

The *Odyssey* Summaries

Book 2

- Telemachos calls a meeting of all the Ithakan men, which includes the suitors.
- Lord Aigyptios (not to be confused with Aigisthos, the man whose murder the gods were earlier discussing), want to know why. After all, there haven't been any meetings since Odysseus left.
- Considering it's been almost twenty years, we're thinking these Ithakans aren't exactly bureaucratic go-getters.
- Telemachos grouches for a bit about the suitors who have invaded his house, eaten his food, drunk his wine, and tried to get with his mom.
- Nobody dares challenge his righteous anger except Antinoös, the would-be-king we met earlier. He blames Penelope herself for deceiving the suitors.
- How so? Let us (him) explain:
- When Odysseus didn't come, Penelope devised a plan to delay having to marry one of these suitors.
- (Note: Because she was a queen, Penelope would have been expected to marry after her husband died. Part of her duty is making sure that her people have a king.)
- To stall, she said she wouldn't marry until she'd finished weaving a funeral shroud for Laertes, Odysseus's father. Now, weaving is slow, but it's not *that* slow.
- Luckily, Penelope had a trick up her sleeve: she wove all day, and then unraveled all her work at night.
- No one could figure out why the shroud never grew, until a maid blabbed on her. (Off with her head, right?)
- Oh, BTW—Laertes isn't even dead. Penelope is just a real go-getter.
- Finished with his Penelope story, Antinoös issues an ultimatum: Telemachos either need to get rid of Penelope (we're not exactly sure how that would work) or make her choose a suitor for a husband.
- Again, we're not exactly sure how that would work.
- Telemachos refuses to oust his mother from the house and is likely on the verge of refusing the second option when Zeus intervenes by sending two eagles to attack the people of the city.
- Halitherses, an augur whose job it is to read portentous signs, reads the portentous sign: conveniently, it's an omen that Odysseus will return home.
- (Don't ask us how he knew that.)
- Another suitor Eurymachos just laughs and declares that Odysseus is dead. He tells Telemachos that the suitors aren't afraid of him *or* his stupid signs.
- Bad move, man.
- But Telemachos is done arguing; he's sailing for Pylos to hear news of his father.
- Mentor, an old friend of Odysseus's, speaks up. (If you look up "mentor" in the dictionary, you'll see this guy's picture. Seriously. We only have the word "mentor" in English because it's this guy's name)
- Anyway, Mentor announces how sickening it is that the community at large has not risen to speak against the suitors. Hoorah! Surely all will be incited to action!
- Sadly, no. Another townsman quickly hushes Mentor, so the crowd does nothing.
- The meeting is over.
- Telemachos prays to the god who visited him last night, whoever it was.
- Athene, nearby, hears his prayer and descends in the guise of Mentor. He/she tells Telemachos to prepare provisions for the journey and promises to find a ship.
- When Telemachos goes home, the suitors mock him.
- But Telemachos confidently tells Eurykleia to prepare provisions and to keep this whole trip on the down-low—especially from Penelope.
- Athene, to mix things up a bit, disguises herself as Telemachos while roaming about town and gathering up some good-hearted men to come along as crew for the ship, which she procures from the luxury shipyard run by Noëmon.

- Disguised as Mentor, she tells Telemachos that his ride is ready. Telemachos leaves immediately, taking with him a group of trusted men and of course Athene/Mentor as well, who is a very convenient travel companion. (S/he brings the best snacks and always pays for gas.)

Book 3

- At dawn the next day, Telemachos arrives in Pylos to find the citizens making sacrifices to Poseidon.
- They tend to do that a lot, and it's probably not unrelated to the two key facts: Poseidon is both powerful and highly temperamental.
- Telemachos is nervous about having to deliver a speech (which you had to do whenever you arrived anywhere, it seems) in front of nobility like Nestor, but Mentor/Athene encourages him: she tells him to have faith in himself because the gods favor him.
- This is a good thing to hear—especially in ancient Greece.
- Still, before any speeches are made, the Ithakans are invited to a sacrificial feast.
- Peisistratos, a son of Nestor, gives wine to Mentor/Athene and asks him to make a prayer to Poseidon.
- Mentor/Athene prays to Poseidon to honor Nestor and his sons and his kingdom and then fulfills the request herself—because she's a goddess.
- After they feast, it's time to find out where the Ithakans came from and what they're after.
- Telemachos, all jazzed up for his big speech, introduces them and asks for news about Odysseus (whom Nestor fought alongside at Troy).
- Nestor, reminded of the Trojan War, laments how long and difficult it was. He also says some nice things about Odysseus and tells Telemachos that he takes after his dad.
- And then it's more story time.
- Nestor details that, after their success at Troy, the Greeks had some trouble getting back home—the gods (ahem, Athene) weren't cooperating.
- Menelaos and Agamemnon, two brothers and also two Greek kings, argued as brothers (and kings) tend to do.
- Menelaos decided to take his fleet and leave Troy immediately while Agamemnon stayed behind, making sacrifices to appease Athene.
- The army, couldn't decide unanimously which man to follow, so they split up.
- Odysseus sided with Menelaos and took his ships to sea—and then he changed his mind.
- Heading back to Troy to show loyalty to Agamemnon, he took half of Menelaos's ships with him.
- Bad move, Odysseus: Menelaos and the remainder of the ships, including Nestor, safely made their way home.
- Agamemnon, as everyone knows, came home only to be killed by his scheming wife Klytimestra and her lover Aigisthos. (This is the murder the gods were discussing at the very beginning of the poem.)
- Telemachos says he envies Orestes for taking revenge and wishes the gods would help him avenge himself similarly on the suitors.
- Nestor reminds him that Odysseus was a great favorite of Athene and that there is hope yet that he might come home.
- Eh, says Telemachos. He has a hard time believing the gods are on his side.
- You're wrong, says Mentor/ Athene. Telemachos underestimates the gods. After all, they can save a man just by wishing it.
- Telemachos is really more interested in Agamemnon's death than philosophical debate, so Nestor tells the story:
- Klytimestra, Agamemnon's wife, has an affair with Aigisthos while her husband's away. While all this adultery is going on, Agamemnon's brother Menelaos is stranded in Egypt, where he can't exact vengeance.
- Agamemnon comes home and is promptly killed by his treacherous wife and her equally treacherous lover.
- The evil pair reigns for seven years in Agamemnon's (former) kingdom of Mykene.

- In the eighth year, Orestes, Agamemnon's son, comes "back from exile" and kills Klytimestra and Aigisthos.
 - On the funeral day of the treacherous couple, Menelaos finally arrives home. He's quite sad to find his brother is dead.
 - The end.
 - Having finished his story, Nestor warns Telemachos not to stay away from home too long, since the suitors are hanging out unchaperoned back there.
 - Well, except that he really needs to check in with King Menelaos at Sparta.
 - As Telemachos and Mentor/Athene are heading back towards the ships, Nestor offers them all beds for the night. More of that good Greek hospitality.
 - Telemachos accepts, and Athene finally reveals herself by turning into an eagle. She decides to stay and watch over Telemachos's crew while he speeds to Sparta.
 - Nestor is awed that she is helping Telemachos and promises to make a sacrifice of a golden-horned heifer to her. (The gods love a good steak.)
 - At dawn, Nestor arrives with his sons and makes good on his word.
 - They perform a sacrifice (yes, another one) and Nestor invites Telemachos's whole crew to the following feast.
 - Afterwards, he provides Telemachos horses so he can go to Sparta. Nestor's son Peisistratos accompanies him to keep an eye on the horses.
- Road trip! Two days of fun chariot-traveling follow.

