Odysseus to tell him the story of his travels.

I am Laertes\(^4\) son, Odysseus.

Men hold me formidable for guile\(^5\) in peace and war:
this fame has gone abroad to the sky’s rim.

My home is on the peaked sea-mark of Ithaca\(^6\)
under Mount Neion’s wind-blown robe of leaves,
in sight of other islands—Dulichium,
Same, wooded Zacynthus—Ithaca
being most lofty in that coastal sea,
and northwest, while the rest lie east and south.
A rocky isle, but good for a boy’s training;
I shall not see on earth a place more dear,
though I have been detained long by Calypso,\(^7\)
loveliest among goddesses, who held me
in her smooth caves to be her heart’s delight,
as Circe of Aeaea,\(^8\) the enchantress,
desired me, and detained me in her hall.
But in my heart I never gave consent.
Where shall a man find sweetness to surpass
his own home and his parents? In far lands
he shall not, though he find a house of gold.

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1. **Muse** (myooz) any one of the nine goddesses of the arts.
2. **Troy** city in northwest Asia Minor, site of the Trojan War.
3. **Helios** (HEE lee ohs) sun god.
4. **Laertes** (LAY ur teez) Odysseus’ father.
5. **guile** (gyl) n. craftiness; cunning.
6. **Ithaca** (IHTH uh kuh) island off the west coast of Greece.
7. **Calypso** (kuh LIHP soh) sea goddess who loved Odysseus.
8. **Circe** (SUR see) of Aeaea (EE ee uh) enchantress who helps Odysseus.
Odysseus continues the story of his return from Troy. After the Trojan War, winds blow his ships to the island of Ismarus. Odysseus and his men attack and defeat the villagers. Odysseus wants to leave quickly, but his men disobey his orders. They stay to drink the villagers’ wine and eat their livestock. Meanwhile, the survivors of the first attack run to ask for help from the other towns on the island. Soon, Odysseus’ men are far outnumbered. After a long and bloody fight, the men retreat to their ships. But they grieve the loss of the many shipmates who have died in the battle.

Back at sea, Odysseus’ fleet is pushed off-course by a storm. After days of fighting the wind and strong currents, the ships arrive at another island. This time, they find that the island’s inhabitants are peaceful people called the Lotus-Eaters. These people survive by eating only lotus flowers. Three of Odysseus’ men accept lotus flowers from the Lotus-Eaters, and the sweet flower makes them feel dreamy and happy. They want to stay on the island forever and forget their mission to return home. Fearing more of his crew will be affected, Odysseus orders everyone back to the boats. He ties down the men affected by the lotus, and the ships set sail. They soon come upon another island.

In the next land we found were Cyclopes,\(^9\) giants, louts, without a law to bless them.
In ignorance leaving the fruitage of the earth in mystery
to the immortal gods, they neither plow
nor sow by hand, nor till the ground, though grain—
wild wheat and barley—grows untended, and
wine-grapes, in clusters, ripen in heaven’s rains.
Cyclopes have no muster and no meeting,
no consultation or old tribal ways,
but each one dwells in his own mountain cave
dealing out rough justice to wife and child,
indifferent to what the others do. ...

As we rowed on, and nearer to the mainland,
at one end of the bay, we saw a cavern
yawning above the water, screened with laurel,
and many rams and goats about the place
inside a sheepfold—made from slabs of stone
earthfast between tall trunks of pine and rugged
towering oak trees.

A huge Cyclops lives in this cave, where he keeps a herd of sheep. Odysseus advances toward the cave with his twelve best fighters and a sack of liquor that had been given to him by Maron, a famous and skillful winemaker. When they reach the cave, the crew finds that the Cyclops is away with his sheep. Goats are kept in the cave, and the Cyclops uses their milk to make cheeses that are piled around the cave on racks. Odysseus’ men suggest they should steal the cheese and goats. Odysseus, however, wants to talk to the Cyclops. He and his sailors eat some cheese by the light of a fire and then quietly wait inside the cave, sitting in the dark as the fire dies out.

