



## The *Odyssey*

The *Odyssey*, one of the greatest poems of ancient Greece, dates from around 700 or 800 BC. Its origins and even its author are shrouded in mystery. Both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* are attributed to Homer, who is traditionally said to have been a blind poet, but we know nothing except the name. It is probable that Homer composed these works as part of the oral tradition of Greek poetry, possibly as early as 1000 BC, and they were written down by a later poet.

Keeping in mind the *Odyssey*'s origin as a poem composed to be heard, not to be read silently, can help us engage with the poem now. Reading aloud, or hearing something read aloud, is a very different experience than reading silently, and it brings out different aspects of the text.

Along with the *Iliad*, the *Odyssey* deals with the events and aftermath of the Trojan War. Troy itself did exist – the ruins of the city were discovered by archaeologists in the nineteenth century – but the heroes and dramatic events associated with the Trojan War are the stuff of legend.

In the legend of the Trojan War, the trouble starts when Paris, prince of Troy, runs away with Helen, the most beautiful woman in the world, who is also the wife of Menelaus, king of Sparta. (The infatuation of Paris and Helen had its origins in meddling by the goddess Aphrodite.) Menelaus and a whole host of other Greek heroes, including Agamemnon, Achilles, and Odysseus, lay siege to Troy for ten years; they eventually defeat the Trojans and sack the city. Homer's *Iliad* takes place during the last year of the war itself, while the *Odyssey* centers on Odysseus's ten-year attempt to get home to Ithaca, an endeavor made much more difficult because he has offended the god Poseidon.

Although he is a warrior, Odysseus (whose Roman name is Ulysses) primarily succeeds because of his cleverness. He's able to get the job done – no matter whether his methods are strictly moral or not. This trickster quality to Odysseus makes him an interesting figure to consider as the 'hero' of the tale. Is he, in fact, a hero by our standards?

The episode with Polyphemus, the cyclops, is particularly useful to consider in this regard. Odysseus and his men are captured by Polyphemus, a giant, monstrous figure who traps them in a cave and proceeds to treat them as a living larder.

Polyphemus is an archetypal outsider. He is not just a giant, but a cyclops, his single eye making him human-like, yet not human. He's a shepherd, moving his flocks from one place to the next, so he is neither a farmer tied to the land nor a city dweller. He lives in a cave, not a proper house, and the other cyclopes are isolated: there is no community or mutual help.

The encounter of Odysseus with Polyphemus unfolds in a way that is unsettling if we try to have sympathy either for either one character or the other.

To begin with, Polyphemus is no amiable giant: he takes Odysseus and his men captive and, gruesomely, uses them as a food supply. This would have been doubly horrible to the ancient Greek audience, for the cyclops is not only murderous, he is inhospitable.

Today, we take for granted things like safe roads and hotels, but in the ancient world, travelers could be, and often were, robbed and killed on the road, and they had to rely on asking for hospitality at homes along the way. The coming of Christianity and the development of monastic life meant a major development in hospitality: indeed an important ministry of monasteries was to give shelter to travelers, where they could be assured of welcome and safety. But in Homer's time, the traveler would have relied on individual households to provide hospitality, and we do see numerous examples of good hospitality in the *Odyssey*.

Polyphemus, though, violates the norms of hospitality in a particularly horrible way. Not only does he imprison his guests, he eats them. In one sense, we can say that he doesn't *see* Odysseus and his men properly: he does not recognize them as beings worthy of respect, but rather as units of food who happen to be able to talk.

Odysseus eventually comes up with a plan for them to escape, but, rather unpleasantly, it involves deliberately allowing more of his men to be eaten. They get Polyphemus drunk, poke out his eye, and then slip past him among his sheep. The trickster quality of Odysseus is in view here as well. Because Odysseus has earlier given his name as "Noman," when Polyphemus cries out to his fellow cyclopes for assistance, they disregard him because he says that "No man has attacked me." Nevertheless, as they sail away, Odysseus cannot resist taunting Polyphemus and boastfully revealing his real name. Polyphemus calls on his father, the sea god Poseidon, to exact revenge – and Poseidon curses Odysseus with ten years of wandering.