Book 4

- When Telemachos arrives, Menelaos is hosting a double wedding feast, and he serves them food even before finding out their names. Nice guy!
- Telemachos is totally awed by the place, and he can't help but whisper that to Menelaos.
- Menelaos agrees; he was pretty happy to see it again after wandering the seas for seven years. But it's not all happy homecoming; he was pretty bummed to discover his brother Agamemnon murdered.
- Also, he lost a lot of friends in the Trojan war.
- Menelaos misses Odysseus more than anyone else does, he says (although we think Penelope is probably a good contender for that title).
- And, oh, hey! Aren't you Telemachos, Odysseus's son?
- Sure is. Telemachos is so bummed by hearing the King talk fondly about his father that he cries. Awkward silence.
- Helen, Menelaos's wife (and BTW the woman that started the whole Trojan war to begin with by getting herself stolen) enters and breaks the silence tactfully by saying that Telemachos looks just like Odysseus.
- Menelaos fondly recognizes Peisistratos as Nestor's son, and everyone gets back to eating.
- Helen decides to drug the men's wine with an anodyne of forgetfulness, hoping to soothe away their sorrows, which—and correct us if we're wrong, but doesn't that means she's roofieing them?
- After treating the wine, she serves it and tells funny stories about Odysseus.
- Like this one time, Odysseus disguised himself as Trojan beggar—even beating himself up to make it look convincing—to get information from the Trojans. Ha!
- Then Menelaos recounts the time they were inside the Trojan horse and Helen, whose loyalty apparently lay with the Trojans at the time, came around knocking on the horse and calling each man inside in the voice of his wife.
- Odysseus saved everyone from giving themselves away by urging them into silence and even clapping his hands over one man's mouth.
- Everyone enjoys these stories, plus they've been drugged, so Telemachos suggests they all go to sleep.
- In the morning, Menelaos finally asks Telemachos why he has come, and Telemachos explains the sitch.
- Menelaos isn't happy about the suitor situation. He tells Telemachos another story.
- Once, when Menelaos was stranded on the island of Pharos, Eidothea, one of the resident

- nymphs, advised him to capture the god of the island—Proteus—and hold him captive.
- Normally, this would be suicidal, and therefore a really bad idea, but in this case, it's the only way the god will tell them how to get off the island.
 - Eidothea helps disguise Menelaos and three of his men as seals. When Proteus surfaces to count his seal flock, they pounce on him and cling desperately while he shape-shifts into several different beings.
 - (Ever heard the word "protean"?)
 - Finally, Proteus reveals that Menelaos is trapped at Pharos because he didn't offer a proper sacrifice to Zeus before departing.
 - The only way he can appease the now-angry god is by going to the Nile River and making them an offering.
 - With the diagnosis out of the way, Menelaos asks Proteus for news of his Greek friends.
 - Proteus tells him that Aias (little Aias that is) has died for foolishly challenging the gods.
 - Mythological Context Lesson: there are two different characters named Aias (or Ajax, if you're feeling Latin-y) in Greek mythology, but they aren't related. This one here is called little Aias, and the other is called big Aias, or Telamonian Aias (his dad was a dude name Telamon).
 - The deal with little Aias is that he raped and killed Cassandra (a Trojan Princess) on the altar of Athene. This was a big no-no—both for obvious reasons (rape/ murder) and because altars were sacred spaces. Naturally, the gods killed him.
 - Next, we learn *again* that Agamemnon is dead.
 - Finally, what we've all been waiting for: Odysseus is being held as a prisoner of Kalypso and would really like to get home.
 - Menelaos is all, "Thanks, man" and books it off island. And that's it for his story.
 - Telemachos gets ready to head back to Pylos. Idiotically (if you ask us), Telemachos refuses horses and a chariot and wants a keepsake instead.
 - Menelaos gives him a silver bowl set. Oh, yeah, that'll come in handy. NOT.
 - In the meantime, back at Ithaka, Noëmon, the rich merchant who sold Mentor/Athene the ship, asks Antinoös when Telemachos will be back from Pylos because he needs his ship.
 - Apparently it was more of a lease than a sale.
 - Antinoös freaks out because he didn't know about Telemachos's voyage at all. (Or else he wasn't listening when Telemachos TOLD THEM ABOUT IT at the council meeting.) Mostly, he just gets all riled up because he's a jerk.
 - So he calls a meeting with all the other suitors. Since Telemachos has been making their parasitic lifestyle so difficult and also they all pretty much hate him, the men decide to sail out to sea, ambush the young man on his way home, and send him to his death.
 - Nice, guys.
 - Town crier Medon (we so wish that job hadn't gone out of style) overhears this and makes a not-so-public announcement to Penelope, who freaks out. Justifiably.
 - She didn't know about the voyage either and laments wildly—first for her lost Odysseus, then for her son who is about to die.
 - Eurykleia, the old nurse, feels guilty about concealing the journey from Penelope and begs her mistress to pray to Athene for Telemachos's sake.
 - Penelope does, and Athene hears her. (She's got good ears, that goddess.)
 - Meanwhile, down at the docks, the suitors have set sail.
 - Athene, pitying Penelope, sends an image of the queen's sister—Iphthime—to her in her sleep. Iphthime assures her sister that Telemachos will come home safely. When Penelope doesn't believe her, the hallucinatory sister reveals that he has Athene's help.
 - Penelope, all reassured by this, asks for news on Odysseus. Before answering, Iphthime fades away.

Penelope wakes up feeling as fresh as a daisy, while the suitors wait in ambush. We suspect this won't end well for them.

Book 6

- Meanwhile, Athene enters the city where Odysseus has crash-landed and heads to the

bedroom of the beautiful princess Nausikaa.

- Taking the form of the princess's friend, the goddess enters Nausikaa's dream and explains that, while the single life is nice, it's time for her to think about marriage. She urges the princess to go to the streams and wash her wedding linens.
- In the morning, young Nausikaa asks her father to borrow the car—i.e., mule-cart—to take her laundry to the streams.
- When her party gets to the streams, they wash their clothes and play around on the shore.
- Nausikaa is so beautiful that she looks like the goddess Artemis.
- The girls' shouting wakes Odysseus and he gets up to see who it is.
- Did we mention he's naked? (Well, he covers the naughty bits with an olive branch.)
- Everyone scatters at the sight of the big, scary, nearly-naked man. Everyone except Nausikaa, who stays because Athene gives her courage.
- Odysseus considers whether he should fall and hug her knees or use his eloquent speech to convince her that he needs some help.
- They don't call him "cunning" for nothing: Odysseus decides that a big naked man hugging a pretty virgin's knees is probably the wrong way to go, and so he uses his eloquent speech instead.
- He praises her beauty, tells her his situation, and effectively begs for her aid.
- Nausikaa is touched by his story and wants to be of service. She calls her maids out of hiding to help him bathe. (What?)
- Odysseus, always the gentleman, begs to bathe alone—he doesn't want to offend the young girls by letting them see him naked.
- Teehee. If this is what he looked like, we bet a few of those maids would have been glad to volunteer.
- When he's done, he puts on some clothes that the princess gave him and Athene plays up his good looks.
- Now might be a good time to try the knee-hugging approach, because Nausikaa is in l-o-v-e. She tells her maids that she wants a man who looks like Odysseus for a husband.
- The princess gives Odysseus directions to the palace, where he can meet the rest of the Phaiakians.
- Wait a minute... Phaiakians...on the island of Scheria...this sounds familiar. Oh, right, Zeus predicted it.
- She rambles on a bit about her people, who are apparently terrible archers and great at building ships, a particularly juicy tidbit for a stranded man with no possessions who's trying to sail back home to his family.
- Once she's done dropping unintentional hints, the princess tells Odysseus to follow her train of accompanying servant-folk into town and ignore the crude remarks of the seamen they will pass on the way.
- Once they get to town, she says, he should hang out in the garden while she goes inside.
- Then, when the time is right, he should come inside, find her mother the Queen, and hug her knees while he begs for mercy.
- Apparently, everything depends on the Queen's opinion. If he can get her on his side, he's all set for hospitality and help in this country.
- Now that Nausikaa has laid out the plans, everyone follows them.
- While Odysseus waits in the gardens, he prays to Athene for luck.
- Athene hears him.

Book 7

- Nausikaa arrives at home, while Athene disguises Odysseus in a cloud of sea mist so nobody can see him as he wanders the city.
- It's sure convenient to have a god(dess) on your side.
- Because she can't help pretending to be other people, Athene comes to Odysseus in the form of a child.
- Odysseus asks the adorable little girl for directions to the palace, and she leads him there.
- Along the way, she tells him all about the land and the ruling family. (This is a very informed

- child. Think Hermione, but immortal and in disguise.)
- Here's the 411: the Queen's name is Arete and the King's Alkinoös (not to be confused with the icky suitor Antinoös).
- Also, we are reminded that the Queen is calling the shots, so she's the one to talk up once Odysseus gets to the palace. Which is apparently just as stunning as Menelaos's palace that we saw back in Book IV.
- Athene/the suspiciously knowledgeable little girl takes Odysseus directly to Queen Arete. Odysseus, who is really good at following directions, falls and hugs her knees.
- At that moment, his protective mist cloud disappears and everyone sees him.
- Stunned silence.
- Odysseus makes his plea.
- More stunned silence.
- Then, the King's oracle nervously clears his throat. All eyes turn to him, and he scolds the King for not showing this beggar some hospitality.
- This breaks the ice and everyone rushes to serve Odysseus. Alkinoös even makes one of the princes give up his seat for Odysseus and declares that tomorrow will be a feast in honor of this guest.
- That is quite a welcome for an oddly-clothed stranger.
- After much eating and fuss, Alkinoös gets around to asking of Odysseus the question that's on everyone's mind: "Hey, any chance you're a god?"
- Odysseus assures everyone that no, he isn't, but can he have a ship so he can go home.
- Everyone is all, "Sure!"
- The Queen, however, is busy looking at Odysseus's clothes, which appear suspiciously similar to the ones she had made for her daughter Nausikaa.
- So she asks Odysseus as politely as one can ask, "Hey, big strange man; what are you doing wearing my daughter's clothes?"
- Odysseus realizes that his story better not include the virginal princess taking off her clothes at any point. So he says something along the lines of, "Well, that's a long story."
- Except that isn't going to cut it, so he launches into the quick and dirty, starting with Kalypso and ending with Nausikaa, without revealing who he is.
- Everyone is moved by his words.
- Very moved. King Alkinoös offers up Nausikaa's hand in marriage. Squee!
- But it's cool. If Odysseus doesn't want to marry the princess, the King will make sure his men row him wherever he wants to go.
- Odysseus decides to go home.
- Bed time for all.

