Learning A–Z	level **Y**	Multi-level	N/A
Grade	5	Word Count	1,770
Lexile	1100L	Fiction • Myth	

Refer to the Focus Question on page 2 of this title to guide discussion and support additional learning connected to the text.

Odysseus and the Bag of Winds tells about Odysseus's place in the stories of Greek mythology. He became known as one of the greatest Greek heroes after winning the Trojan War. However, his journey back home to Ithaca was doomed as he and his men were suddenly blown off course. This story shows how jealousy, greed, and distrust can lead even the most confident people astray. Illustrations and maps support the text.

Learning A–Z

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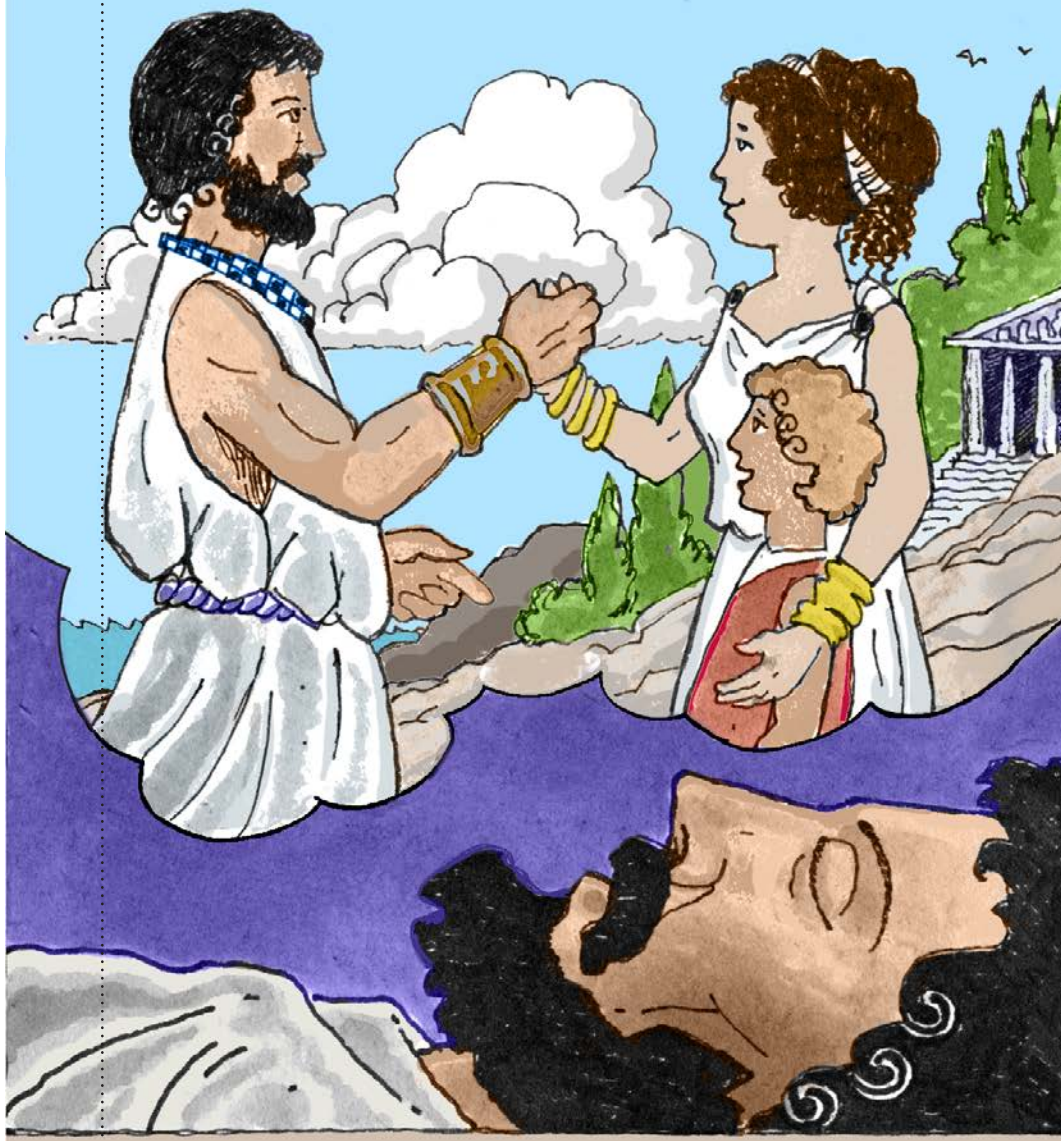
ODYSSEUS AND THE BAG OF WINDS