Odysseus is clever, yes, but he is also ruthless and proud. Here we have a prototype of many anti-hero figures of modern culture, who are strangely compelling and attractive even while acting on impulses of anger, pride, and violence.

Yet there are also many glimmers of the good and admirable in the *Odyssey*. Odysseus is not a particularly moral character, but he displays bravery and resourcefulness. We see in Penelope, Odysseus's wife and Telemachus's mother, a woman who is intelligent, faithful, and resourceful. In Telemachus we see a young man who admires his father and wants to defend his mother Penelope from the horde of men who, presuming that Odysseus is dead, have overrun the household and are pressuring Penelope to marry one of them. Athena shows up disguised as the character Mentor and provides guidance and help in a way that we can definitely admire. It is a world that is alien, and yet familiar, and in that way, it can help us get a fresh perspective on our own culture.

## Ulysses and the Cyclops Polyphemus

From Book IX of the *Odyssey*, translated by Samuel Butler

“I am Ulysses son of Laertes, reknowned among mankind for all manner of subtlety, so that my fame ascends to heaven. I live in Ithaca, where there is a high mountain called Neritum, covered with forests; and not far from it there is a group of islands very near to one another – Dulichium, Same, and the wooded island of Zacynthus. It lies squat on the horizon, all highest up in the sea towards the sunset, while the others lie away from it towards dawn. It is a rugged island, but it breeds brave men, and my eyes know none that they better love to look upon. The goddess Calypso kept me with her in her cave, and wanted me to marry her, as did also the cunning Aean goddess Circe; but they could neither of them persuade me, for there is nothing dearer to a man than his own country and his parents, and however splendid a home he may have in a foreign country, if it be far from father or mother, he does not care about it. Now, however, I will tell you of the many hazardous adventures which by Jove’s will I met with on my return from Troy. . . .

“We sailed hence, always in much distress, till we came to the land of the lawless and inhuman Cyclopes. Now the Cyclopes neither plant nor plough, but trust in providence, and live on such wheat, barley, and grapes as grow wild without any kind of tillage, and their wild grapes yield them wine as the sun and the rain may grow them. They have no laws nor assemblies of the people, but live in caves on the tops of high mountains; each is lord and master in his family, and they take no account of their neighbours.

[Ulysses and his men land on a nearby island and consider the land of the Cyclopes; Ulysses then chooses a group to go with him to explore it.]

“When we got to the land, which was not far, there, on the face of a cliff near the sea, we saw a great cave overhung with laurels. It was a station for a great many sheep and goats, and outside there was a large yard, with a high wall round it made of stones built into the ground and of trees both pine and oak. This was the abode of a huge monster who was then away from home shepherding his

flocks. He would have nothing to do with other people, but led the life of an outlaw. He was a horrid creature, not like a human being at all, but resembling rather some crag that stands out boldly against the sky on the top of a high mountain.

“I told my men to draw the ship ashore, and stay where they were, all but the twelve best among them, who were to go along with myself. I also took a goat-skin of sweet black wine which had been given me by Maron, son of Euanthes, who was priest of Apollo the patron god of Ismarus, and lived within the wooded precincts of the temple. When we were sacking the city we respected him, and spared his life, as also his wife and child; so he made me some presents of great value – seven talents of fine gold, and a bowl of silver, with twelve jars of sweet wine, unblended, and of the most exquisite flavour. Not a man nor maid in the house knew about it, but only himself, his wife, and one housekeeper: when he drank it he mixed twenty parts of water to one of wine, and yet the fragrance from the mixing-bowl was so exquisite that it was impossible to refrain from drinking. I filled a large skin with this wine, and took a wallet full of provisions with me, for my mind misgave me that I might have to deal with some savage who would be of great strength, and would respect neither right nor law.