Book 8

- At dawn, Athene goes around the city in town-crier disguise, shouting the news of the stranger's coming and the upcoming feast. Everyone congregates at the palace.
- She also makes Odysseus totally studly (*studlier*) and instills in him a desire to prove himself worthy of any challenge.
- At this little meeting, Alkinoös orders that a ship and crew be prepared for later that day.
- The King then invites everyone to the banquet and calls in his blind bard, Demodokos.
- (Oh, p.s., it's likely that Homer himself was blind.)
- Demodokos about the fight between Odysseus and Achilles that went down before the Trojan War.
- Odysseus, his name still unknown to the Phaiakians, sits back to listen to the tale about himself. It brings tears to his eyes.
- He hides his face beneath his cloak and only King Alkinoös notices his tears.
- Alkinoös orders some sporting games, bragging that when Odysseus goes home, he'll boast to his people of the Phaiakians' athleticism.
- They play. Homer lists the names of all the men that partake and the winners of each race. (Hey, epic poems were the only way for people to get their due before Facebook.)
- You should note that the King's sons make a good showing; Prince Klytoneos wins the foot-

race and Prince Laodamas wins the boxing match.

- It is this very Prince Laodamas, a handsome man, by the way, who invites Odysseus to join in the games.
- When he proves reluctant, Euryalos (another competitor) jokingly says he doesn't look like the athletic type.
- This is literary foreshadowing for Odysseus kicking some serious butt.
- Odysseus proceeds to hurl a discus further than any man present has managed so far. (Athene, disguised as a Phaiakian, is the one to measure the distance and announce as much.)
- Odysseus proudly asks for any man to challenge him. He will take on anyone except his gracious host, Prince Laodamas; and he'll win any contest except the running race, since his long days at sea have weakened his legs.
- Alkinoös wisely decides to diffuse the situation by switching things up; he asks for Demodokos to come back and sing some more.
- Demodokos sings the story of the affair between Ares (god of war) and Aphrodite (goddess of love), and of how Hephaistos, Aphrodite's crippled blacksmith husband, got jealous when he found out. The scorned husband wove a net, spread it over the bed, caught the lovers in the act, and shamed them in front of all the other gods.
- Well, apparently that was enough storytelling for the King. Alkinoös orders some dancing to entertain Odysseus and bestows on his guest a few gifts.
- Euryalos approaches Odysseus and offers him a lovely sword in repentance for his rash words earlier. It's cool, man.
- Later, after being given a nice bath, Odysseus asks Demodokos to sing about that great man Odysseus in the Trojan horse.
- We're not sure why he asked for this song, since it makes him cry. Again.
- Alkinoös sees and begs Demodokos to stop since it is upsetting his guest.
- Finally, Alkinoös asks who his guest is and why he grieves so much when hearing about the Trojan War. He silences his bard and invites him to tell his tale, but not before a complete non-sequitur in which he tells everyone of a prophecy that one of his ships will be turned to stone and mountains thrown up around his city.
- Everyone is all, "Um...OK" and then gets ready to hear Odysseus's story.
- Get the popcorn, folks. This is going to be a long tale.

Book 10

- Odysseus' crew lands next on the island of Aiolia, ruled by Aiolos, the god of the winds.
- Aiolos welcomes the Ithakans and listens to their tale of the Trojan War. They stay at his home for a month.
- When they leave, the gracious Aiolos gives Odysseus a bag of storm winds. (Neat!) The idea is that only the west wind is left free to blow the Ithakans straight back home.
- Odysseus doesn't tell his men what's in the bag, and just takes care of steering the ship by himself for nine days.
- Then, predictably, he falls asleep, exhausted. His men see Ithaka on the horizon, but before waking their master decide to check out what's in the sack; they think it may be treasure of some sort.
- This is a phenomenally bad idea.
- The moment they open the sack all the storm winds rage out and blow the ship backwards, undoing all their nine days of sailing.
- Odysseus despairs, even though he really only has himself to blame. He even thinks to kill himself, which would be extremely suspenseful if he weren't the one telling this story.
- So instead of suicide, Odysseus rows all the way back to Aiolia and begs for more help.
- Aiolos now realizes that the gods have cursed Odysseus, because there's no other way he could've messed that one up.
- The god refuses to help him.
- So the Ithakans row for six more days and again see land—Lamos, this time, the land of the Laistrygones, who are something between ogres and giants.

- When the men land, the king, Antiphates, greets them by falling on the first man and drinking his blood. And that, understandably, is the end of their stay on Lamos.
 - They sail again until they reach the island of Aiaia, home of the goddess Circe.
 - Odysseus scouts around and sees a plume of smoke rising inland. Made cautious by his last few adventures, he decides not to explore it alone.
 - Instead, after killing a big stag for dinner, he sends 22 men—including his friend Eurylochus—to explore the hall.
 - The witch Circe greets them and invites them in. She's so hot that everyone goes immediately, except for cautious Eurylochus.
 - He watches in secret as the men eat—and turn into pigs, which Circe drives into a pigsty.
 - Well, that's what you get for leering at a goddess, right ladies?
 - Eurylochus runs back to the ship to warn Odysseus, who arms up to rescue his men.
Eurylochus begs him not to go back, and in fact stays behind himself once the men set out with their master.
 - On the way, Odysseus is visited by the god Hermes who gives him advice and a magical herb called moly.
 - Odysseus is supposed to eat it to keep from turning into an animal at Circe's table and then draw his sword when the witch tries to drive him into a cage. When she breaks down, he has to agree to have sex with her if she vows not to use magic against him.
 - Gee, sounds like a fair trade to us.
 - Odysseus follows all the instructions.
 - All of them.
 - Afterwards, Circe restores Odysseus' companions to him by turning them back to human form.
 - Then the witch, who is apparently a nice person now, invites the whole crew to stay with her and rest, which they do. For a year. (!)
 - Finally, one of Odysseus' men asks if perchance they could consider the possibility of potentially, perhaps, maybe going home.
 - So, Odysseus approaches Circe to help them get to Ithaka.
 - She prophesies that he cannot go home until he visits the land of the dead to see the prophet Teiresias, who has further instructions for him. She gives him directions to get to the Underworld (which you could reach by ship back then, apparently).
 - Meanwhile, Elpenor—one of Odysseus' crew members—wanders to the rooftop to get some fresh air and spends the night up there.
 - In the morning, Elpenor wakes up and falls off the roof to his death.
 - Sadly, nobody notices because they're all despairing over the news of going to the Underworld and also they're busy preparing the ship.
 - They find that Circe has disappeared for good, leaving behind only a black ewe and ram as sacrifice required to enter the Underworld.
- It's like a highway toll, but bloodier and less portable.

Book 11

- Odysseus travels to the Underworld and makes the offerings according to Circe's instructions. The shades of the dead (shades = ghosts) gather to drink the blood (gross) and then talk to Odysseus.
- The first shade is Elpenor, freshly fallen from Circe's roof. Odysseus's eyes bug out when he sees one of his crew members—he weeps and listens to the man's story.
- Elpenor begs for Odysseus to honor his death by building a burial mound (essentially a pile of rocks) for his dead body. Odysseus agrees, since it's the least he can do after totally having failed to notice that one of his crew members was missing.
- Odysseus then glimpses his mother's shade among the rest of the dead. This is news to him, since last he heard she was still alive. Not a good way to find out.
- Fortunately, he is soon distracted from his weeping by the arrival of Teiresias (the dead blind prophet).
- Teiresias drinks the blood of Odysseus's sacrifice and then speaks.

