

Unit 1 - Homer's *The Odyssey*

1. Some scholars argue that Odysseus is a tragic hero because of one fatal flaw. Describe one situation from the *Odyssey* in which Odysseus demonstrates one of these fatal flaws and explain why scholars might argue that Odysseus is not an admirable hero.
2. The theme of disguise is depicted throughout the *Odyssey* by both Athena and Odysseus. Explain why it is necessary for each of them to continually disguise themselves from others. Use specific examples from the text.
3. How does the theme of temptation affect Odysseus and his men? Consider ideas such as Circe, Calypso, the lotus flowers, the Sirens, the cattle of the sun god, etc. Does temptation serve to support or deter them from their goal?
4. How successfully does Homer depict the development of Telemachus' character? In your answer, you should consider how Telemachus matures and discuss his contribution to the *Odyssey*.
5. Who has the greater determination to return to Ithaca, Odysseus or his men? In your answer, you should discuss the actions of Odysseus and his men during their travels, and consider who shows the greater desire to return home.
6. Which is a more vital skill for Odysseus on his journey home—his cunning or his perseverance? Why?
7. Critically reflect upon the concept of *nostos* or return in *The Odyssey*.
8. What kind of justice system do the gods follow and how does it compare/contrast to the justice system followed by mortals in the story? How is this/How isn't this "justice" in the true sense of the word?
9. How is pride both destructive and constructive in *The Odyssey*? Give at least three examples and explanations for each.
10. At what point does divine intervention strip the characters of their ability to act and think for themselves?
11. How does Odysseus's cunning help him get out of bad situations and how does it work against him? Explain with examples.
12. Following the rules of hospitality is both revered socially and religiously. Therefore, who violates hospitality laws or severely, the suitors by their greed, or Calypso by holding Odysseus captive? Why? Explain your answer with explanations from the book.
13. Explain the role that honor plays in *The Odyssey*? Be specific and use examples and explanations from the book. Based on this explanation, is honor a human concept in the book or one handed down from the gods? Why?
14. Describe Odysseus's sense of loyalty. Who is he loyal to? Why? How does he show this loyalty? How is he justified in sleeping with Circe and Calypso?
15. How does Homer portray the relationship between gods and men in *The Odyssey*? What roles do the gods play in human life? What roles do mortals play in divine life?
16. How does the theme of vengeance work in the epic? Approach it from the points of view of Telemachos and Poseidon as well as Odysseus.

17. A major theme in *The Odyssey* is reciprocity: people getting what they deserve. Explain how this theme affects the main characters—Odysseus, Penelope, Antinoos and Telemachos.
18. Consider three of the following symbols—Odysseus’s great bow, Athena as both a mentor and protector, the shroud that Penelope weaves for Laertes, the island of Ithaca, or the sea itself—and explain their significance in the story.
19. How important are immortal females to Odysseus’ return home and success in regaining his kingdom? Explain with references to the text.
20. “Good xenia is always rewarded; bad xenia is always punished.” How true is this of Homer’s portrayal of xenia (guest friendship) in the books of the *Odyssey* you have read? Give reasons for your answer.
21. Why do you think the story is told almost entirely in flashback?
22. What is the value or importance of *The Odyssey*? Why do people continue to read and study it?
23. Does Odysseus control his own destiny, or is his fate determined by the gods? Explore with evidence from the text.
24. How do the men of Odysseus’ crew feel about him? Do you think they regard him as a hero? Why or why not? Support your answer with evidence from the story.

