

## The Odyssey Book 10 Summary

- Odysseus's 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 Eurylochos—to explore the hall.
- The witch Circe greets them and invites them in. She's so hot that everyone goes immediately, except for cautious Eurylochos.
- 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?
- Eurylochos runs back to the ship to warn Odysseus, who arms up to rescue his men. Eurylochos 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 compromise his morals 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's 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's 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 prophecies 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's 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.

## The Odyssey Book 11 Summary

- 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 Klytimestra.
- 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 Achilles, Patroklos, Antilochos, and Telamonian Aias, some of Odysseus's buddies from the Trojan war.
- Odysseus praises Achilles for having earned so much honor and glory in his life; surely his death is like, the greatest death ever.
- Nope. Actually, Achilles 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 Achilles'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 Achilles, 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.