Written by Troy Wolff
Illustrated by Stephen Marchesi

Glossary

capsizing *(v.)* page 17
overturning

endure *(v.)* page 6
to survive, experience, or live through

epilogue *(v.)* page 18
a short section at the end of a piece of writing, often telling what finally happens to the characters

helm *(n.)* page 9
the wheel or handle used to steer a ship

masterpiece *(n.)* page 5
an extraordinarily good piece of writing or other creative work

mortals *(n.)* page 4
human beings, who will die eventually

pleaded *(v.)* page 18
begged; asked with urgency

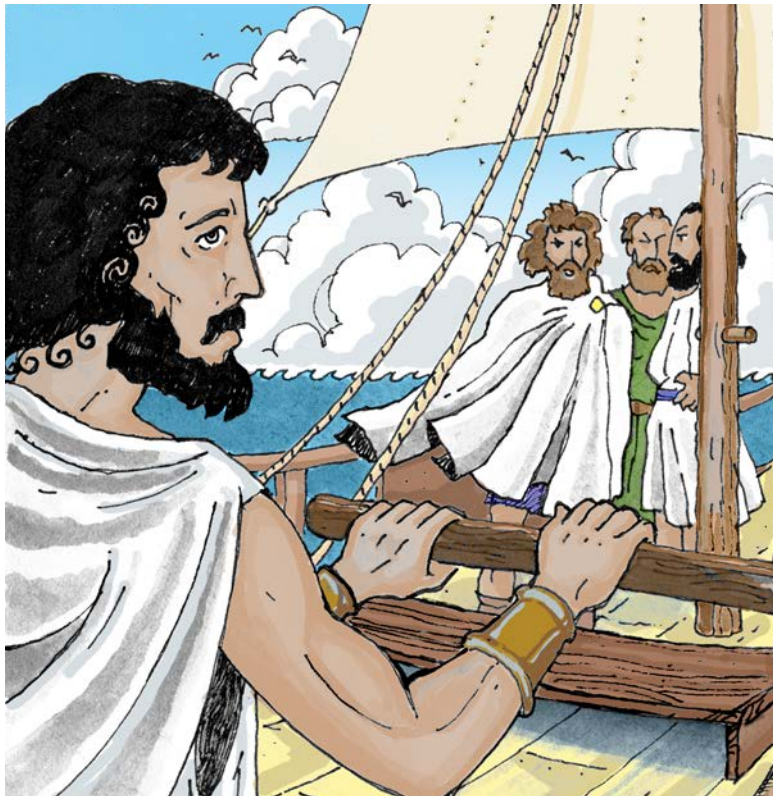
prologue *(n.)* page 4
a section at the beginning of a piece of writing, often one that provides background information

