



## [The Odyssey](#), by Homer

### **In A Nutshell**

Published around 800-600 BC, the *Odyssey* is probably the most famous and often-quoted of the Greek epics. Being a Greek epic and all, it was originally composed in the classic oral tradition of...not being written at all. The tale was simply handed down orally from generation to generation until finally Homer decided to write the thing down.

So it's important to remember that the Greeks reading this work would have already known the story and what was going to happen. Dramatic suspense? Not so much. It's more about how the story is told, which in this case was painstakingly beautiful lines of dactylic hexameter (a poetic meter in which every line is structured in its length and syllables). Very sadly, this meter doesn't come across in English translations.

You should also know that the *Odyssey* is somewhat like a sequel to the *Iliad* (although we're using the term "sequel" rather loosely). The *Iliad* covers the story of the great Trojan War, whereas the *Odyssey* tells the story of one Greek hero (Odysseus) trying to get home after that very war. Homer is credited with writing both, though there are some who believe the poems have different authors. Your guess is as good as ours.

Lastly, a slew of also-famous literature was inspired by the already famous *Odyssey*. The short list includes James Joyce's *Ulysses*, Alfred Lord Tennyson's "Ulysses," and Virgil's *Aeneid* – a pretty impressive bunch.

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## Big Picture Study Questions

- 1 Why is it that Odysseus has to wander the sea for twenty years? Is it *really* because of that whole eye-stabbing incident? Or is it because of his cocky attitude afterwards? Or perhaps it's some deeper character flaw?
- 2 What kinds of roles do women play in the *Odyssey*? Which females hold the most power and why?
- 3 How does the *Odyssey* define love? Why are Odysseus's affairs with Kirkê and Kalypso not considered true love?

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