The Cyclops returns with a bundle of firewood. When he tosses it to the floor, the sailors have to run out of the way to avoid being crushed. The Cyclops picks up a huge boulder

\(^9\) Cyclopes (SY kloh peez) n. plural form of Cyclops (SY klops), race of giants with one eye in the middle of the forehead.
and sets it down so that it blocks the entrance of the cave. He milks his sheep and begins the process of turning the milk into cheese. When he lights his fire, the Cyclops sees that he is not alone in the cave.

‘Strangers,’ he said, ‘who are you? And where from? What brings you here by seaways—a fair traffic? Or are you wandering rogues, who cast your lives like dice, and ravage other folk by sea?’

We felt a pressure on our hearts, in dread of that deep rumble and that mighty man. But all the same I spoke up in reply:

‘We are from Troy, Achaeans, blown off course by shifting gales on the Great South Sea; homeward bound, but taking routes and ways uncommon: so the will of Zeus would have it. We served under Agamemnon, son of Atreus—the whole world knows what city he laid waste, what armies he destroyed. It was our luck to come here; here we stand, beholden for your help, or any gifts you give—as custom is to honor strangers. We would entreat you, great Sir, have a care for the gods’ courtesy; Zeus will avenge the unoffending guest.’

The Cyclops is upset that Odysseus has spoken of the gods. (Cyclopes do not closely follow the gods.) He asks Odysseus where he has left his ship. Odysseus lies and says that Poseidon, the god of the sea, destroyed the ship on the island’s rocks. Without warning, the Cyclops grabs two of Odysseus’ men and eats them. After finishing his meal, the Cyclops grows tired and lies down to rest. Odysseus thinks to stab him while he sleeps but remembers that the boulder is still blocking the mouth of the cave. The men must wait until morning.

The Cyclops wakes and milks his sheep. After finishing his chores, he devours another two of Odysseus’ men. The Cyclops leaves the cave, carefully replacing the boulder after he goes. Odysseus begins to plan an attack. Using a tree that the Cyclops had collected, Odysseus makes a long spear. That night, the Cyclops returns with his flock. He completes his chores and eats two more men. Odysseus approaches the Cyclops with a bowl of liquor. The Cyclops drinks the bowl and immediately asks for another. Odysseus continues to bring the Cyclops drinks, and the Cyclops is so pleased that he says he will make a gift to Odysseus. He begins to appear drunk and drowsy. He asks Odysseus for his name. Odysseus replies:

‘Cyclops, you ask my honorable name? Remember the gift you promised me, and I shall tell you.

10. Achaeans (uh KEE uhnz) Greeks; here, Odysseus’ men.
11. Zeus (zoos) king of the gods.
12. Agamemnon (ag uh MEHM non) king who led the Greek army during the Trojan War.
13. Poseidon (poh SY duhn) god of the sea, earthquakes, horses, and storms at sea.
My name is Nohbdy: mother, father, and friends, everyone calls me Nohbdy.’

And he said:
‘Nohbdy’s my meat, then, after I eat his friends. Others come first. There’s a noble gift, now.’

Even as he spoke, he reeled and tumbled backward, his great head lolling to one side; and sleep took him like any creature. Drunk, hiccuping, he dribbled streams of liquor and bits of men.

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Odysseus heats the huge spear in the fire, and four of his men help him lug it toward the Cyclops. They plunge the spear into his lone eye socket, piercing and searing the eyeball. The Cyclops roars in pain. He claws at his face and pulls out the spike, but he is now blind. He stumbles around the cave, groping wildly with his hands. Odysseus and his men move away in fear.

The other Cyclopes of the island hear the painful cries and come to the outside of the cave. They ask the Cyclops, whom they call Polyphemus, what has happened.

Out of the cave
the mammoth Polyphemus roared in answer:

‘Nohbdy, Nohbdy’s tricked me, Nohbdy’s ruined me!’

To this rough shout they made a sage reply:

‘Ah well, if nobody has played you foul there in your lonely bed, we are no use in pain given by great Zeus. Let it be your father, Poseidon Lord, to whom you pray.’

Odysseus laughs at how well his trick has worked. The Cyclops rushes to the cave’s mouth, removes the boulder, and spreads his arms wide, hoping to catch anyone who tries to escape. Odysseus considers his options and then comes up with a plan. He ties three sheep together and ties one of his men under the middle sheep, so that the thick wool of the three will hide the man below. He does this for every one of his companions and then for himself.