“We soon reached his cave, but he was out shepherding, so we went inside and took stock of all that we could see. His cheese-racks were loaded with cheeses, and he had more lambs and kids than his pens could hold. They were kept in separate flocks; first there were the hoggets, then the oldest of the younger lambs and lastly the very young ones all kept apart from one another; as for his dairy, all the vessels, bowls, and milk pails into which he milked, were swimming with whey. When they saw all this, my men begged me to let them first steal some cheeses, and make off with them to the ship; they would then return, drive down the lambs and kids, put them on board and sail away with them. It would have been indeed better if we had done so but I would not listen to them, for I wanted to see the owner himself, in the hope that he might give me a present. When, however, we saw him my poor men found him ill to deal with.

“We lit a fire, offered some of the cheeses in sacrifice, ate others of them, and then sat waiting till the Cyclops should come in with his sheep. When he came, he brought in with him a huge load of dry firewood to light the fire for his supper, and this he flung with such a noise on to the floor of his cave that we hid ourselves for fear at the far end of the cavern. Meanwhile he drove all the ewes inside, as well as the she-goats that he was going to milk, leaving the males, both rams and he-goats, outside in the yards. Then he rolled a huge stone to the mouth of the cave – so huge that two and twenty strong four-wheeled waggons would not be enough to draw it from its place against the doorway. When he had

so done he sat down and milked his ewes and goats, all in due course, and then let each of them have her own young. He curdled half the milk and set it aside in wicker strainers, but the other half he poured into bowls that he might drink it for his supper. When he had got through with all his work, he lit the fire, and then caught sight of us, whereon he said:

“Strangers, who are you? Where do sail from? Are you traders, or do you sail the sea as rovers, with your hands against every man, and every man’s hand against you?”

“We were frightened out of our senses by his loud voice and monstrous form, but I managed to say, ‘We are Achaeans on our way home from Troy, but by the will of Jove, and stress of weather, we have been driven far out of our course. We are the people of Agamemnon, son of Atreus, who has won infinite renown throughout the whole world, by sacking so great a city and killing so many people. We therefore humbly pray you to show us some hospitality, and otherwise make us such presents as visitors may reasonably expect. May your excellency fear the wrath of heaven, for we are your suppliants, and Jove takes all respectable travellers under his protection, for he is the avenger of all suppliants and foreigners in distress.’

“To this he gave me but a pitiless answer, ‘Stranger,’ said he, ‘you are a fool, or else you know nothing of this country. Talk to me, indeed, about fearing the gods or shunning their anger? We Cyclopes do not care about Jove or any of your blessed gods, for we are ever so much stronger than they. I shall not spare either yourself or your companions out of any regard for Jove, unless I am in the humour for doing so. And now tell me where you made your ship fast when you came on shore. Was it round the point, or is she lying straight off the land?’

“He said this to draw me out, but I was too cunning to be caught in that way, so I answered with a lie; ‘Neptune,’ said I, ‘sent my ship on to the rocks at the far end of your country, and wrecked it. We were driven on to them from the open sea, but I and those who are with me escaped the jaws of death.’

“The cruel wretch vouchsafed me not one word of answer, but with a sudden clutch he gripped up two of my men at once and dashed them down upon the ground as though they had been puppies. Their brains were shed upon the ground, and the earth was wet with their blood. Then he tore them limb from limb and supped upon them. He gobbled them up like a lion in the wilderness, flesh, bones, marrow, and entrails, without leaving anything uneaten. As for us, we wept and lifted up our hands to heaven on seeing such a horrid sight, for we did not know what else to do; but when the Cyclops had filled his huge paunch, and had washed down his meal of human flesh with a drink of neat milk, he stretched himself full length upon the ground among his sheep, and went to

sleep. I was at first inclined to seize my sword, draw it, and drive it into his vitals, but I reflected that if I did we should all certainly be lost, for we should never be able to shift the stone which the monster had put in front of the door. So we stayed sobbing and sighing where we were till morning came.