relinquish *(v.)* page 9
to give something up or turn it over to another person

stowed *(v.)* page 8
put away; stored

wake *(n.)* page 9
the track that a vessel leaves in water as it moves

ODYSSEUS AND THE BAG OF WINDS



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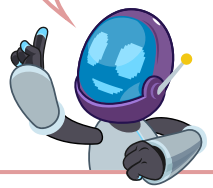
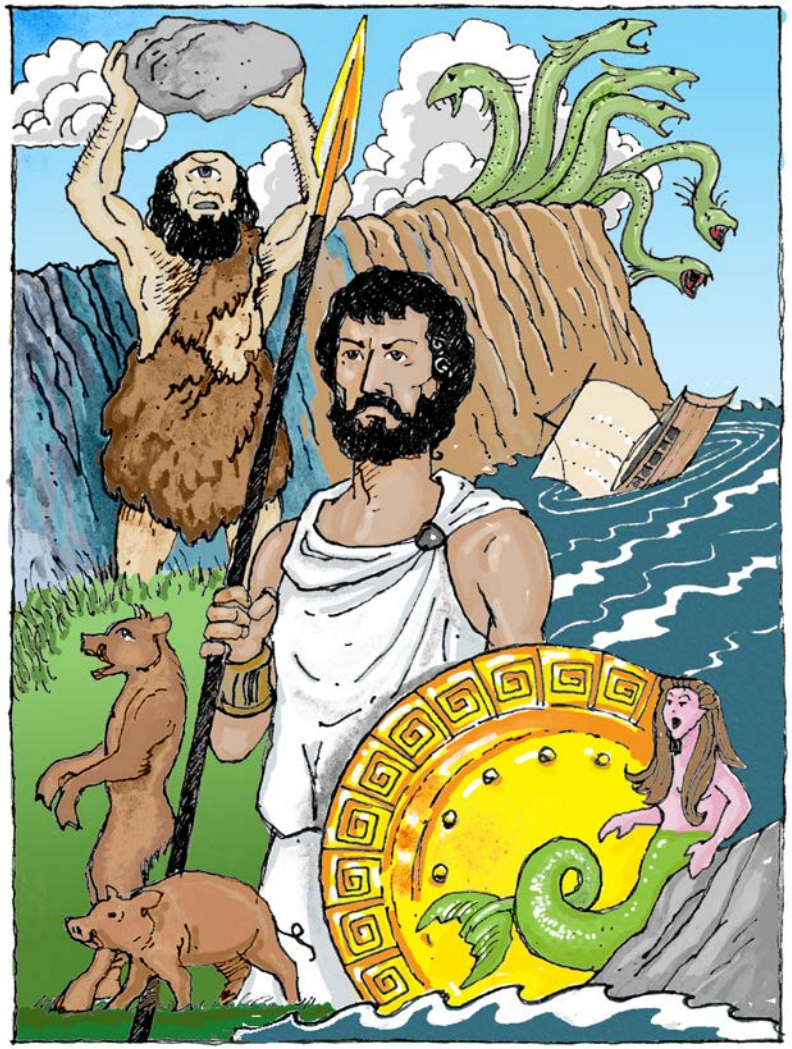
Focus Question

How did the character traits of Odysseus and his men affect what happened during the story?"



Words to Know

capsizing
endure
epilogue
helm
masterpiece
mortals
pleaded
prologue
relinquish
stowed
wake



Look for The Odyssey at your local library or bookstore. Read about the many adventures of Odysseus and how human traits such as jealousy, pride, gluttony, and others prevented him and his crew from returning home sooner.

Epilogue

Driven by the howling winds, Odysseus and his men cowered in fear onboard their ship, helpless to sail in the storm. Eventually, they ended up back at Aeolus's island. "Odysseus, why are you here?" Aeolus asked, as the men came ashore.

With great shame, Odysseus told Aeolus what happened with the bag of winds. "It was not my fault," he said. "It was my men." He **pleaded** with Aeolus to help him once again.

However, despite Odysseus's desperate pleadings, Aeolus was firm. "Surely the gods have decided to test you, Odysseus," he said. "To be turned away after getting so close to home can only mean the gods are against you, and I cannot go against the gods' wishes. Good luck to you, wise Odysseus. I cannot help you again."