They wait until dawn when the sheep go out to graze on the island. The Cyclops hears the bleating sheep, touches their wool as they pass by, and lets them through, unaware that they carry the sailors with them. Outside the cave, Odysseus unties the other men. They run toward their ship, driving the sheep with them. The sailors who had been keeping watch on the ship are delighted to see them, but then they realize how many men have not returned. Despite their grief, they load the sheep onto their ships and set out to sea. They sail as far as a voice will carry before Odysseus leaves Polyphemus with a shouted taunt.

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14. Polyphemus (pol ih FEE muhs) name of the Cyclops who imprisons Odysseus and his men.
15. sage (sayj) adj. wise.
'O Cyclops! Would you feast on my companions?
Puny, am I, in a cave man’s hands?
How do you like the beating that we gave you,
you damned cannibal? Eater of guests
under your roof! Zeus and the gods have paid you!’

The blind thing in his doubled fury broke
a hilltop in his hands and heaved it after us.
Ahead of our black prow it struck and sank
whelmed in a spuming geyser, a giant wave
that washed the ship stern foremost back to shore.

The sailors must row furiously to recover from the wave, but that does not stop
Odysseus from revealing his real name to the Cyclops. He proudly commands
Polyphemus to tell anyone who asks that Odysseus was the one who blinded him.
At the sound of this name, Polyphemus begins to cry. He says that long ago a wizard
named Telemus\(^\text{16}\) foretold that Odysseus would blind the Cyclops. Polyphemus begs
Odysseus to return, promising to treat him with kindness this time. Polyphemus says
that Poseidon is his father, and he offers to ask the god to bless Odysseus. Still enraged,
Odysseus rejects the offer, saying he would kill Polyphemus if he could. In response,
Polyphemus calls to Poseidon:

‘O hear me, lord, blue girdler of the islands,
if I am thine indeed, and thou art father:
grant that Odysseus, raider of cities, never
see his home: Laertes’ son, I mean,
who kept his hall on Ithaca. Should destiny
intend that he shall see his roof again
among his family in his father land,
far be that day, and dark the years between.

Let him lose all companions, and return
under strange sail to bitter days at home.’
In these words he prayed, and the god heard him.
Now he laid hands upon a bigger stone
and wheeled around, titanic for the cast,
to let it fly in the black-prowed vessel’s track.
But it fell short, just aft the steering oar,
and whelming seas rose giant above the stone
to bear us onward toward the island.

The sailors land their ships on the island. They make an offering to Zeus by burning
some of the sheep. They eat the other sheep and drink some of the leftover wine. Zeus,
rejects Odysseus’s offering and has only more trouble in store for the sailors. They wait
for morning and then return to the sea.

Odysseus’ ships arrive in Aeolia, home to Aelous,\(^\text{17}\) king of the winds. There, Odysseus is
given a sack with all but the west wind. When they near home and the bag is opened;

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16. Telemus (tehl EH muhs) wizard who foretold that Odysseus would blind Polyphemus.
17. Aeolia (ee OH lee uh) … Aeolus (EE uh luhs) island … king of the winds.
however, a storm is loosed that returns them to Aeolia. Aeolus is convinced that the sailors are cursed and so banishes them from his kingdom. The sailors come ashore in the land of the cannibals known as the Laestrygonians, who destroy all but one of Odysseus' ships. From here, they sail to another island, where the sorceress Circe turns half of the crew into pigs. Eventually, Odysseus convinces Circe to turn them back into humans. But she tells Odysseus that in order to return home, he must speak with the prophet Tiresias in the land of the dead, known as Hades.

The crew sails to a dark and mysterious region inhabited by the Men of Winter. There, they dig a sacrificial pit and make offerings to the dead. From under the earth, the dead begin to appear to Odysseus.

From every side they came and sought the pit with rustling cries; and I grew sick with fear. But presently I gave command to my officers to flay those sheep the bronze cut down, and make burnt offerings of flesh to the gods below—to sovereign Death, to pale Persephone. Meanwhile I crouched with my drawn sword to keep the surging phantoms from the bloody pit till I should know the presence of Tiresias.