“When the child of morning, rosy-fingered Dawn, appeared, he again lit his fire, milked his goats and ewes, all quite rightly, and then let each have her own young one; as soon as he had got through with all his work, he clutched up two more of my men, and began eating them for his morning’s meal. Presently, with the utmost ease, he rolled the stone away from the door and drove out his sheep, but he at once put it back again – as easily as though he were merely clapping the lid on to a quiver full of arrows. As soon as he had done so he shouted, and cried ‘Shoo, shoo,’ after his sheep to drive them on to the mountain; so I was left to scheme some way of taking my revenge and covering myself with glory.

“In the end I deemed it would be the best plan to do as follows. The Cyclops had a great club which was lying near one of the sheep pens; it was of green olive wood, and he had cut it intending to use it for a staff as soon as it should be dry. It was so huge that we could only compare it to the mast of a twenty-oared merchant vessel of large burden, and able to venture out into open sea. I went up to this club and cut off about six feet of it; I then gave this piece to the men and told them to fine it evenly off at one end, which they proceeded to do, and lastly I brought it to a point myself, charring the end in the fire to make it harder. When I had done this I hid it under dung, which was lying about all over the cave, and told the men to cast lots which of them should venture along with myself to lift it and bore it into the monster’s eye while he was asleep. The lot fell upon the very four whom I should have chosen, and I myself made five. In the evening the wretch came back from shepherding, and drove his flocks into the cave – this time driving them all inside, and not leaving any in the yards; I suppose some fancy must have taken him, or a god must have prompted him to do so. As soon as he had put the stone back to its place against the door, he sat down, milked his ewes and his goats all quite rightly, and then let each have her own young one; when he had got through with all this work, he gripped up two more of my men, and made his supper off them. So I went up to him with an ivy-wood bowl of black wine in my hands:

“‘Look here, Cyclops,’ said I, you have been eating a great deal of man’s flesh, so take this and drink some wine, that you may see what kind of liquor we had on board my ship. I was bringing it to you as a drink-offering, in the hope that you would take compassion upon me and further me on my way home, whereas all you do is to go on ramping and raving most intolerably. You ought to be

ashamed yourself; how can you expect people to come see you any more if you treat them in this way?’

“He then took the cup and drank. He was so delighted with the taste of the wine that he begged me for another bowl full. ‘Be so kind,’ he said, ‘as to give me some more, and tell me your name at once. I want to make you a present that you will be glad to have. We have wine even in this country, for our soil grows grapes and the sun ripens them, but this drinks like nectar and ambrosia all in one.’

“I then gave him some more; three times did I fill the bowl for him, and three times did he drain it without thought or heed; then, when I saw that the wine had got into his head, I said to him as plausibly as I could: ‘Cyclops, you ask my name and I will tell it you; give me, therefore, the present you promised me; my name is Noman; this is what my father and mother and my friends have always called me.’

“But the cruel wretch said, ‘Then I will eat all Noman’s comrades before Noman himself, and will keep Noman for the last. This is the present that I will make him.’

