

English 9

*Odyssey* Book 1 Study questions

1. Compare and contrast the ‘proem’ of the *Iliad* with that in the *Odyssey*.
2. Why does Homer refer to the Agamemnon tragedy (the Clytemnestra-Aegisthus affair and murder of Agamemnon, then the killing of Aegisthus by Orestes)? How does this story resonate within the *Odyssey*? How is it like/unlike the situation of Telemachus and his family?
3. Compare and contrast the depiction of the gods in the *Odyssey* and that in the *Iliad*.
4. Why do you think Athena appears in person to Telemachus, rather than in a dream? And why do you think she appears in disguise rather than not?
5. The theme of *xenia* (the guest-friendship) comes up with the appearance of Mentès. Telemachus shows he knows how to treat the *xenos*. How do you see Telemachus treating his guest properly? What does it say about Telemachus, in contrast to the suitors, that he knows the ritual of *xenia*?
6. Homer uses some epithets, such as “who marshals the thunderheads” (l. 76) in Book 1. What other epithets do you see? What is the effect of these epithets?
7. We see depictions of the *nostos* (homecoming) theme in the setting of Odysseus’s house and the happenings there as well as ideas about *kleos* (good reputation) in Telemachus’s thoughts about Odysseus. What does Book 1 add to our understanding of this theme?
8. What is the role of the presence of Odysseus through the memory of him?
9. Dramatic irony—the situation where the audience knows more about the story than the characters do—is in play in Book 1. (One example is the identity of Athena, which the audience knows while Telemachus does not.) Where else do you see instances of dramatic irony? What is the effect of this dramatic irony in Book 1?
10. What is the advice that Athena gives to Telemachus? Some critics call that advice contradictory; what elements would you say conflict? Do you have a way of straightening out the conflict?
11. Using evidence from the text, describe the relationship between Penelope and Telemachus.
12. Why does Homer start where he does? Rather than begin the story back at Troy with Odysseus’ departure, he begins in Ithaca. What are the potential advantages of beginning *in medias res*?
13. How does Telemachus’s character develop over the course of Book 1?