One shade came first—Elpenor, of our company, who lay unburied still on the wide earth as we had left him—dead in Circe's hall, untouched, unmourned, when other cares compelled us. Now when I saw him there I wept for pity and called out to him:

'How is this, Elpenor, how could you journey to the western gloom swifter afoot than I in the black lugger?'

Elpenor explains how he arrived in the land of the dead. After drinking too much wine, he fell from the roof of Circe's house and snapped his neck. Elpenor asks that Odysseus return to Circe's island to burn Elpenor's body in a funeral ceremony. Odysseus promises to do so. Next, the soul of Anticlea, Odysseus' mother, appears to him. She had been alive when Odysseus had left for Troy, many years ago. He grieves when he sees her ghost, but he avoids speaking to her because he is anxious to meet Tiresias.

Tiresias appears and tells his prophecy to Odysseus. Tiresias says that Poseidon is angry about the blinding of his son, the Cyclops Polyphemus. The sailors' safe return to Ithaca depends on a herd of cattle owned by the god Helios, which they are soon to encounter.

Avoid those kine, hold fast to your intent, and hard seafaring brings you all to Ithaca.

18. Laestrygonians (lehs trih GOH nee uhnz) race of cannibals.
19. Tiresias (ty REE see uhs) blind prophet who advises Odysseus.
20. Persephone (puhr SEHF uh nee) queen of the underworld.
21. lugger n. small sailing vessel.
22. kine (kyn) n. cattle.
But if you raid the beeves, \(^23\) I see destruction for ship and crew. Though you survive alone, bereft of all companions, lost for years, under strange sail shall you come home, to find your own house filled with trouble: insolent men eating your livestock as they court your lady. Aye, you shall make those men atone in blood!

Tiresias foretells that Odysseus will kill his wife’s suitors. The prophet tells Odysseus that after he returns home, Odysseus should build a shrine to Poseidon far from the sea, and there sacrifice many animals. Tiresias predicts that Odysseus will die a gentle death at sea. He will be old and happy, and Ithaca will be a peaceful place.

Odysseus leaves the land of the dead and returns to Circe. She instructs him on the route he is to take to reach Ithaca. Circe warns of a number of obstacles: the Sirens, whose song lures sailors to their deaths; the Wandering Rocks, which can sometimes even kill sea birds; the whirlpool Charybdis\(^{24}\) and the many-headed monster Scylla;\(^{25}\) and, lastly, Helios’ beloved cattle.

The crew sets sail, and Odysseus informs them of Circe’s warnings. First, they will encounter the Sirens. Circe has instructed Odysseus that he should be the only crewmember to hear the alluring songs. He plans to be tied to the mast of the ship while the Sirens sing so that he cannot go to them. As the ship approaches the island of the Sirens, the current becomes mysteriously calm.

The crew were on their feet briskly, to furl the sail, and stow it; then, each in place, they poised the smooth oar blades and sent the white foam scudding by. I carved a massive cake of beeswax into bits and rolled them in my hands until they softened—no long task, for a burning heat came down from Helios, lord of high noon. Going forward I carried wax along the line, and laid it thick on their ears. They tied me up, then, plumb amidships, back to the mast, lashed to the mast, and took themselves again to rowing. Soon, as we came smartly within hailing distance, the two Sirens, noting our fast ship off their point, made ready, and they sang. . . .

The Sirens’ song pleads with the men to come ashore where life will be like a pleasant dream. The sailors cannot hear the Sirens, though, because their ears are full of the beeswax. Despite his preparation, Odysseus cannot resist the Sirens’ voices and wants desperately to be untied. He tries to break free from the ropes that bind him. Following his directions, however, the sailors only bind him more tightly. They safely pass by the island, and the crew members remove the wax from their ears and untie Odysseus.

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\(^{23}\) beeves (béevz) n. alternate plural form of “beef.”

\(^{24}\) Charybdis (kuh RIHB dihs) huge whirlpool.