“As he spoke he reeled, and fell sprawling face upwards on the ground. His great neck hung heavily backwards and a deep sleep took hold upon him. Presently he turned sick, and threw up both wine and the gobbets of human flesh on which he had been gorging, for he was very drunk. Then I thrust the beam of wood far into the embers to heat it, and encouraged my men lest any of them should turn faint-hearted. When the wood, green though it was, was about to blaze, I drew it out of the fire glowing with heat, and my men gathered round me, for heaven had filled their hearts with courage. We drove the sharp end of the beam into the monster’s eye, and bearing upon it with all my weight I kept turning it round and round as though I were boring a hole in a ship’s plank with an auger, which two men with a wheel and strap can keep on turning as long as they choose. Even thus did we bore the red hot beam into his eye, till the boiling blood bubbled all over it as we worked it round and round, so that the steam from the burning eyeball scalded his eyelids and eyebrows, and the roots of the eye sputtered in the fire. As a blacksmith plunges an axe or hatchet into cold water to temper it – for it is this that gives strength to the iron – and it makes a great hiss as he does so, even thus did the Cyclops’ eye hiss round the beam of olive wood, and his hideous yells made the cave ring again. We ran away in a fright, but he plucked the beam all besmirched with gore from his eye, and hurled it from him in a frenzy of rage and pain, shouting as he did so to the other Cyclopes who lived on the bleak headlands near him; so they gathered from all quarters round his cave when they heard him crying, and asked what was the matter with him.



“‘What ails you, Polyphemus,’ said they, ‘that you make such a noise, breaking the stillness of the night, and preventing us from being able to sleep? Surely no man is carrying off your sheep? Surely no man is trying to kill you either by fraud or by force?’

“But Polyphemus shouted to them from inside the cave, ‘Noman is killing me by fraud! Noman is killing me by force!’

“‘Then,’ said they, ‘if no man is attacking you, you must be ill; when Jove makes people ill, there is no help for it, and you had better pray to your father Neptune.’

“Then they went away, and I laughed inwardly at the success of my clever stratagem, but the Cyclops, groaning and in an agony of pain, felt about with his hands till he found the stone and took it from the door; then he sat in the doorway and stretched his hands in front of it to catch anyone going out with the sheep, for he thought I might be foolish enough to attempt this.

“As for myself I kept on puzzling to think how I could best save my own life and those of my companions; I schemed and schemed, as one who knows that his life depends upon it, for the danger was very great. In the end I deemed that this plan would be the best. The male sheep were well grown, and carried a heavy black fleece, so I bound them noiselessly in threes together, with some of the withies on which the wicked monster used to sleep. There was to be a man under the middle sheep, and the two on either side were to cover him, so that there were three sheep to each man. As for myself there was a ram finer than any of the others, so I caught hold of him by the back, esconced myself in the thick wool under his belly, and flung on patiently to his fleece, face upwards, keeping a firm hold on it all the time.

“Thus, then, did we wait in great fear of mind till morning came, but when the child of morning, rosy-fingered Dawn, appeared, the male sheep hurried out to feed, while the ewes remained bleating about the pens waiting to be milked, for their udders were full to bursting; but their master in spite of all his pain felt the backs of all the sheep as they stood upright, without being sharp enough to find out that the men were underneath their bellies. As the ram was going out, last of all, heavy with its fleece and with the weight of my crafty self; Polyphemus laid hold of it and said:

“‘My good ram, what is it that makes you the last to leave my cave this morning? You are not wont to let the ewes go before you, but lead the mob with a run whether to flowery mead or bubbling fountain, and are the first to come home again at night; but now you lag last of all. Is it because you know your master has lost his eye, and are sorry because that wicked Noman and his horrid crew have got him down in his drink and blinded him? But I will have his life yet. If you

could understand and talk, you would tell me where the wretch is hiding, and I would dash his brains upon the ground till they flew all over the cave. I should thus have some satisfaction for the harm this no-good Noman has done me.'

"As he spoke he drove the ram outside, but when we were a little way out from the cave and yards, I first got from under the ram's belly, and then freed my comrades; as for the sheep, which were very fat, by constantly heading them in the right direction we managed to drive them down to the ship. The crew rejoiced greatly at seeing those of us who had escaped death, but wept for the others whom the Cyclops had killed. However, I made signs to them by nodding and frowning that they were to hush their crying, and told them to get all the sheep on board at once and put out to sea; so they went aboard, took their places, and smote the grey sea with their oars. Then, when I had got as far out as my voice would reach, I began to jeer at the Cyclops.