Aeolus was right. Odysseus would suffer much bad luck, and struggle mightily, before he would finally reach Ithaca. But these journeys proved Odysseus to be the craftiest, most clever mortal on Earth, and his journey became one of the greatest stories ever told.

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Prologue

Every culture in the world has its own mythology. Mythology is a set of stories from a culture's distant past, sometimes based on true events, but often involving fantastic events and supernatural beings. The purpose of mythology is to entertain, teach lessons on how to live, and help explain how the world works. For example, before humans developed scientific explanations for natural events like earthquakes, storms, and volcanoes, many ancient myths explained these mysterious events through stories of gods and humans. The ancient Greeks believed that lightning occurred when Zeus, their supreme being, was angry and wished to frighten or punish **mortals** on Earth by throwing down thunderbolts from high upon Mount Olympus.

Odysseus's sweet dreams of home turned into a nightmare of howling winds and crashing waves. Opening his eyes, he saw his men panicking, rushing around the deck, waving their arms, and covering their heads against the winds and waves. At their feet, he saw the empty ox-hide bag. "What have you done?" he cried. "Your greed and jealousy have ruined us!"

Unable to hear Odysseus over the howling winds, the men rushed over the ship, trying to keep it from **capsizing** in the storm. Suddenly, with a great snapping and ripping sound, the mast came crashing down, pulling the sails with it.

Heartbroken, Odysseus watched helplessly as his home began fading away in the distance. With no sails on the ship and no way to steer, Odysseus and his men were being blown over the furious seas away from Ithaca, back in the direction from which they'd come.

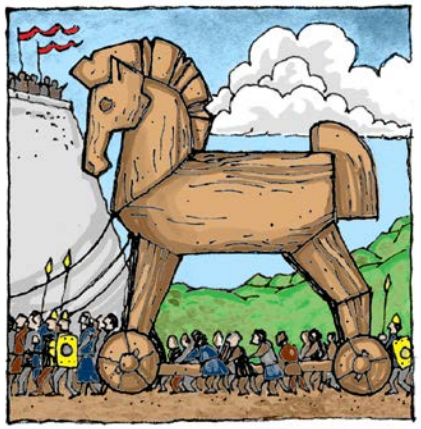
Oh, weak man! Why did I let myself sleep? Odysseus cried to himself. *Hours from home, and now this!* He prayed to Poseidon, god of the seas, to calm the waves, and to Zeus, god of the sky, to end the storm. However, his prayers went unanswered. The gods had other things in store for Odysseus, and he would not see his home for many more years.

But with one tug of the golden cord, everything changed. Raging, hurricane-force winds exploded from the ox-hide bag. Bottled up for the last nine days, winds from every direction furiously crashed down and around Odysseus's ship, tossing it around on the waves as if it were a child's toy.

In fact, the mythology of the ancient Greeks is probably the best known in all the world. Greek stories of gods, heroes, and monsters have been studied and enjoyed for more than thirty centuries, and they remain as popular today as ever. Many of the stories of Greek mythology are based on the events of a monumental ten-year war between the armies of Greece and a powerful city called Troy and its allies, located in what is now the country of Turkey. All of the Greek gods and many of the great Greek heroes took part in this great war, which is believed to have occurred in the 13th or 12th century BC.

