

The Odyssey
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The Greek poet Homer wrote a poem around 700 B.C., and titled it *The Odyssey*. This poem is an epic about a hero who is trying to get to his home, Ithaca. *The Odyssey* is classified as an epic because it has a hero with unusual qualities, times where the hero is tested to show his worthiness of the quest, and a low point where the hero almost gives up.

In an epic, there is a hero with unusual or supernatural qualities. In *The Odyssey*, Odysseus is the hero, and he is smart, cunning, very strong, and even godlike. In Book 9 of *The Odyssey*, Odysseus and his men sail to the Cyclopes Island. He and his men get stuck in the Cyclops' cave, but Odysseus comes up with a cunning plan to get out. Since Odysseus blinds the Cyclops by stabbing it in the eye, he and his men tie themselves to the rams that the Cyclops releases, and escape from the dreaded Cyclops' cave. This episode demonstrates Odysseus' cunning. The next example of supernatural qualities that Odysseus possesses comes in Book 21, and this is the quality of strength. This is the contest that is held for the suitors. None of the suitors can shoot the arrow through the twelve axe heads and hit the target; in fact, none of them can even string the bow. Then Odysseus, disguised as a beggar, easily strings the bow, shoots through the twelve axe heads, and hits the target on his first try. Homer writes, "He took aim and let fly, and the bronze-tipped

arrow/Passed clean through the holes of all twelve axe heads/From first to last.” (21.

447-450). Odysseus is *The Odyssey's* hero, and he possesses a few supernatural qualities.

Epics usually test the hero to show his worthiness of the quest. In *The Odyssey*, Odysseus has to pass many tests, two of which are the Lotus-Eaters and the Sirens. When Odysseus and his men reach the shore of the land of the Lotus-Eaters, Odysseus sends a few men to see the locals. The locals give them lotus to eat, which makes them forget home, and instead makes them want to stay there with the Lotus-Eaters. Homer puts it, “They headed out and made contact with the Lotus-Eaters,/Who meant no harm but did give my men/Some lotus to eat. Whoever ate the sweet fruit/Lost the will to report back, preferring instead/To stay there, munching lotus, oblivious of home.” (9. 92-96). After that, Odysseus quickly orders his men to board the ship so that they would not consume any more of the lotus plant because, he remembers his home and he is showing his worthiness of achieving his quest to get home. Another test that Odysseus and his men have to pass is the Sirens. Before they can hear the Sirens’ song, Odysseus puts wax into his men’s ears so that they cannot hear the song and be tempted to sail toward the island. Then they strap Odysseus tightly onto the mast so that he could listen to the song without being tempted to dive overboard. The Sirens offer knowledge of the Trojan War to Odysseus, but he restrains himself, and therefore passes the test. Odysseus has to face many tests in order to get back to his homeland, Ithaca.

Often in epics, there is a low point where the hero nearly gives up. In *The Odyssey*, Poseidon shipwrecks Odysseus, and almost leaves him dead on the shores of Phaeachia. Poseidon sends a tsunami to crash down on Odysseus, but since the goddess Ino lends him a veil that is immortally charmed, Odysseus cannot drown. Homer writes these dramatic lines like this, "Poseidon Earthshaker raised up a great wave-/An arching cavernous, sensational tsunami-/And brought it crashing down on him." (5. 368-370). He almost drowns a few times, but Athena is with him. Odysseus says a prayer to the Riverlord, and finally, the waters calm, and Odysseus is able to swim to shore. When he reaches land, he can barely breathe, and he is trying to find a somewhere to sleep through the night. He does not know if he will or won't be able to make it through the night. Odysseus' low point in *The Odyssey* is very nearly fatal.

The Odyssey is an epic because Odysseus passes many tests, and survives a low point where he almost gives up. *The Odyssey* is a book with a cunning hero named Odysseus who has to pass tests such as the Lotus-Eaters and the Sirens, and almost gives up when he is shipwrecked by Poseidon. *The Odyssey* has many informative, interesting, and intense scenes packed into it.

Works Cited

Homer. *Odyssey*. Trans. Stanley Lombardo. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 2000.