"Cyclops,' said I, 'you should have taken better measure of your man before eating up his comrades in your cave. You wretch, eat up your visitors in your own house? You might have known that your sin would find you out, and now Jove and the other gods have punished you.'

"He got more and more furious as he heard me, so he tore the top from off a high mountain, and flung it just in front of my ship so that it was within a little of hitting the end of the rudder. The sea quaked as the rock fell into it, and the wash of the wave it raised carried us back towards the mainland, and forced us towards the shore. But I snatched up a long pole and kept the ship off, making signs to my men by nodding my head, that they must row for their lives, whereon they laid out with a will. When we had got twice as far as we were before, I was for jeering at the Cyclops again, but the men begged and prayed of me to hold my tongue.

"Do not,' they exclaimed, 'be mad enough to provoke this savage creature further; he has thrown one rock at us already which drove us back again to the mainland, and we made sure it had been the death of us; if he had then heard any further sound of voices he would have pounded our heads and our ship's timbers into a jelly with the rugged rocks he would have heaved at us, for he can throw them a long way.'

"But I would not listen to them, and shouted out to him in my rage, 'Cyclops, if any one asks you who it was that put your eye out and spoiled your beauty, say it was the valiant warrior Ulysses, son of Laertes, who lives in Ithaca.'

"On this he groaned, and cried out, 'Alas, alas, then the old prophecy about me is coming true. There was a prophet here, at one time, a man both brave and of great stature, Telemus son of Eurymus, who was an excellent seer, and did all the prophesying for the Cyclopes till he grew old; he told me that all this would

happen to me some day, and said I should lose my sight by the hand of Ulysses. I have been all along expecting some one of imposing presence and superhuman strength, whereas he turns out to be a little insignificant weakling, who has managed to blind my eye by taking advantage of me in my drink; come here, then, Ulysses, that I may make you presents to show my hospitality, and urge Neptune to help you forward on your journey – for Neptune and I are father and son. He, if he so will, shall heal me, which no one else neither god nor man can do.’

“Then I said, ‘I wish I could be as sure of killing you outright and sending you down to the house of Hades, as I am that it will take more than Neptune to cure that eye of yours.’

“On this he lifted up his hands to the firmament of heaven and prayed, saying, ‘Hear me, great Neptune; if I am indeed your own true-begotten son, grant that Ulysses may never reach his home alive; or if he must get back to his friends at last, let him do so late and in sore plight after losing all his men.’”

“Thus did he pray, and Neptune heard his prayer. Then he picked up a rock much larger than the first, swung it aloft and hurled it with prodigious force. It fell just short of the ship, but was within a little of hitting the end of the rudder. The sea quaked as the rock fell into it, and the wash of the wave it raised drove us onwards on our way towards the shore of the island.

“When at last we got to the island where we had left the rest of our ships, we found our comrades lamenting us, and anxiously awaiting our return. We ran our vessel upon the sands and got out of her on to the sea shore; we also landed the Cyclops’ sheep, and divided them equitably amongst us so that none might have reason to complain. As for the ram, my companions agreed that I should have it as an extra share; so I sacrificed it on the sea shore, and burned its thigh bones to Jove, who is the lord of all. But he heeded not my sacrifice, and only thought how he might destroy my ships and my comrades.

“Thus through the livelong day to the going down of the sun we feasted our fill on meat and drink, but when the sun went down and it came on dark, we camped upon the beach. When the child of morning, rosy-fingered Dawn, appeared, I bade my men on board and loose the hawsers. Then they took their places and smote the grey sea with their oars; so we sailed on with sorrow in our hearts, but glad to have escaped death though we had lost our comrades.”

☞ RECOMMENDED RESOURCES ☞

There are many translations of the *Odyssey*, taking various approaches. The original Greek poem is difficult to render in English poetry, and some translators have made it into a prose narrative instead. Some verse translations aim to reproduce, as much as possible, the flavor and rhythm of the Greek original, while others take advantage of poetic devices (such as rhyme) that work well in English, even though these did not appear in the original, in order to create an experience that is as engaging for the English reader as the original is for the Greek reader.