- His first words are a warning: don't eat Helios's cattle at Thrinakia. His next are to casually announce that Odysseus will survive alone.
- In other words, all of his companions will die. Great, that's probably something they're glad to hear.
- The good news is, Odysseus will make it home after all, but he'll find trouble there. He'll have to make the suitors pay for their insolence with ... wait for it ... blood.
- After defeating the suitors, Teiresias continues, Odysseus had better go inland until he reaches an area of earth which has never known the sea. There, he has to pray to Poseidon in order to ensure himself a peaceful seaborne death in his old age, surrounded by all his folk.
- Okay, that's great, says Odysseus; but why is his mother here, and can he talk to her?
- Sure, says Teiresias, as long as she drinks the blood of the sacrifice, too.
- One gory mess later, Odysseus's mother Antikleia tells him of the situation back home in Ithaka: Telemachos is growing up but helpless against the suitors; Penelope is still loyal; and, oh yeah, she herself has died from loneliness.
- Her son tries three times to embrace her, but this doesn't work out too well, since Antikleia is dead.
- When she leaves, there's a long line of other dead people waiting to talk to him. The shades don't get too many visitors around these parts.
- Odysseus draws his sword to hold them back. (Except they're already dead, so we're not sure how effective that would be.) He lets them come and drink one at a time.
- Odysseus speaks first to a long line of princesses: Tyro, Antiope, Alkmene, Megara, Epikaste, Chloris, Leda, Iphimedeia, Phaidra, Prokris, Ariadne, Maira, Klymene, and Eriphyle.
- At this point, Odysseus pauses in his narrative. The Phaiakians are all "No way!"
- Queen Arete, clearly impressed by all these stories, decides that when they do finally send Odysseus on his way, it should be with lots of sparkly things (i.e., treasure).
- King Alkinoös then asks Odysseus if, while he was down in the underworld, he met any of his friends who died at Troy.
- He sure did!
- Back in the Underworld, Odysseus sees Agamemnon and hears the tragic story of his murder and his son Orestes's revenge against Aigisthos and Klytaimnestra.
- Agamemnon is understandably bitter against women and considers all of them treacherous. Oh, except for Penelope, whom he praises for her loyalty. (Nice save.)
- Then appear the spirits of Achilleus, Patroklos, Antilochos, and Telamonian Aias, some of Odysseus's buddies from the Trojan war.
- Odysseus praises Achilleus for having earned so much honor and glory in his life; surely his death is like, the greatest death ever.
- Nope. Actually, Achilleus says, being dead sucks. He'd rather be a poor country farmer who is alive than a glorious lord in the Underworld. Wise words.
- He then asks Odysseus about his son, Neoptolemos; Odysseus responds with what he knows of the lad's brilliance and luck in battle.
- Then Odysseus pleads with Telamonian Aias to forget their earlier quarrel in Troy over Achilleus's arms.
- [Mythological Context Lesson: You've already heard about little Aias in Chapter 4, so here's the deal with big or "Telamonian" Aias: back at Troy, Odysseus and big Aias competed for the arms of Achilleus, who had been killed and therefore didn't need his weapons anymore. The arms were supposed to go to the bravest man, but the Greeks couldn't bring themselves to make a decision since they figured whoever lost would leave the war in a huff. Since they couldn't afford to lose either of these great heroes, so they let the Trojan captives decide. The Trojans picked Odysseus, and the enraged Aias killed himself. Sore loser.]
- Clearly still peeved, the ghostly Aias turns away from Odysseus. Ouch. Rejected.
- Before he goes, Odysseus also sees Minos, Orion, Tityos, Tantalos, Sisyphos, and Herakles. These are all figures of Greek myth and, if you're interested in the specifics (*obviously* you are), check out your text. (And then check out Shmoop's handy-dandy mythology guides!)

- When all the shades come crowding in to drink the blood, Odysseus freaks out and runs back to his ship.
- Everyone leaves the Underworld a little bit wiser and less a few sacrificial animals.

Book 12

- As promised, the Ithakans return to Aiaia (because that worked out so well the first time), recover Elpenor's body, and go through the proper funeral rites.
- Circe reappears and feeds the men. She makes them promise to stay for the full day of feasting while she gives further directions to Odysseus.
- "Further directions" seems to be a euphemism for "more sex." Still, after the "further directions," she gives some actual directions on how to avoid the temptation of the Sirens who will try to lure him to death with their beautiful voices.
- Circe tells Odysseus that no man has ever heard the song of the Sirens and lived to tell the tale. But he can! He should have his men plug up their ears and tie him to the mast so he can listen without jumping overboard.
- Then she tells him about two different courses he can take to go home. The first one contains Rovers, moving rocks that are impossible for any ship to get through.
- The second route holds two dangers: Skylla, a sea monster with six heads that eats men, and Charybdis, a whirlpool that sucks in and vomits out the sea three times a day.
- Surprisingly, this is the better option. Circe advises Odysseus to hug the cliff of Skylla and sacrifice six men rather than risk losing his whole ship to Charybdis. Also, he should race through as quickly as possible instead of trying to fight her (the monsters are female, of course).
- Odysseus hems and haws, since he'd rather not lose any men—but Circe essentially tells him to suck it up.
- Wonder what she would tell the six men who are about to be sacrificed?
- One more thing: don't kill Helios' cattle at Thrinakia, unless he wants to lose his entire crew.
- The next day they set sail with the help of Circe's magical wind.
- The Ithakans approach the Sirens and, following Circe's instructions, Odysseus plugs his men's ears with melted beeswax and then instructs them to tie him up.
- For the complete lyrics, please see your text, but the Sirens basically promise Odysseus immortal knowledge. Come 'ere!"
- Only sexier.
- Just as they successfully pass the Sirens, the men approach Skylla and Charybdis and promptly lose their oars in fear.
- That is actually not a euphemism.
- Odysseus tries to inspire courage in them while he arms up against Skylla. Clearly, he's forgetting Circe's instructions.
- As foretold, Skylla takes six of Odysseus' best men. (Come on, Skylla, couldn't you have taken the cowards and weaklings?)
- He suddenly remembers that he's supposed to move quickly rather than fight the she-monster, so his ship makes it out. Barely.
- They then see Thrinakia, land of Helios' cattle. Odysseus wants to sail past since he's been warned against it about twelve times.
- But his men, led by Eurylochos, vote to stay there for a night to recover from losing six of their friends to a giant, hungry monster.
- Well, okay, Odysseus says—but hands off Helios' cattle.
- The next morning, they're getting ready to head off when ... a storm begins.
- And continues. For a full month.
- When their food runs out, the cows begin looking pret-ty tasty.
- Odysseus goes off to pray to the gods one day and finally Eurylochos snaps. He persuades the men to kill the biggest cow they can find. It's cool, though; he'll atone for it by building a big temple to Helios once they get back to Ithaka.
- Yum! Steak for everyone!
- Odysseus comes back, sees the cooking meat, and despairs...in an angsty, we're-going-to-die

sort of way.

- Helios is super ticked and asks Zeus for revenge. Sure thing; the King of the Gods promises to destroy Odysseus' ship with his thunderbolt.
- When the storm ends, the Ithakans set sail and are promptly struck by Zeus' thunderbolt.
- Everyone dies except Odysseus.
- The sea floats him back towards Skylla and Charybdis, and he manages to survive only by jumping on the huge tree-island thingy positioned above Charybdis. He clings to its trunk while Charybdis ingests his ship.
- When she spits it back up again, Odysseus let go and lands on its flotsam. The gods help him evade Skylla as he rows past her using his hands as oars.
- He drifts on the open sea for nine days before washing ashore the island of Ogygia, where Kalypso rescues him.
- But then she keeps him prisoner for seven years, which kind of negates her whole rescuer argument.
- At this point, Odysseus ends his narrative for real this time.

Book 13

- Alkinoös, moved by Odysseus's harrowing tale, promises that each Phaiakian man will give him a gift to build up wealth for his return to Ithaka.
- They feast all the next day while Alkinoös's men prepare the ships. Odysseus is impatient to leave.
- Alkinoös's men row him to Ithaka during the night as Odysseus sleeps on the ship, and we're kind of surprised he actually made it home this time.
- They land on a rocky grotto, unload the still sleeping Odysseus, and leave him on the shore with all his treasure.
- Up in the clouds, or wherever it is that gods hang out, Poseidon sees Odysseus in Ithaka and approaches Zeus angrily. He wants Odysseus to suffer—more! Mwah-hah-hah.
- Zeus tells him that he is a god and therefore may take his revenge against a mortal any time he wants.
- So Poseidon finds the Phaiakians' returning ship, which is almost back to its homeland, and turns it into stone. Where it promptly sinks.
- He'd like to throw up some mountains around their city as well, but Zeus says that would be overkill.
- Alkinoös, seeing this happen, remembers the prophecy we heard in Book VIII (that his ship would be turned to stone and mountains thrown up around his island if his people were nice to strangers) and promptly whacks himself on the forehead.
- Meanwhile, Athene, up to her old tricks again, conjures a grey mist to hide Odysseus while he sleeps.
- When he wakes, Odysseus doesn't recognize his home and has no idea where he is. He thinks the Phaiakians have deceived him.
- After he counts his treasure and realizes none of it is stolen, Athene tarts herself as a shepherd and approaches him.
- They have a little exchange, and Odysseus makes up an elaborate story about being a hunted man from Crete who fought in the Trojan War and just escaped a ship of pirates.
- Athene, highly amused, reveals her true form and has a hearty laugh. Then she comments that Odysseus is indeed a master liar. Which is a compliment. We think.
- We learn that Odysseus thought himself abandoned by the goddess after the Trojan War, but is pleased to discover that she's been the one following him around and putting protective clouds over him.
- Athene reaffirms that this land is Ithaka. She lifts the protective cloud so he can see clearly that this is indeed his beloved homeland.
- They stash the treasure safely in the grotto and start planning revenge.
- Athene tells Odysseus she will disguise him as a beggar, because she is the master of disguises and no one likes to look too closely at beggars anyway. She orders him to go

see his swineherd in the forest while she flies to Sparta to call Telemachos home.