Unit 2a – Aristotle’s *Poetics*

1. How does Aristotle define poetry? Elucidate.
2. According to Aristotle, the various kinds of Imitations “can be differentiated from each other in three respects: in respect of their different *media* of imitation, or different *objects*, or a different *mode* (i.e. a different *manner*).” Discuss with examples.
3. Critically discuss Aristotle’s theory of Mimesis and its significance to the study of literature.
4. Compare and contrast the views of Aristotle and his teacher, Plato, on ‘Imitation.’
5. From what two instincts natural to human beings does poetry, according to Aristotle, seem to have sprung?
6. Aristotle observes that “we take delight in viewing the most accurate possible images of objects which in themselves cause distress when we see them.” How does Aristotle explain this curious pleasure?
7. Discuss how Aristotle traces the development of Tragedy, starting from the dithyrambs.
8. What does comedy imitate or represent? What is the “laughable”?
9. What are the differences between epic poetry and tragedy according to Aristotle's *Poetics*?
10. Define and discuss the characteristics of Tragedy brought about by Aristotle.
11. What are the six elements Aristotle uses to define tragedy in *Poetics*? Discuss.
12. What are the six elements of tragedy? Discuss them in their order of importance, as listed in *Poetics*.
13. What are the six elements of tragedy? Which one, according to Aristotle, is the most important and why?
14. Discuss Aristotle’s concept of plot in a tragedy. Why does he consider plot as the “source” and “the soul of tragedy”?
15. What is an epic? Why does Aristotle consider the epic inferior to the tragedy in *Poetics*?
16. What, according to Aristotle, is tragedy’s unique function? Explain.
17. Critically examine Aristotle's concept of Catharsis.
18. Tragedy, according to Aristotle, is essentially a representation or imitation, not of men, but of an action. What characteristics should this action have? How does Aristotle describe a "whole"? What must the poet invent to imitate an action?
19. What is the main difference between poetry and history? What does Aristotle apparently mean by the term "universal"?
20. The tragic pleasure is that of pity and fear and the poet has to produce it by a work of imitation. Discuss.
21. Describe the elements of plot given by Aristotle in *Poetics*.
22. Consider the three kinds of plot that Aristotle says the tragic poet should avoid. Explain why he thinks each should be avoided.
23. What are "recognition" (*anagnorisis*) and "reversal" (*peripeteia*)? Why are they important to the structure of a drama and to achieving the cathartic effect Aristotle says is the key to a successful tragedy?
24. Elaborate upon the three concepts discussed in *Poetics*: reversal, recognition, and catharsis.

25. Discuss the characteristics of tragic hero as expounded by Aristotle.
26. How does Aristotle argue that tragedy is superior to epic?
27. Discuss Aristotle's theory of tragedy with reference to any tragedy that you have read.
28. Can you think of a contemporary book or movie that challenges Aristotle's view?
Explain the work and the challenge it poses.
29. What is the relevance of Aristotle's *Poetics* today?

Unit 2b – Sophocles’s *Antigone*

1. Compare and contrast the characters of Antigone and Creon with reference to the precepts of a “tragic hero.” Use the entire definition of tragic hero and support your ideas with quoted evidence.
2. What does the play suggest about the issue of individual versus the state?
3. What does this play suggest about the nature of leadership?
4. What does this play suggest about the nature of justice and mercy?
5. Is this a feminist play? Before you decide, please review a definition of the word feminist. Then use evidence to support your argument.
6. Discuss the Greek view of catharsis. How does this play achieve catharsis? Explain.
7. Creon argues that it is not right for “a man to go to school to a boy.” What is inherently wrong with his logic? Have you ever learned a valuable lesson from someone who is younger than you?
8. Teiresias tells Creon: “The only crime is pride.” What does he mean by this? How can pride lead to faulty judgement? How can poor decisions be rectified?
9. Compare and contrast the sisters, Antigone and Ismene, and include their philosophies, and their reactions to others in the play.
10. “Antigone” is thousands of years old, and yet you are reading it today. How is the play universal?
11. Why does the play open with a mention of the tragedy of Oedipus?
12. Do Antigone's convictions about burying Polyneices mean that she disliked her other brother, Eteocles?
13. What are the main differences between Antigone and Ismene, in terms of personality?
14. How might Antigone's defiance be related to her former job – leading Oedipus around the world in his exile?
15. Why does Antigone say, "If that is what you think, I should not want you, even if you asked to come."? (p. 673)
16. Do you think Ismene feels the same way Antigone does about Polyneices, despite her reluctance to do anything?
17. Ismene says, "Impossible things should not be tried at all?" (p. 673) Is what Antigone plans to do really impossible?
18. Antigone says that the worst death is "death without honor." What might this be a reference to (especially within her own family)?
19. How is the way the people see Creon at the beginning of Scene I similar to the way the people used to see Oedipus?
20. In his long speech, Creon says "no Ruler can expect complete loyalty from his subjects until he has been tested in office." (p. 675) However, what is the justification he uses to say that he must be obeyed?
21. Why do you think Creon seems too preoccupied with revolt and strife?
22. "Only a crazy man is in love with death!" (Choragos, p. 675) How might this statement apply to Creon.
23. Respond: "There's nothing in the world so demoralizing as money." (Creon, p. 677)
24. Why do you think the Sentry is afraid to tell Creon that Polyneices has been buried? Are his fears justified?
25. Why does Creon accuse the Sentry of the crime of burying Polyneices?