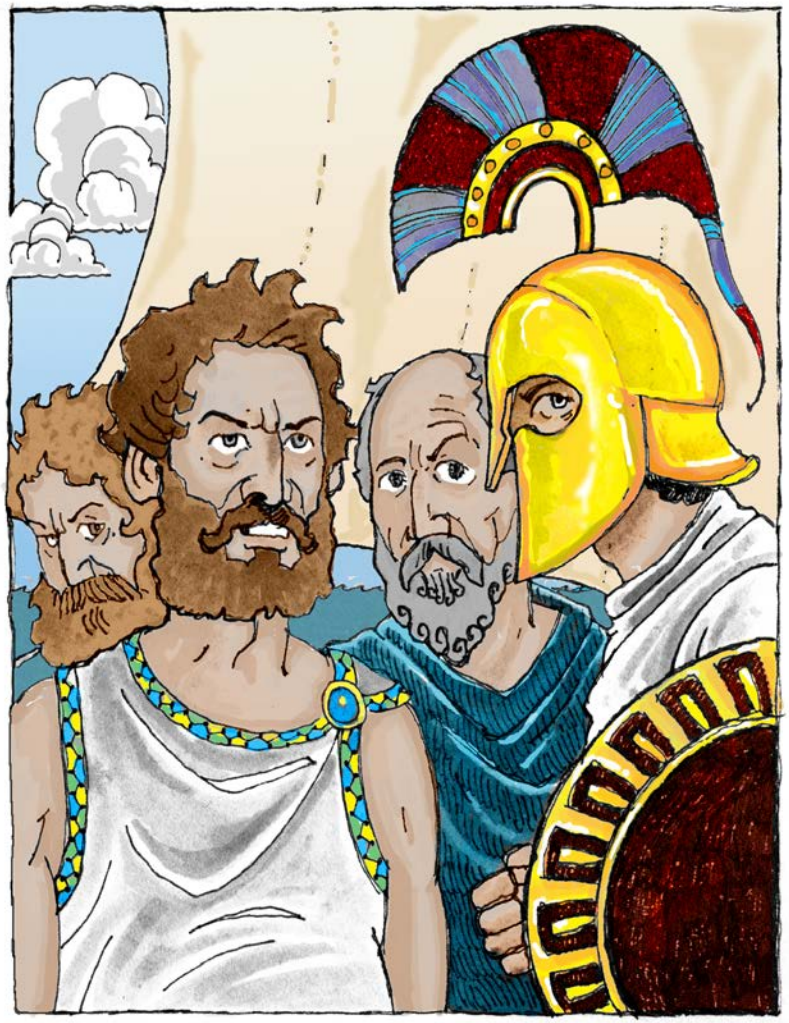
The poet Homer wrote a famous account of the Trojan War called *The Iliad*, but perhaps his most famous poem of all explores what happened immediately after the war ended. This **masterpiece**, called *The Odyssey*, followed the adventures of one of the greatest Greek heroes, Odysseus, as he tried to return home following the war with Troy.

It was Odysseus who won the war for the Greeks by using a large wooden horse to smuggle Greek soldiers inside the walls of Troy so that they could open the gates.



Although his war strategy led to victory for the Greeks, Odysseus still had many struggles to **endure** before he would return home to his family. After the war ended, Odysseus and his men began sailing to Ithaca, their island home. What should have been a simple trip became one of the most famous journeys in all of literature. Odysseus's adventures have been read for centuries, and Homer's model of a hero's journey back home has been imitated in story after story, including movies like *Finding Nemo* and *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* and novels like *Don Quixote, A Farewell to Arms, and Cold Mountain*.

Odysseus's journey home, which took ten years, was filled with adventure after adventure. His fantastic journey began with the tale of Aeolus and the bag of winds.



The more the men talked, the angrier they became at Odysseus and the more anxious they became to open the ox-hide bag sitting under the bench. With one last look at Odysseus sleeping soundly on the bench, the men silently nodded to each other and reached for the bag.

Jealousy and Greed

With Odysseus asleep and Ithaca within sight, the men began talking quietly to themselves. "Look at Odysseus there—so proud that he was unwilling to let his trusted companions steer the ship."

"We've fought together for ten years, and he can't even trust us to steer his ship."

"You know, Odysseus is a great soldier, but he did not share with us fairly the gifts won from Troy."

"That's true. With every victory, he always took the lion's share and left us with the rest."

"Yes, and what about this gift from Aeolus? Odysseus told us nothing of Aeolus's treasure as we left his island."

"Look at that bag, tied with a golden cord."

"Yes, why wouldn't Odysseus tell us about this bag?"