\(^{25}\) Scylla (SIHL uh) sea monster of gray rock.
Almost immediately, they come upon another island. This is the domain of Charybdis and Scylla. The whirlpool makes such a terrifying sound that the men drop their oars in fear. Odysseus gives a speech reminding them how many challenges they have already overcome. He rouses courage in the sailors and gives special instructions to the men steering the ship. If they are not careful, they will be drowned by the whirlpool Charybdis. They avoid Charybdis but are once again gripped by fear when they realize they are headed toward the monster Scylla. They must pass narrowly between the two dangers. Scylla spits fire into the sea, causing it to rise and crash violently.

The shot spume soared to the landside heights, and fell like rain. But when she swallowed the sea water down we saw the funnel of the maelstrom,\(^26\) heard the rock bellowing all around, and dark sand raged on the bottom far below. My men all blanched against the gloom, our eyes were fixed upon that yawning mouth in fear of being devoured.

Then Scylla made her strike, whisking six of my best men from the ship. I happened to glance aft at ship and oarsmen and caught sight of their arms and legs, dangling high overhead. Voices came down to me in anguish, calling my name for the last time.

Odysseus describes the terrible way in which Scylla swings the men through the air and swallows them. Their deaths affect him deeply, but the ship sails on, leaving Scylla and Charybdis behind.

That night, a storm forces the men to steer the ship into the safety of a sea cave. Right away, Odysseus warns his crew against killing the cattle that roam the island, which belong to the fierce god Helios. The sailors nod in understanding, but as the days pass and the storms continue, they begin to run low on food. Odysseus ventures further into the cave to pray to the gods for help. In response, however, the gods cause Odysseus to fall asleep. Meanwhile, on the shore, a sailor named Eurylochus\(^27\) pleads with the rest of the crew.

’You’ve gone through everything; listen to what I say. All deaths are hateful to us, mortal wretches, but famine is the most pitiful, the worst end that a man can come to.

Will you fight it? Come, we’ll cut out the noblest of these cattle for sacrifice to the gods who own the sky; and once at home, in the old country of Ithaca, if ever that day comes—

\(^{26}\) maelstrom (MAYL struhm) n. large, violent whirlpool.

\(^{27}\) Eurylochus (yoo RIHL uh kuhs) member of Odysseus’ crew who persuades the men to eat Helios’ cattle.
we’ll build a costly temple and adorn it
with every beauty for the Lord of Noon.²⁸
But if he flares up over his heifers lost,
wishing our ship destroyed, and if the gods
make cause with him, why, then I say: Better
open your lungs to a big sea once for all
than waste to skin and bones on a lonely island!’

The men make offerings of the bones of the cattle and eat their meat. Odysseus wakes,
smells the cooking meat, and knows that his crew has disobeyed his orders. He cries out
to the gods in regret. A nymph hears Odysseus and passes on the news of the slaughter
to Helios. Helios gives an angry speech against the sailors.

‘O Father Zeus and gods in bliss forever,
punish Odysseus’ men! So overweening,
now they have killed my peaceful kine, my joy
at morning when I climbed the sky of stars,
and evening, when I bore westward from heaven.
Restitution or penalty they shall pay—
and pay in full—or I go down forever
to light the dead men in the underworld.’

Zeus responds to Helios’ speech by promising to destroy Odysseus’ ship. Odysseus
begins to lecture the crew but realizes that the damage has already been done. The
gods cause the slaughtered cows to crawl around and make noise as if they were alive.
This is a sign of the gods’ anger.

The men eat the rest of the meat and return to sea. Zeus sends a violent thunderstorm
to their ship. Winds rip the boat apart and a single lightning bolt strikes the deck. The
crew is thrown overboard and drowns. Clinging to a floating piece of the ship, Odysseus
is pushed back toward Charybdis. He grabs hold of a tree just before the whirlpool can
swallow him. He then manages to row past Scylla undetected on a piece of driftwood.
Finally, after nine days drifting on the open sea, Odysseus finds refuge on Ogygia²⁹ Isle
with the nymph Calypso. Calypso is in love with Odysseus, so she takes him in.

At this point, Odysseus tells Alcinous that he does not want to repeat the story he told the
king last night, and so ends the first part of his tale.

²⁸. Lord of Noon Helios.
²⁹. Ogygia (oh [IH] ee uH) isle where Calypso lives.

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