Book 14

- When Odysseus arrives at the swineherd's home in the forest, he is nearly attacked by the dogs.
- Luckily, swineherd Eumaios shows up just in time and welcomes him into his hut and offers him what little food and comfort he has.
- While serving his guest, Eumaios talks all about the history of the land—King Odysseus's leaving to fight in Troy, the suitors' uncouth takeover of Odysseus's home, Penelope's staunch loyalty despite her suffering, and Telemachos's helplessness against the suitors.
- So, basically, nothing new.
- Still disguised as a beggar, Odysseus tries to tell Eumaios that Odysseus is not dead and will come back.
- The swineherd kind of rolls his eyes, and changes the subject.
- Odysseus makes up an elaborate story about being a commoner from Crete, who coincidentally has suffered many of the same trials that Odysseus did.
- In his made-up story, he says that he's heard Odysseus had just left an island when the beggar arrived. Odysseus is going to head home just as soon as he consults an oracle.
- Eumaios isn't convinced but it's pretty clear that the beggar's story has planted a seed of hope.
- He brings the beggar more food, making a big deal about treating his guest as Odysseus would've wished. Beggar Odysseus is touched.
- After dinner, Odysseus wants to beg for a cloak so he can sleep, but tells a witty story instead.
- Ah, but this is the kind of story that carries a subtle message, in this case, "Give me a cloak please."
- Eumaios, who is one sharp swineherd, gets the message and gives the beggar a fine heavy cloak. He tells him to stay at the hut until Telemachos returns and can give him passage wherever he wishes.

Book 15

- Athene makes her way to Sparta, where Telemachos is in bed but not yet asleep. She urges him to leave immediately for Ithaka because Eurymachos is going to marry Penelope. (Not true.)
- He should go to Eumaios the swineherd as soon as he reaches Ithaka, and have Eumaios tell Penelope he's back.
- (Remember, the suitors are all ready to kill Telemachos if he shows his face, so some discretion is required.)
- All worked up by Athene's lie, Telemachos tells Peisistratos that they need to get going.
- At dawn, Menelaos rushes to get Telemachos gifts and transportation ready. Menelaos, Helen, and Peisistratos each choose a gift for him. Helen's is sweet—a beautiful gown woven by her own hands for Telemachos's future bride. Aw.
- Just then, Zeus sends a sign—an eagle flying with a dead farmyard goose in its talons.
- Helen interprets this to mean that the god-favored Odysseus has returned to Ithaka and will remove the household pests—the suitors—from his home.
- Um, sure.
- Telemachos and Peisistratos drive the whole day and sleep that night at Pherai.
- The following morning, Telemachos requests that Peisistratos take him straight to his ships and send word for his men to join him. He wants to avoid meeting Nestor and waiting for more gifts, which as we've seen takes forever in ancient Greece.
- Sounds good.
- Just as Telemachos is about to set sail, a stranger approaches him, a descendent of Melampous and a man gifted with prophetic abilities.
- Time for some back story. Okay, so Melampous was a rich, happy Lord until King Neleus exiled him and took over his house. We don't know exactly why, other than the vague

- mention that it had something to do with Neleus's beautiful daughter.
- (The fact that this story is thrown in without a lot of details probably means Homer's audience was already pretty familiar with it.)
- Melampous was held captive in his exile by yet another man, Phylakos. Somehow he escaped, took back his lands, carried off Neleus's daughter and gave her in marriage to his brother, and then, because it was his destiny, went to Argos to be ruler. Done and done.
- Several generations later, Theoklymenos was born; he is the prophetic man who's asking Telemachos for a ride home. His reasons for hitchhiking are: (1) he killed his cousin in Argos, and (2) he is being hunted for the murder.
- Telemachos says sure, come on board.
- Back in Ithaka, Odysseus tests Eumaios's hospitality, until Eumaios takes offense at the beggar's insinuations of being a burden and welcomes him to stay until Telemachos returns.
- Then beggar Odysseus asks for information about the Queen and Odysseus's father, Laertes.
- Laertes is alive, but wishes he were dead because he grieves so much for his son.
- We learn that Eumaios grew up as Laertes's ward in the household and was a playmate to the Princess Ktimene, Laertes daughter (who therefore was Odysseus's sister).
- When Ktimene married and left Ithaka, Eumaios was sent to the forest to work as a swineherd. (As far as we can tell, this wasn't intended as a punishment of any sort, though it does seem like this guy got the short end of the stick.)
- Want some more backstory?
- Eumaios was the son of a Syrian lord and a Sidonian slave woman. His mother was unhappy as a slave (no!) and jumped at the opportunity to exchange sex for passage back to her homeland. (Well, you work with what you've got.)
- Little Eumaios came with her on the ship. When she died barely a week into the voyage, the sailors sold Eumaios to Laertes.
- Odysseus feels sorry for the guy so the two men talk night the night away and trade stories.
- Aboard Telemachos's ship, the fugitive guy Theoklymenos asks the prince where he could stay in Ithaka.
- Telemachos says he would offer his own house, but unfortunately it's currently occupied by swarms of suitors. He tells Theoklymenos briefly about his lost father.
- Zeus sends a sign, a hawk flying by with a dove in its talons.
- Theoklymenos interprets this to mean Odysseus's family will rule Ithaka forever.
- Telemachos asks one of his crewmen, Peiraios, if Theoklymenos can stay with him. Peiraios sportingly agrees.
- When they land in Ithaka, Telemachos makes his way to the swineherd's hut.

Book 16

- Telemachos arrives to find Eumaios chatting with a beggar.
- Eumaios jumps up to greet Telemachos enthusiastically; it is obvious that he loves him like a son.
- Eumaios introduces the beggar to Telemachos and asks if he'll look after the old man.
- Telemachos laments that his house is being intruded on, but offers the beggar clothing and food and further permission to stay with Eumaios.
- He worries aloud that he isn't trained in arms and will likely do a lousy job of ousting the suitors. (Plus, he's sort of outnumbered.)
- Odysseus/the beggar pumps his son up. He urges Telemachos to seek the aid of his brothers in ousting the suitors. Even if the odds are stacked against him, it's better to die in glorious battle than to be beaten by all these suitors.
- Telemachos says he has no brothers and no chance against the suitors, who are some of the toughest men in the land.
- He sends Eumaios to Penelope with the news that he has returned, but warns the swineherd not to let the suitors hear.

- When Eumaios asks if he let Laertes know, Telemachos tells him to let Eurykleia the nurse tell him instead. (Keep this in mind.)
- At this point, Odysseus spots Athene outside and goes to her. Telemachos can't see her, which could possibly make for some comic relief.
- She tells Odysseus to reveal himself to Telemachos and removes his disguise with her wand.
- Telemachos is blown away by the staggering transformation and assumes that Odysseus must be a god. (Well, all the ladies seem to like him.)
- While Telemachos is all overcome by wonder and happiness, Odysseus berates him for not taking the news more like a man.
- After the hugging and the tears, the father and son plot to defeat the suitors. Based on Telemachos' information, there are over one hundred of them. Hm. These are some mighty high odds.
- Telemachos despairs, but Odysseus tells him to have faith—after all, the gods are on their side. (Well, most of the gods.)
- Odysseus outlines the plan: tomorrow, Athene will disguise him as a beggar. He'll head to the royal hall to distract the suitors while Telemachos locks their weapons up in another room.
- Odysseus has set aside only two swords, spears, and shields for their own use. Other than that, they're trusting in the gods to assist them.
- He also warns Telemachos not to let anyone else know that he has returned.
- The pair agrees to question the female servants of the household to discover which ones are loyal to their cause.
- Then they send a runner to the Queen to say Telemachos has returned.
- This not so smart for two reasons: one, they already sent Eumaios to do just that; and two, this runner shouts the news aloud so that everyone, including the suitors, hears.
- Twenty minutes later, Eumaios tells the queen in private that her son has returned, and she's all, "No kidding."
- Back at the royal hall, the seabound suitors return to their friends, all bummed that they've failed to ambush and kill Telemachos.
- Antinoös urges the suitors to act fast. Now that everyone knows they've tried to kill Telemachos, they might as well strike the first blow.
- Another (and more prudent) suitor named Amphinomos isn't quite so trigger-happy: he advises them to pray to the gods to see if they are favored. The others agree.
- Meanwhile, Medon, our favorite town crier, has overheard the suitors' plans yet *again* and brings the info to Penelope.
- She confronts the suitors and accuses them of trying to kill her son.
- Eurymachos is all, "Who, us? Never!" and the Queen, who is helpless because she is a woman, goes upstairs.
- Back at the hut, Athene disguises Odysseus just as Eumaios returns. He delivers the news that a crier ruined their secrecy and that he spotted an unknown ship coming to Ithaka. (It's implied that this is the ship of the unsuccessful ambushing suitors.)
- Odysseus and Telemachos aren't fazed. They tuck into a good dinner and go to sleep.