"Because he doesn't want to share with us the gifts of Aeolus."

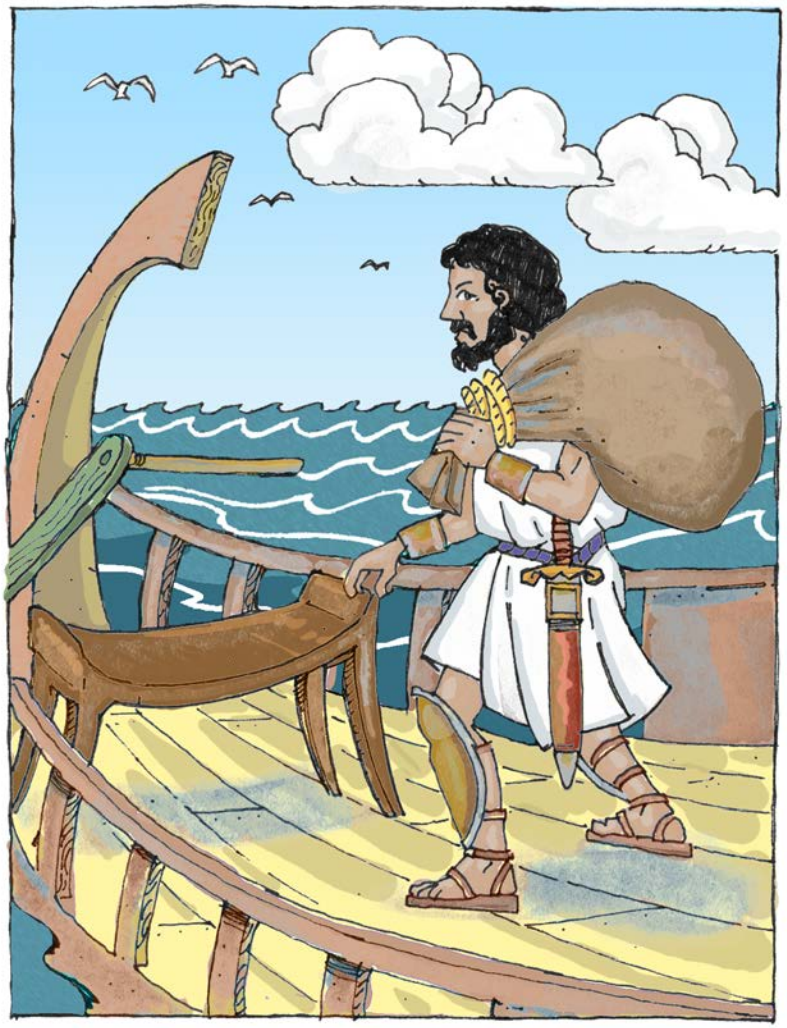
"Exactly! The bag is surely filled with gold and jewels. Just look at that golden cord."

"And look how carefully Odysseus protected it from us."