26. How do you think this line might be prophetic: "How dreadful it is when the right judge judges wrong!" (Sentry, p. 677)
27. On page 678, the Sentry who comes to see Creon says, "A man should never be too sure of anything." What else might this statement mean, within the context of the play?
28. Why is Antigone not ashamed when she has to go before Creon and confess?
29. Choragos, speaking about Antigone, says "Like father, like daughter: both headstrong, deaf to reason!" (p. 679) How is this statement true? How is it not true?
30. Is Creon's decision to also arrest Ismene a smart move against potential anarchy, or is it merely a vindictive act?
31. How does Creon say Antigone's act dishonors Eteocles? How does Antigone respond to this?
32. Why does Ismene attempt to assume guilt alongside Antigone? Why doesn't Antigone let her?
33. What does Antigone mean when she says, "Words are not friends."? What do you think it means?
34. Creon asks, "If I permit my own family to rebel, how shall I earn the world's obedience?" (p. 686) Do you think he's more concerned with ruling well or appearing to rule well?
35. How does Haimon gradually try to persuade his father?
36. According to Haimon, does the city agree with Creon's actions?
37. Respond to this quote: "It is not reason never to yield to reason!" (Haimon, p.686)
38. How does Haimon defend himself against Creon's verbal attack?
39. What are the fundamental differences in Creon and Haimon's viewpoints?
40. How is their rift between Creon and Haimon similar to that between Creon and Antigone?
41. Does Antigone have any regrets in Scene IV?
42. Antigone mentions the curse on her father on page 689. Why is it appropriate for her to allude to it at this point in the play?
43. Why do you think the Chorus seems to be siding with Creon in its dialogue with Antigone?
44. Antigone prays that Creon's punishment "equal my own." (p. 690) Based on what happened in Scene III, how do you think this will come true?
45. Creon appears to revere Tiresias as the scene opens. How does this change?
46. Tiresias says, "A good man yields when he knows his course is wrong and repairs his evil. The only crime is pride." (p. 692) Do you agree? Does Creon agree?
47. Creon says of Tiresias, "The generation of prophets has always loved gold." Tiresias responds by saying, "The generation of kings has always loved brass." (p. 693) What does Tiresias's response mean? How does it especially apply to Creon?
48. Why do you think Creon finally changes his mind? Knowing what you know about Greek tragedy, do you think he will be in time to prevent anything horrible from happening?
49. Respond to this quote: "Fate has brought all my pride to a thought of dust." (Creon, p. 698)
50. How were the events which occur in Exodos foreshadowed earlier in the play?

51. How do Haemon's arguments to sway Creon change during the two men's interaction? Use details from the play to support your response.
52. Is Creon a tragic figure? Discuss.
53. Do you think Antigone is a tragic figure? If so, what tragic characteristics does she have? If not, why not?

Unit 3 - Aristophanes's *Lysistrata*

1. What happens to Peace at the end of *Lysistrata*, and why is she female?
2. Why does the male chorus carry pots of fire in *Lysistrata*, and what does the female chorus carry?
3. What elements in *Lysistrata* make it a comedy?
4. How is *Lysistrata* both a character and a symbol?
5. Could the solution proposed by *Lysistrata* ever really work?
6. Was Aristophanes a feminist? Explain your answer.
7. Was Aristophanes a war hawk or a pacifist? Explain your answer.
8. Are male and female characters treated differently in the play? Does Aristophanes reinforce contemporary stereotypes about women?
9. Do obscene jokes, nudity, phalluses etc need to be 'toned down' for a modern audience?
10. *Lysistrata* is unique in surviving comedy in having two choruses. What is the role of the choruses in the play?
11. Are current events critical to an understanding the play?
12. Aristophanic comedy is often described as a realistic genre; and yet the plays contain large elements of fantasy. How does this work in *Lysistrata*?