Book 17

- Telemachos wakes and says that he must go to town so Penelope can see with her own eyes that he is in fact alive. He leaves orders that Eumaios is to bring "the beggar" to town during the day so that he can beg for food.
- Back in the great hall, Penelope is ecstatic to see her son alive. She asks him for news of Odysseus, but Telemachos tells her to be patient.
- Penelope complies.
- Telemachos then orders her to go bathe, change her clothes, and pray that Zeus will help them with their revenge against the suitors. He leaves with the excuse that he must take care of a passenger who

unexpectedly sailed with him yesterday.

- Telemachos quickly spots Odysseus's loyal friends – Mentor (the real one this time), Antiphos, and Halitherses – and goes off to consult with them.
- Peiraios brings Theoklymenos to Telemachos and asks the prince to send some maids so that they can get Menelaos's gifts into the house. Telemachos prudently tells him to wait and keep the treasure for now until they can be sure the suitors won't touch it.
- Peiraios obeys and leaves with his guest.
- The men enjoy a meal while Penelope weaves. She asks her son again for news of Odysseus, this time taking a firmer stance.
- Telemachos tells her the truth about his visit with Menelaos, but omits the fact that Odysseus is home. He only gives her faint hope by telling her what Proteus revealed to Menelaos – that Odysseus was last seen alive on the island of Kalypso.
- Theoklymenos interrupts and tells Penelope about the sign he interpreted for Telemachos the day before – the sign which prophesies that Odysseus is in fact *already* back in Ithaka and plotting revenge.
- To Telemachos's relief, Penelope doesn't believe the prophet's words. Phew. That was a close one.
- Medon, the town crier, calls the suitors (who are playing sports and engaging in other manly pursuits) to come in for dinner.
- While they're busy filing in, Odysseus – still in the guise of a beggar – leaves the forest with Eumaios and heads to town, even using a walking stick to play up his disguise.
- Eventually, the pair runs into Melanthios the annoying goatherd. He mocks the beggar, tells him to go home, and even kicks at him.
- Odysseus doesn't respond, though he burns with rage inside. All he does is pray aloud to the gods that Melanthios gets what he deserves. Given what we've seen so far, we're about 98% sure this will in fact happen.
- We find out that Melanthios willingly serves Eurymachos and adores him.
- When they reach the hall, Eumaios asks the beggar to stay at the entrance and allow him to enter first. Odysseus agrees.
- As the disguised Odysseus speaks, an old dog sitting on a dung heap nearby pricks his ears up and tries to wag his tail.
- Odysseus recognizes him as Argos, the hound that he trained as a puppy but never had the chance to take hunting before he left for Troy. Now poor Argos is old and mistreated by everyone, which is kind of sad.
- Odysseus sheds a tear for the poor condition of his favorite dog and inquires about the animal.
- Eumaios says that Odysseus owned this dog; the animal was swift, strong, and courageous in his prime, but now he's just abused by everyone.
- As the men enter the hall, Argos breathes his last breath and dies happy, having recognized and seen his master after twenty years.
- Eumaios grabs a spare bench and seats himself across from Telemachos while the disguised Odysseus enters the hall.
- Telemachos, who has to pretend he doesn't know this guy, gives the beggar a generous hunk of bread and meat and tells him not to be shy in asking for food.
- Odysseus goes down the line, begging food from each man. With this strategy, he learns who among the suitors goes on the good list and who on the naughty list.
- This would be a great way to decide who lives and who perishes, if Athene didn't command that everyone has to die, which she does.
- Everyone gives Odysseus something until Melanthios recognizes him as the same old beggar from before; he again insults the man.
- After hearing this, Antinoös turns on Eumaios and scolds him for bringing a beggar to the hall.
- OK, so we've got two names for our naughty list...
- Telemachos stops Eumaios from his angry reply, but only so he can insult Antinoös himself. He commands the suitor to give the beggar some bread.
- Antinoös threatens to instead throw a footstool at the man. But beggar Odysseus ignores him.
- After he has begged and received from everyone else, Odysseus calls on Antinoös to give something. He begins by telling him a false sob story of how he was a rich man once and had the misfortune to sail to Egypt.
- Antinoös interrupts with a refusal to feed him.

- Beggar Odysseus insults him: he says it's a shame that Antinoös looks so much more lordly than he is.
- Zing!
- Enraged, Antinoös throws a footstool at the beggar (in his defense, he *did* give fair warning) and clips him on the shoulder. Odysseus doesn't even wince, but inwardly rages to return the favor.
- Everyone is embarrassed by Antinoös's uncouth behavior; some loudly reprimand him for striking a poor beggar.
- Upstairs, Penelope hears all the noise and can tell that Antinoös is causing trouble again. She sends her maid to fetch the beggar to her for questioning – she wants to ask him for any news on Odysseus.
- Eumaios takes the message to beggar Odysseus, who says that he will meet with the Queen later tonight; he wants to avoid any suspicion from the suitors.
- Penelope, at first desperate to hear this news, eventually calms down and realizes that this is a clever beggar.
- Eumaios leaves to tend to the herds as the banquet continues.

Book 18

- A real beggar by the name of Iros, who regularly begs at Odysseus's hall, sees the newcomer and rudely demands that he get out. Clearly, this town isn't big enough for *two* beggars.
- Odysseus tries to reason with the man, but he is staunch. This launches us into another back-and-forth round of insults.
- Antinoös, seeing these two going at each other, spurs them on, since everyone loves a good fight. He promises a prize of fat blood pudding to the winner.
- Telemachos assures beggar Odysseus that the crowd will watch his back (meaning they won't let some jerk hit him with a footstool). The crowd cheers, proving that if there's one thing Greeks can agree on, it's that old beggars shouldn't be hit unawares from behind.
- Iros is all, "You're going down!" and Odysseus is all, "Oh really? Well look at... THIS!" and then he rips off his shirt and everyone goes "Ooooh!"
- Antinoös, noting Iros's fear, threatens to have him beaten and castrated if the new beggar wins against him.
- Odysseus decides to be merciful and strike Iros only once, which he does, in the jaw. Unfortunately for Iros, this one punch is enough to break his jaw. Blood proceeds to do what it always does in the *Odyssey*, namely, spew everywhere.
- Everyone is massively entertained by the fight and they all cheer the beggar Odysseus on.
- Amphinomos, who we've already seen is a not-so-bad suitor, gets some advice from the beggar, who urges the suitor to go home before Odysseus returns and punishes everyone by exacting some revenge.
- Amphinomos is convinced, but Athene will not allow him to leave – she wants *all* the suitors to die.
- Moving on to less vindictive activities, Athene puts Penelope to sleep for a few minutes during which she showers her in ambrosia and makes her even lovelier than she already is.
- The goddess inspires Penelope to show herself to the suitors and get them all hot and bothered over her. The Queen makes her appearance with the excuse of berating Telemachos for allowing such poor treatment of the beggar.
- Indeed, Penelope proceeds to have a model moment in front of all the suitors, who appreciate it wholeheartedly.
- Penelope is oblivious to her influence on the men and scolds Telemachos for allowing such abuse (she's referring to the beggar) in her household.
- Telemachos replies that it was not what it seemed.
- Eurymachos interrupts and compliments Penelope on her beauty. Though she plays modest at first, Penelope finally ends up flirting a bit with the suitors; she complains that they haven't courted her correctly, as not one of them has presented her with any gifts.
- Unfortunately, not one of the suitors responds with the clearly invited line, "I've got a gift for you, come here and I'll show it to you."
- While the suitors comically search each of their troves to find a suitable gift for the Queen, Odysseus watches, highly amused.

- When Penelope leaves, her servants carrying the shining gifts she has just received, Odysseus decides to test the loyalty of her maids.
- At night, the maids are assigned to keep the torches burning in the hallway so that the suitors – getting drunk in the hall – can see what they’re smacking into before they smack into it.
- Beggar Odysseus tells the servants he’ll take care of the torches tonight and sends them up to go care for Penelope.
- The women giggle at him. One girl, Melantho, calls him crazy or drunk for sticking around with the drunk and rowdy suitors.
- Beggar Odysseus threatens to tell Telemachos about their rude behavior, so the girls scatter in fear.
- The suitors, seeing the beggar tending the torches, begin teasing him again. Odysseus answers in kind, boasting that he could defeat any of them in battle.
- This infuriates Eurymachos, and he lobs a footstool at the beggar. Very original. It misses, however, and hits a wine steward, spilling all the wine.
- Amphinomos restores the peace by turning their attention to the banquet and away from the fighting. They all go back to eating. And getting drunk.