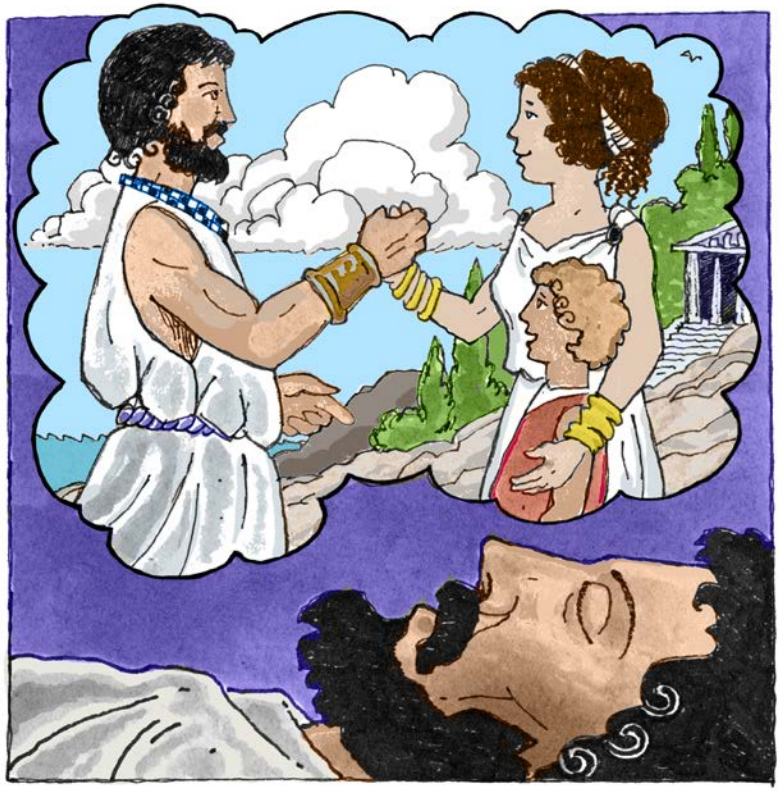
A Visit with an Old Friend

After victoriously leaving Troy to sail for home, Odysseus and his men stopped to visit Odysseus's friend, Aeolus (AY-oh-luhs), god of the winds. Aeolus welcomed the victors. Odysseus and his men, exhausted after the war, feasted and celebrated for a full month with Aeolus. In return for listening to Odysseus tell many stories of the war, Aeolus offered Odysseus a magical gift to speed him on his way home to Ithaca. The god of the winds gathered all of the wild and dangerous winds that might have blown Odysseus off course. He forced these winds into a magical oxhide bag, sealing them with a golden cord. He left out only one wind, a steady west wind, which would speed Odysseus and his men homeward.

With much gratitude, Odysseus accepted the gift, amazed that such power could be held in his hands. Not trusting his men to understand such a magical gift, Odysseus quietly **stowed** the bag under the captain's seat on his ship, and the men prepared to sail for Ithaca.

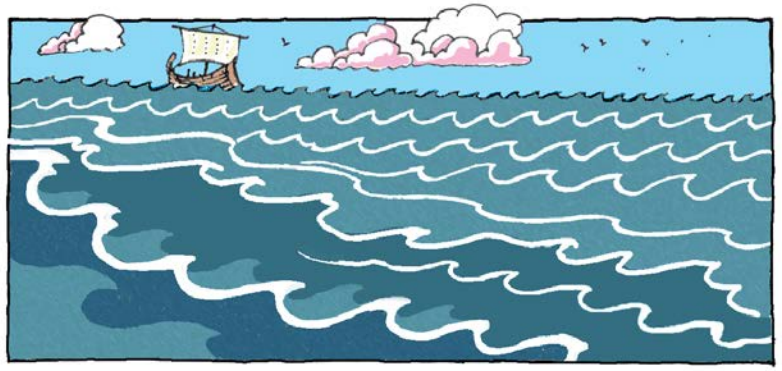


How Telemachus would have grown in ten years! Would he even recognize his father? As these thoughts entered Odysseus's mind, his eyelids grew very heavy. *Ithaca is only hours away. We can see it plainly. Surely I can shut my eyes now and leave the steering to the men,* Odysseus said to himself as he struggled to stay awake. Turning to his most trusted companion, Odysseus relinquished the helm, crawled over to a nearby bench, and immediately fell sound asleep, dreaming of Penelope and his son.



The rest of Odysseus's men saw the same view a few moments later, and the entire ship erupted into cheers and laughter. Men hugged each other and wiped tears of joy from their eyes. After ten long years of separation from family and friends, they would soon be back home—in perhaps only a few more hours.

As the outline of Ithaca became sharper and clearer, Odysseus's spirits soared. He would finally see his wife, Penelope, and his son, Telemachus (tuh-LEM-a-kuhs). Telemachus had been an infant when Odysseus left for the war.