Robert Fitzgerald, *The Odyssey* (modern verse translation).

Richmond Lattimore, *The Odyssey of Homer* (modern verse translation); this is my own personal favorite of the translations.

Alexander Pope, *The Odyssey* (eighteenth-century verse translation).

E.V. Rieu, *The Odyssey* (modern prose translation – Penguin Classics edition).

Gareth Hinds, *The Odyssey* (graphic novel).

C.S. Lewis, *A Preface to Paradise Lost*. This short book is indispensable for understanding the literary genre of the epic poem. Although focused on Milton's poem, the first chapters present an illuminating discussion of the genre of epic poetry. Chapters III, IV, and V, on "primary epic," are particularly valuable for an understanding of the *Odyssey*.

☞ QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION ☞

1. Is Odysseus a hero? What about Penelope? Why or why not? What do you consider to be the virtues a true hero should display? What virtues are celebrated or disregarded in modern films and stories about heroes?
2. What is the position of women in ancient Greek society, as depicted in the *Odyssey*? How does this differ from the Christian view of women?
3. How would the Beatitudes be received in the world of the *Odyssey*? Imagine the different reactions to Jesus's teaching of Odysseus, Penelope, Odysseus's sailors, and the slaves in Odysseus's household in Ithaca.
4. Consider Odysseus's method of escaping from Polyphemus. What do you think of his decision? Would you do the same? Why or why not?
5. Elsewhere in the *Odyssey*, we encounter the Sirens and also the island of the Lotus-Eaters. These scenes have been particularly striking to many later readers. What resonance do they have with what we know of the Christian life?
6. The conclusion of the *Odyssey* is extremely violent. Is Odysseus's treatment of the suitors an example of justice or of vengeance?
7. Christian tradition includes some pious legends that are unverified but may be true (for instance, the tradition that on the way to his Crucifixion, our Lord was comforted by St. Veronica, who wiped his face with a veil that then preserved his image). We also have some tales of the saints featuring miraculous events that probably did not happen. Yet we know that miracles do happen. How do we distinguish between historical fact, legend, myth, and simple falsehood in our teaching of children and our own devotional lives *without* also accidentally cultivating a materialist, skeptical attitude toward miracles and divine intervention?
8. The word 'odyssey' comes from this tale: from the name of its protagonist, Odysseus. This connection shows just how profoundly Homer's tale has entered into Western culture. What elements of the *structure* of the story are significant? In what way is the Christian journey an 'odyssey'?

☾ USING THE ARTS ☽

1. Locate images of artwork of scenes from the *Odyssey*. Print these out and shuffle them; add in cards that refer to any scenes for which you don't have an image. Have your group arrange the cards in a timeline. (You can be sneaky and add in an event that is *not* from the *Odyssey*, to see if they can identify that it doesn't fit in.) This activity encourages engagement with the storyline as a narrative and can lead to discussion about the relative importance of different events and their consequences.
2. Consider different representations in art of the Polyphemus episode (or others in the *Odyssey*). What aspects of the scene are highlighted or suggested in each piece of art? How do they differ? Have participants depict other scenes from the *Odyssey* in one of the styles of these works of art. Some options include: a Greek vase painting of Odysseus and Polyphemus; *Ulysses Fleeing the Cave of Polyphemus* by Christoffer Wilhelm Eckersberg; *Odysseus in the Cave of Polyphemus* by Constantin Hansen; *Ulysses Deriding Polyphemus* by J.M.W. Turner.
3. Write about your own experience of the Christian faith in the structure of the *Odyssey*. What would be the starting point? Is there a Mentor figure in this journey? What obstacles appeared on the journey, and how might they be imaginatively represented?