Book 19

- Odysseus, still disguised as the beggar, commands Telemachos to remove the suitors’ weapons from the great hall, as planned.
- Telemachos tells Eurykleia to go shut the women in their rooms while he does so. Again, this won’t be suspicious at all.
- Odysseus and Telemachos move the weapons together, their path lit by Athene, who is conveniently bearing a torch for the occasion.
- For the first time, it seems, Telemachos realizes just how deeply Athene is invested in helping Odysseus. He is awed.
- Penelope sits on her chair in her room, awaiting the beggar to come as promised.
- Melantho sees Odysseus coming up and insults him; he replies that she should think about what Odysseus would think of her behavior.
- Penelope rushes to his aid and dismisses the maid.
- The Queen asks the beggar where he is from, but he replies that the topic is too painful to discuss. Instead, he gets information from her.
- She tells him about the long years she has spent waiting for her husband to return and how she tricked the suitors with her shroud-weaving routine.
- But now she is desperate and has given up hope. She plans to marry a suitor soon, just to get out of Telemachos’s house and let him live in peace. (Nooo!)
- Finally, she persuades the beggar to tell her about himself. Odysseus assumes a fake name – Aithon – and weaves a complex story in which he came from Crete, fought in Troy, and later played host to Odysseus.
- Penelope gets excited at hearing her husband’s name, but doubts the truth of his tale; she asks for details about Odysseus’s appearance – just to make sure.
- The beggar describes Odysseus’s clothing, weapons, and men perfectly, moving Penelope to tears.
- He goes on to promise her that Odysseus is returning. In fact, he claims, he will be back...today!
- But Penelope remains unconvinced.
- Still, she offers the man a bath, clothes, and bed for the night.
- The beggar, however, refuses the bath (which is really just a foot washing) unless he gets it from a maid as old and long-suffering as he is.
- Playing right into his hands, Penelope offers the services of Eurykleia, Odysseus’s nurse when he was young.
- Eurykleia notices the strong resemblance between the beggar and Odysseus, but the beggar brushes it off by saying he gets that a lot.
- She begins washing his feet.
- Odysseus realizes something and freezes – he must not let her see the scar on his thigh. (Thigh!? Just what kind of foot wash is this, anyway?)
- Flashback to the scar story: as a boy Odysseus went on a hunt on Mount Parnassos with his grandfather Autolykos, where he was gashed in the thigh by a wild boar. It left an unmistakable scar.

- Of course, Eurykleia spots the mark, knows the man to be Odysseus, and freaks out.
- Odysseus whispers to the old woman, so as not to alert the nearby Queen, and vows her to silence – especially with respect to Penelope.
- Eurykleia promises to zip it.
- In the meantime, Penelope, utterly oblivious, asks the beggar one last question. She describes to him a dream she had in which she joyfully watched the domestic geese in her garden. Sweet, until a mountain eagle swooped down and killed them all.
- She and her attendant women began to wail in sorrow, but the eagle came back and spoke, saying that he is her lord returned and the geese are the suitors.
- We wish all our dreams interpreted themselves for us.
- Still, this isn't enough explanation for Penelope. She asks the beggar to interpret the dream...again.
- The beggar tells her it means certain death for the suitors.
- Penelope is still doubtful.
- She tells him that she is so tired of the courtship that she will end it tomorrow by issuing a contest in which the suitors must string Odysseus's old bow and shoot an arrow through twelve consecutive axe heads. She will marry the suitor who wins it.
- The beggar promises that Odysseus will be present for the contest.
- Still skeptical, Penelope goes upstairs to sleep.

Book 20

- Beggar Odysseus settles down to bed on the floor outside of Penelope's room, but has trouble falling asleep. Kind of like before the night of a big game, or in this case the slaughter of 100+ men.
- He sees some of the maids slipping out to go sleep with the suitors. He is enraged at the maids' betrayal but stays silent.
- Athene arrives and instructs Odysseus to have faith.
- Meanwhile, upstairs, Penelope is crying for Odysseus. She prays to Artemis for death rather than more of this endless suffering. She dreams that Odysseus comes back, but of course doesn't believe the good omen.
- Odysseus wakes at dawn and, in a moment of angst, asks Zeus for a sign that he was meant to come home.
- Zeus hears and sends a thunderclap through a perfectly clear sky.
- A maid grinding barley hears the thunder clap and knows Zeus must be around and listening. She prays that all her hard work to feed the greedy suitors will soon be over. Oh, and that all the suitors die. This is convenient for Zeus, who gets to grant two prayers at once.
- And we're back to Odysseus, who takes heart at seeing the thunderbolt.
- Telemachos checks up on beggar Odysseus and then orders the maids to prepare a feast, because today is a holiday.
- Melanthios returns to taunt the beggar more. Does he ever learn? And also, doesn't he have anything else to do?
- Afterwards another man approaches the beggar – Philoitios, the resident cowherd. He greets the beggar warmly and notes his resemblance to Odysseus. We quickly see that he is ashamed and outraged at the suitors' behavior in his lord's house.
- The beggar asks Eumaios and Philoitios if they would fight on Odysseus's side against the suitors should he return to Ithaka. They both eagerly answer yes.
- The suitors, at the sound of breakfast, drop all their plans of killing Telemachos and turn their minds to the real task at hand – eating.
- Telemachos seats the beggar opposite himself with his own share of food and a goblet of wine and challenges anyone to insult him.
- For the most part, no one does, although there is some mild grumbling from (surprise) Antinoös.
- We find out that the "holiday" is really a day of sacrifice to Apollo.
- Athene, who apparently loves conflict, wants the suitors to tease Odysseus so he'll get all worked into a rage. Because she always gets her way, the suitors indeed taunt the beggar, one by one.
- Eventually, one suitor, Ktesippos, throws a cow's foot at the beggar. Odysseus ducks, which foils

Ktesippos's mean plan.

- Telemachos, enraged, rushes to the beggar's defense.
- Yet another suitor, Agelaos, gets everyone off the topic of the beggar and back to the issue at hand: who's going to get Penelope. He asks Telemachos to see reason: it's obvious that Odysseus isn't coming back, so Penelope needs to get over herself already and marry one of the suitors. He asks that Telemachos reason with his mother.
- Telemachos refuses and the suitors laugh at him. Athene, who still wants to see some blood, makes his refusal seem *especially* hilarious to the suitors so they laugh for a *really* long time.
- Theoklymenos, the prophetic fugitive whom Telemachos gave a ride home from Pylos, has a vision of the hall filled with dripping blood and shades of the dead. Then he tells everyone about it.
- You would think this would dampen the mood, but no, the suitors just laugh at him, too. Telemachos rolls his eyes and tries to ignore them the best he can, a task made easier by the knowledge that, very soon, the hall will indeed be filled with their dripping blood.

Book 21

- Penelope takes Odysseus' bow down from its place of honor on the wall. She remembers how he obtained it as the payment for a debt from Iphitos from Lakedaimon.
- Don't worry—Homer tells you the story: Odysseus met Iphitos in Messene, where he (Odysseus) had come claiming the natives owed Ithaka for having stolen some sheep way back when. Iphitos was also there on the account of livestock; he was tracking some stray mares that apparently wandered to Messene themselves.
- But these mares ended up being the death of Iphitos, since he later wandered to the house of Herakles (Hercules), who promptly killed him so he could have the mares.
- The point is, Odysseus became friends with Iphitos; he gave him a sword and spear, and Iphitos in return gave him the bow that Penelope is now taking off the wall.
- Back to the Queen. She approaches the suitors and announces the contest and all its details, which we've already heard.
- Eumaios and Philoitios present the weapons and both break down in tears, since they know Penelope has given up hope that her husband will ever return.
- Antinoös mocks them for their sniveling, of course.
- Telemachos is the first to try stringing the bow, not because he wants to marry his mother (he'll leave that to this ancient Greek hero), but because he wants to prove his strength, manliness, and virility.
- After four tries, it looks like Telemachos is finally about to succeed—when beggar Odysseus signals for him not to do it. Convenient.
- Telemachos obeys and hands the bow over to the first suitor, who fails miserably.
- Antinoös orders Melanthios to build a fire and bring a cake of lard so that they can limber up the bow in the hopes of stringing it. (Cheating!)
- As he does, beggar Odysseus notices Eumaios and Philoitios leaving the hall. He rushes after them and reveals himself as Odysseus. As proof, he shows them his scar. Woohoo!
- In the meantime, Eurymachos has been shamed by the bow; he can't string it, either.
- To delay his own attempt, Antinoös distracts everyone's attention with the feast and says he'll try the bow tomorrow after they have eaten.
- Beggar Odysseus speaks up; he wants a chance at stringing the bow.
- The suitors, especially Antinoös, emphatically say no. They're afraid he can actually do it, since they saw his absolutely awesome body a few days before.
- Penelope scolds Antinoös and Eurymachos for treating the beggar so badly and invites him to give it a shot.
- Telemachos uncharacteristically steps forward and tells his mother that this is a man's affair and she ought to go upstairs and be a woman. Alone. In the bedroom.
- Incidentally, that's where ancient Greek women actually did spend a lot of their time.
- Penelope obeys, marveling at Telemachos' sudden bravery. Because there's nothing a mom likes better than being ordered around by her son.

