

# Three islands, three lessons

[Literature](#), [Mythology](#)



Three Islands, Three Lessons In the epic poem, *The Odyssey*, Homer tells the story of a war hero named Odysseus who is away from home for twenty years. During this time, Odysseus fights in the Trojan War and then travels for ten years trying to return home. Throughout this journey, Odysseus learns many lessons; however, the three most important lessons he learns are to follow the laws of *xenia*, the importance of family, and to show respect to the gods. The first lesson that Odysseus learns is to follow the laws of *xenia*. When Polyphemus gets home and sees that Odysseus ate his sheep, he eats his men, “ So I spoke, but he in pitiless spirit...sprang up and reached for my companions slapped them against the ground...brains ran all over the floor...he cut them up limb by limb and got supper ready" (144). Odysseus does not follow the laws of *xenia* because he eats Polyphemus' sheep without permission, and in turn Polyphemus ate Odysseus' men, just because he does not want to follow the laws of *xenia*. Odysseus learns that it is better to request something instead of simply taking it. Later on his journey, Odysseus learns about good hospitality when Eumaios gives up his bed, “ So there Odysseus went to bed...only the swineherd did not please to leave his pigs but made preparations as he went out" (146). Eumaios followed the laws of *xenia* by giving up his bed to Odysseus; he showed hospitality to Odysseus by giving up his bed and sleeping with his pigs. Odysseus finally realizes that he should respect the laws of *xenia* because of the losses he suffered. While on his journey, Odysseus also learns the importance of family. During his time in Hades, Odysseus found his mother and discovered the reason for her death, “ And so it was me...the reason I perished...it was my longing for you that took the sweet spirit of life from

me" (173). In this quote, it shows that when one has family, there is someone that cares for another. Also, family always cares about the person they love, like his mother dies worrying about Odysseus' well being. Another way Odysseus learns the importance of family is when he finds his way home, Odysseus is reunited with his family. Laertes is there with his arms wide open to welcome him home like it says in this quote, " Opening his arms [Odysseus] ran straight to him" (355). This quote goes to show that family will always welcome one home. One can tell that this family really love Odysseus a lot, because his whole family is worried and just can't wait until Odysseus gets home to Ithaka. Odysseus learns that family is very important because they will always be there for one and other through thick and thin. The final lesson Odysseus learns is to show respect for the gods. After Helios' cattle are killed by Odysseus' men, he pleads to punish the companions of Odysseus and Zeus answers his plea, " I will strike these men's fast ship midway on the open wide blue sea...and dash it to pieces" (195). This quote shows how if one disrespects the gods, they will take revenge. Odysseus should just explain why he kills the cattle, then maybe Zeus would not want revenge. Before Odysseus began to tell his story to King Alsinous, Odysseus decides to be arrogant and not be thankful to the gods for helping him out during the trojan war, so the gods decide to have a talk about Odysseus like it says in this quote, " For his sake Poseidon, Shaker of Earth, he does not kill Odysseus, yet [he] drives him back from the land of his fathers" (29). Odysseus needs to learn how to think before he acts or speaks, because it can put him in a world of trouble. If Odysseus could have looked beyond himself and his " brilliant" ideas maybe he could have seen

how Poseidon helped Odysseus in his plan. Odysseus learns that respect goes a long way especially when dealing with the gods. Through his experiences in the Island of the Cyclopes, in Hades, and in Aiolos' Palace, Odysseus learns many valuable lessons. Although ten years is more than enough time to learn the importance of following the laws of xenia, family, and respect, it is obvious that while learning all these lessons Odysseus has become a better person in the long run.