

Book Summary of *The Odyssey*

Odysseus, king of the Greek island of Ithaca, has been away from home for twenty years. He left his wife and baby son to cross the sea and fight in the Trojan War. After the war ended, Odysseus set out for home with a crew of men. However, disaster after disaster befell Odysseus, who had angered the powerful ocean god, Poseidon. Monsters and giants killed members of his crew. Other crew members died in a shipwreck. Now, only Odysseus remains alive, stranded on the island of the nymph Calypso, who wishes to keep him as her husband. Odysseus is miserable and homesick. Encouraged by the gods, Calypso agrees to let him go and sends him on his way on a raft. Poseidon wrecks the raft, but Odysseus manages to swim to shore, and he finds himself in the land of the friendly Phaeacians, who offer to ferry him home to Ithaca.

Meanwhile, in Ithaca, Odysseus' faithful wife, Penelope, is still waiting for her husband to return. She does not wish to marry any of the many suitors who are occupying her house. She feels unable to send the arrogant and unmannered suitors away, but she continues to stall in selecting one of them as her husband.

Odysseus' son, Telemachus, is now a young man. He, too, feels angry with the suitors and wonders what has become of Odysseus. Inspired by the goddess Athena, Telemachus undertakes a sea voyage to visit two kings who fought alongside Odysseus in the Trojan War in hopes that one of them might have news of his father. While Telemachus is gone, the suitors plot to ambush his returning ship and kill him. However, Telemachus returns safely to Ithaca after learning that his

father is still alive. Instead of going back to the palace, Telemachus visits the hut of the swineherd Eumaeus, a long time, faithful servant of the family. Eumaeus has another visitor, a storytelling beggar who Telemachus learns is his father in disguise. After a joyful, tearful reunion, father and son begin plotting the downfall of the suitors.

Odysseus, Eumaeus, and Telemachus journey to the palace. There, still in beggar costume, Odysseus begs for food from the suitors, who abuse and threaten him. He does not immediately retaliate, nor reveal his identity to Penelope, who has come up with a test by which she will select her future husband. She promises that she will marry whoever can string Odysseus' great bow and shoot an arrow through a row of axes. None of the suitors prove able to accomplish this feat, but Odysseus accomplishes the task easily. Bow in hand, he finally announces his identity and begins to shoot the suitors. With help from the goddess Athena, Odysseus, Telemachus, and Eumaeus are able to kill the suitors. After the fighting ends, Odysseus is joyfully reunited with Penelope as well as his father, Laertes. Although members of the suitors' families band together to avenge the suitors' deaths, Athena intervenes and brings peace.