- As the beggar takes his time feeling the bow, Telemachos tells Eurykleia to shut all the women in their rooms and tell them not to come out until summoned, even if they hear sounds of battle.
- As the beggar takes his time stringing the bow, the suitors shout insults at him...
- ...Until he successfully strings the bow in one easy motion, grabs an arrow and shoots it straight through the twelve axe heads.
- In the silence that follows, Zeus sends a sign of his favor—a single thunderclap.
- Telemachos arms himself and moves to stand next to his now unmasked father.
- Odysseus is back. Yeah!

Book 22

- First up, Antinoös. Odysseus hits him with an arrow to the throat while he's drinking wine.
- It's justice time.
- Realizing that their weapons are gone, the suitors scatter.
- Eurymachos begs for Odysseus to have mercy on the rest of the suitors, now that he's killed the worst of them (that would be Antinoös).
- Nope.
- So, Eurymachos tries to rally the suitors to fight Odysseus, who responds by promptly killing Eurymachos with an arrow to the heart.
- As Amphinomos rushes Odysseus, Telemachos stops him with a spear to the heart.
- Telemachos then runs to the storage room, grabbing more weapons, and arming the four allies (Odysseus, himself, Eumaios, and Philoitios).
- Melanthios sees Telemachos go to the storage room and quickly does the same in order to arm the suitors.
- Odysseus is none too happy to see that the suitors suddenly have weapons.
- Telemachos knows it's his fault for leaving the storage room door open and confesses it to Odysseus, who orders the two herdsmen to follow Melanthios, tie him up, and lock him in the storage room so he can do no more harm. They obey.
- All right, guys, less apologizing/ordering and more fighting! Especially since the suitors now have Odysseus and Co. cornered and incredibly outnumbered.
- Athene arrives, disguised as Mentor. Odysseus recognizes her for who she is and calls for help.
- The suitors beg Mentor/Athene not to help Odysseus, threatening him with death if he does.
- She turns to Odysseus and tells him to show the suitors his stuff (i.e., the skills he used against Troy)—justice, she says, is on the way.
- But she holds back. Odysseus and Telemachos have yet to prove themselves worthy of her assistance. She watches her two little pet mortals from the roof and passively protects them while they pick off suitors one by one.
- At last, Athene's sign—the aegis or "great shield"—shines in the air in the hall and the suitors realize that Odysseus has godly help. They panic. Some beg for mercy, but Odysseus is ruthless.
- So ruthless, in fact, that he spares only Phemios the singer and Medon the town crier, because Telemachos swears they're loyal.
- Finally, all the suitors are dead. Bloodbath? Check. Revenge? Check. Mischief managed? Check.
- Odysseus calls for Eurykleia to bring all the unfaithful maids to him.
- Eurykleia is all, "Um, how 'bout putting on some non-bloodbath clothes first?", and Odysseus is all, "No."
- Of the fifty maids in the household, twelve have proved disloyal. Odysseus forces them to drag the corpses of the suitors outside and clean the hall.
- He orders his son to then hack the disgraceful women to pieces outside, but Telemachos thinks this is too noble a death for these "sluts." Instead, he hangs them, which is apparently worse than being hacked to pieces.
- Then the good guys torture and kill Melanthios.
- Odysseus orders Eurykleia to bring brimstone, a brazier, and medicinal herbs so he can purify

the great hall.

- We're thinking some bleach and a mop would be a good idea, too.
- Apparently, so does Eurykleia, since she tries to get him to clean up first. He refuses.
- Odysseus purifies the hall, and all the maids and servants who remain with many hugs and tears (and grimaces, because as far as we can tell, he's still wearing his bloody clothes).

Book 23

- Eurykleia goes to Penelope with the news that Odysseus is back.
- Penelope doesn't believe her, thinking she's gone mad.
- Seriously, did she not hear that battle going down?
- Even when Eurykleia tells her that all the suitors are dead, Penelope thinks some strange hero has come to deliver her, not her husband.
- Still, the stubborn woman finally comes down from her room and sees Odysseus. Now she can finally accept the fact that he's back.
- Except not.
- Telemachos begs her to just talk to the guy, but Penelope insists that if this were Odysseus, he would know their secret signs.
- Odysseus smiles knowingly.
- Because he's worried about facing repercussions for killing, oh, all the noblemen of the country, he orders that the household keep the slaughter of the suitors a secret from the rest of Ithaka.
- He has a brilliant plan: they'll plan a dancing feast tonight so they can pretend that all the noise was just Penelope's wedding!
- As Odysseus is cleaning himself up, Athene makes him more handsome to the eye. (Another goddess makeover.)
- When Odysseus sits down beside Penelope that night, she tells him that he can sleep outside her room, on the bed that Odysseus carved years ago.
- At this point Odysseus snaps, asking who dared move his bed. Apparently, he built the entire bedroom around a huge olive tree and carved the bed straight from the roots, so it totally can't be moved.
- This is the secret that Penelope referenced earlier; she rushes into Odysseus' arms in tears and begs his forgiveness.
- The two rejoice, make love, and exchange stories of the twenty long years.
- Except we're betting there are certain bits Odysseus leaves out, such as sleeping with Circe, having sex with Kalypso for seven years, and that offer of marriage to Nausikaa.
- Athene makes time go slower so that the couple can enjoy their night together and still get enough sleep. Nice to have a goddess on your side!
- The following morning, Odysseus announces that he will visit his grieving father.
- He orders the women to go upstairs and lock themselves up to stay safe from any potential avengers from town.
- Odysseus takes Telemachos and his faithful herdsmen with him to see Laertes. Athene adds her protection by hiding them in...yes, you got it, a cloud shaped oddly like a group of traveling men.

Book 24

- In the meantime, the suitors' ghosts are being led by Hermes to the Underworld.
- There, the shades of Achilles and Agamemnon exchange their stories about the Trojan War. Actually, Achilles talks about the Trojan war, Agamemnon is still rattling on about getting killed by his unfaithful wife and her lover.
- When they see the suitors' shades entering, Agamemnon asks why they are here.
- And we get a three minute version of everything we've just read, courtesy of a suitor named Amphinemon, who amazingly blames everything on Penelope.

- Agamemnon rejoices for Odysseus, happy that the man has such a faithful wife. Unlike his own.
- Back in the land of the living, Odysseus reaches Laertes's garden lands; he sends Telemachos and the herdsmen up to the hut to prepare a good meal.
- Odysseus finds his father alone, ragged, and plowing the land dejectedly. He decides to test him to see if he is still loyal. We would expect nothing less from Odysseus at this point.
- Odysseus insults Laertes's appearance and then says his name is Quarrelman and he once housed Odysseus on his journey home.
- Laertes is grateful to the man for helping his son, but is convinced that Odysseus is dead. He obviously fell for the story that the screams of agony coming from the palace were mere wedding noises.
- Finally, Odysseus gives up the ruse and throws his arms around his father, confessing who he really is.
- Laertes... doesn't believe him. He wants proof. Odysseus shows him his thigh scar.
- Their reunion is very emotional.
- They go back to the farmhouse where the other men have prepared a meal. Laertes is joyous and Athene makes him look young again.
- When listening to Odysseus's story about defeating the suitors, Laertes wishes he could have fought alongside his son.
- Meanwhile, in town, people have heard about the massive slaughter of yesterday in Odysseus's hall. That brilliant wedding cover-up didn't work at all.
- Euepeithes clamors for revenge before the council and is approved.
- Odysseus's friends – Phemios, Medon, and Halitherses – tell the council that the gods are on Odysseus's side and warn the townspeople not to spill blood over this.
- But Euepeithes, an old man who, it turns out, is the late Antinoös's father, wants Odysseus to die. He wins the council over. Not-so-smart men.
- In the heavens, Athene approaches Zeus to ask whether it is his will that blood be shed in revenge.
- Zeus replies that peace can only come about by mutual contract and agreement; in other words, the people must accept Odysseus as king.
- The townspeople march to Laertes's land, armed to kill Odysseus.
- Odysseus's friends stand as one. Laertes is proud to be among them.
- Laertes invokes Athene's aid, casts his spear, and hits Euepeithes right in the helmet.
- His spear goes *through* the helmet and cleanly kills the man.
- Athene shouts for the skirmish to end and the people stop, scared by the goddess who apparently got past her desire for blood and vengeance and now is all about peace.
- She orders Odysseus to stop the battle or Zeus will be angry, leading us to believe she didn't really *listen* to Zeus's words at all.
- Odysseus obeys and both parties swear to peace with Athene as their witness.
- Finally, there is peace on Ithaka.