

Odyssey books 6-12 summary



Book 6 Athena appears in a dream to the Phaeacian princess Nausicaa in disguise. She encourages her to go to the river the next day to wash her clothes so that she will appear more attractive to her suitors, when she goes to wash them she has an encounter with Odysseus (who is naked) she eavesdrops to let Odysseus wash himself, Nausicaa gives Odysseus directions to the palace and advice on how to approach Arete, queen of the Phaeacians. 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. 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. 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. Alcinous is so impressed with his visitor that he offers Odysseus his daughter's hand in marriage. Book 8 At an assembly Alcinous proposes providing a ship for Odysseus so that the man

can return to his homeland. There a blind bard named Demodocus sings of the battle 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. 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 9 Odysseus tells the Phaeacians the sorry tale of his wanderings. From Troy, the winds sweep him and his men to Ismarus, city of the Cicones. The men plunder the land and, carried away by greed, stay until the reinforced ranks of the Cicones turn on them and attack. Odysseus and his crew finally escape, having lost six men per ship. A storm sent by Zeus sweeps them along for nine days before bringing them to the land of the Lotus-eaters, where the

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natives give some of Odysseus's men the intoxicating fruit of the lotus. As soon as they eat this fruit, they lose all thoughts of home and long for nothing more than to stay there eating more fruit. Only by dragging his men back to the ship and locking them up can Odysseus get them off the island. After making a meal of wild goats captured on an island offshore, they cross to the mainland. There they immediately come upon a cave full of sheep and crates of milk and cheese. The men advise Odysseus to snatch some of the food and hurry off, but, to his and his crew's detriment, he decides to linger. The cave's inhabitant soon returns—it is the Cyclops Polyphemus, the son of Poseidon. Polyphemus makes a show of hospitality at first, but he soon turns hostile. He devours two of Odysseus's men on the spot and imprisons Odysseus and the rest in his cave for future meals. The next day, while Polyphemus is outside pasturing his sheep, Odysseus finds a wooden staff in the cave and hardens it in the fire. When Polyphemus returns, Odysseus gets him drunk on wine that he brought along from the ship. Feeling jovial, Polyphemus asks Odysseus his name. Odysseus replies that his name is "Nobody". As soon as Polyphemus collapses with intoxication, Odysseus and a select group of his men drive the red-hot staff into his eye. Polyphemus wakes with a shriek, and his neighbors come to see what is wrong, but they leave as soon as he calls out, "Nobody's killing me". When morning comes, Odysseus and his men escape from the cave, unseen by the blind Polyphemus. (Flashback)Book 10(Flashback) Aeolus presents Odysseus with a bag containing all of the winds, and he stirs up a westerly wind to guide Odysseus and his crew home. Within ten days, they are in sight of Ithaca, but Odysseus's shipmates, who think that Aeolus has secretly given Odysseus a fortune in gold and silver, tear the bag open. The winds escape and stir up a

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storm that brings Odysseus and his men back to Aeolia. This time, however, Aeolus refuses to help them, certain that the gods hate Odysseus and wish to do him harm. Lacking wind, the Achaeans row to the land of the Laestrygonians, a race of powerful giants whose king, Antiphates, and unnamed queen turn Odysseus's scouts into dinner. Laestrygonians pelt the ships with boulders and sink them as they sit in the harbor. Only Odysseus's ship escapes. When Odysseus goes to rescue them, Hermes approaches him in the form of a young man. He tells Odysseus to eat an herb called moly to protect himself from Circe's drug and then lunge at her when she tries to strike him with her sword. Odysseus follows Hermes' instructions, overpowering Circe and forcing her to change his men back to their human forms. Odysseus soon becomes Circe's lover, and he and his men live with her in luxury for a year. When his men finally persuade him to continue the voyage homeward, Odysseus asks Circe for the way back to Ithaca. She replies he must sail to Hades, the realm of the dead, to speak with the spirit of Tiresias, a blind prophet who will tell him how to get home. The youngest man in his crew, Elpenor, had gotten drunk the previous night, slept on the roof, and, when he heard the men shouting and marching in the morning, fell from the roof and broke his neck. Odysseus explains to his men the course that they must take, which they are displeased to learn is rather meandering. Book 11(Flashback) Odysseus travels to the River of Ocean in the land of the Cimmerians. There he pours libations and performs sacrifices as Circe earlier instructs him to do to attract the souls of the dead. First is Elpenor the crewman who broke his neck then is Theban prophet Tiresias, who reveals that Poseidon is punishing the Achaeans for blinding his son Polyphemus. Book 12(Flashback) Odysseus returns to Aeaea, where he

buries Elpenor and spends one last night with Circe. As he sets sail, Odysseus passes Circe's counsel on to his men. They approach the island of the lovely Sirens, and Odysseus, as instructed by Circe, plugs his men's ears with beeswax and has them bind him to the mast of the ship. He alone hears their song flowing forth from the island, promising to reveal the future. The Sirens' song is so seductive that Odysseus begs to be released from his fetters, but his faithful men only bind him tighter. Odysseus and his men must navigate the straits between Scylla and Charybdis. Scylla is a six-headed monster who, when ships pass, swallows one sailor for each head. Charybdis is an enormous whirlpool that threatens to swallow the entire ship. As instructed by Circe, Odysseus holds his course tight against the cliffs of Scylla's lair. As he and his men stare at Charybdis on the other side of the strait, the heads of Scylla swoop down and eat six of the sailors. A storm keeps them beached for a month, and at first the crew is content to survive on its provisions in the ship. When these run out, however, Eurylochus persuades the other crew members to disobey Odysseus and slaughter the cattle of the Sun. They do so one afternoon as Odysseus sleeps; when the Sun finds out, he asks Zeus to punish Odysseus and his men. Shortly after the Achaeans set sail from Thrinacia, Zeus kicks up another storm, which destroys the ship and sends the entire crew to its death beneath the waves. As had been predicted, only Odysseus survives, and he just barely. The storm sweeps him all the way back to Charybdis, which he narrowly escapes for the second time. Afloat on the broken timbers of his ship, he eventually reaches Ogygia, Calypso's island.

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