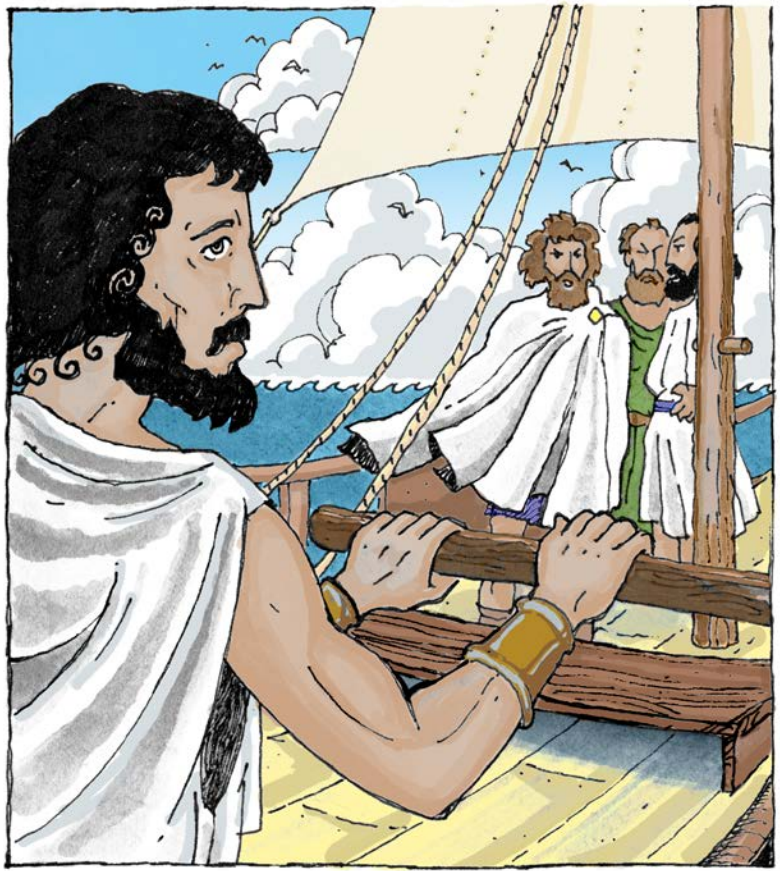


Aeolus's Gift

Aeolus's gift worked perfectly at the beginning of their journey. For nine days, Odysseus's ship carved a smooth and steady **wake** through the blue waters of the Aegean Sea, always heading westward toward Ithaca. With each passing hour, Odysseus grew more anxious to see his home. The war with Troy had lasted ten long years, and during that time Odysseus had never once seen his wife, Penelope, nor his young son.

He was so determined to return home that he refused to **relinquish** the **helm** of his ship to anyone else. For nine days and nights Odysseus stayed at the helm with his eyes peering through the salt spray to catch a glimpse of his homeland. His men were a bit insulted at Odysseus's lack of trust in them. They were all good sailors. *Of course we can steer the ship just as well as Odysseus,* they often thought to themselves.

They had also noticed the bag tied with the golden cord sitting under Odysseus's seat—the bag that he seemed to be protecting very carefully. But these concerns were not important to the men at the time. Each of them was also anxious to return home after the war. *If Odysseus insisted on steering the boat by himself, let him do it,* they said to themselves. It simply meant they each had more time to sleep and dream of home.



Almost Home

"Odysseus! Look!" Odysseus snapped out of his daydreaming as one of his men cried out from the bow of the ship. Shading his eyes from the glare, Odysseus peered ahead. A faint mist hovered above the surface of the water, and scattered clouds dotted the sky, but sure enough, as he stared more closely, a familiar outline rose on the horizon. It was the jagged peaks of Ithaca! Odysseus could recognize the shape of his beloved island anywhere, and his heart leaped up into his throat to see its familiar curves and points.