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Eric Freeberg , Tania Zamorsky

The Odyssey

United States of America (2011)

TAGS: Athena Charybdis Circe Cyclops / Cyclopes Hermes Magic Odysseus / Ulysses Penelope Poseidon Scylla Trojan War Zeus





We are still trying to obtain permission for posting the original cover.

General information	
Title of the work	The Odyssey
Country of the First Edition	United States of America
Country/countries of popularity	United Kingdom
Original Language	English
First Edition Date	2011
First Edition Details	Tania Zamorsky, *The Odyssey*. New York: Sterling Children's Books, 2011, 152 pp.
ISBN	9781402773341
Genre	Historical fiction, Mythologies
Target Audience	Children (7–10 years)
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Creators



Courtesy of Eric Freeberg.

Eric Freeberg (Illustrator)

Eric is a professional children's books illustrator. He has illustrated over twenty-five children's books including three classical retellings for Classic Starts (*The Iliad*, *The Odyssey*, *Greek Myths*) as well as illustrating for various magazines and advertising campaigns. Freeberg has received multiple awards for his work including the 2010 London Book Fair's Children's Illustration Competition and the 2010 Holbein Prize for Fantasy Art. He currently resides in Florida.

Sources:

Official website (accessed: April 2, 2018).

Profile at the childrensillustrators.com (accessed: April 2, 2018).

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Tania Zamorsky (Author)

Tania Zamorsky is a children's author who has written six books for the Classic Starts series: *The Odyssey*, *The Story of King Arthur and his Knights*, *Peter Pan*, *Pinocchio*, *Dracula*, and *A Little Princess*.

Source:

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Official website (accessed: November 9, 2020).

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Additional information

Summary

This book begins with a brief prologue that touches on the judgement of Paris, Odysseus winning the war with the Trojan horse and the Greeks having to endure a tough journey home due to interference from the Gods. The narrative follows that of Homer's *The Odyssey* fairly closely, beginning with Odysseus longing for home on Calypso's island only for the Gods to decide to help Odysseus get home. Athena helps Odysseus reach Phaeacia where he tells king Alcinous of his troublesome journey home. Odysseus tells of his encounters with the Cicones, the Lotus-eaters and the Cyclops as well as his time on Circe's island, his journey to the underworld and devastating encounter with Scylla and Charybdis. The Phaeacians help Odysseus reach Ithaca where he visits the hospitable Eumaeus as a beggar, before revealing himself to his son Telemachus and devising a plan to take down the suitors. Odysseus completes Penelope's task of the twelve axes and defeats the suitors with help from Telemachus and Eumaeus. Odysseus and Penelope are reunited in a romantic fashion before Odysseus visits his father to his surprise and joy. The families of the suitors want revenge for their slaying and it takes an intervention from Athena to reconcile peace between the two parties, where the narrative ends.

The book has a section titled "What do you think?" which poses 10 questions for discussion at the back of the book. There are a series of illustrations throughout the book. They are black and white and depict various scenes alongside the text. There is a depiction of everyday life in Phaeacia which includes women carrying vases, men wearing robes and sandals working at workbenches, and a temple on top of the hill in the background (p. 39). There is also a depiction of the giant one-eyed cyclops rolling his boulder (p. 51), Odysseus longing for home on Calypso's island (p. 9) and Odysseus and Penelope reunited hand in hand (p. 140) to name a few.

Analysis

This book largely follows the structure of Homer's *The Odyssey* whilst making slight adjustments to make this an enjoyable read for a young audience.

Athena's presence is considerable (as it is in the Odyssey) and she constantly steps into both help and reassures Telemachus, Odysseus

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and Penelope. With Telemachus, Athena casts a spell on him (p. 16) to make him proud, courageous and handsome and this leads to him setting sail to find his father and rid the palace of the suitors. Athena also visits Penelope in her sleep to let her know that Telemachus is safe, we are told that Penelope "smiled in her sleep" (p. 24) when she heard this. Athena also casts a spell over Odysseus which makes him "lose all memory of his sorrows and struggles" (p. 32). Athena and Odysseus even share a joke (p. 83) where Athena tells Odysseus to stop his tricks and Odysseus teases: "you are one to speak about lying." Athena is constantly in the background playing the role of the guardian angel to Odysseus and his family: this is comforting for a young audience and gives them reassurance throughout the book.

Regarding Odysseus' journey home, the events are faithful to the original for the most part, though in events that contain strong violence or adult themes the author has modified certain elements to deliver the narrative to a young audience. For example, when Odysseus enters the cave of the Cyclops, we are not told of the dismemberment of Odysseus's men and the trauma suffered, rather we are told that the Cyclops "ate them up" (p. 52) and then went to sleep. We are then told that Odysseus used a magic sleeping potion to give to the Cyclops rather than intoxicating the Cyclops with wine. Odysseus and his men heat a spear and blind the Cyclops, and we are told of his screams and his anguish, which suggests to me that the authors think violence against a monster would be tolerable for a young audience but that violence against humans would be too much to bear. This seems true of the final showdown between Odysseus and the suitors too. In the Odyssey, this is a wildly violent scene, but in this interpretation, the author simply tells us that "one by one the suitors fell" (p. 133).

Hospitality is an important theme in this interpretation, as it is in the Odyssey. The Phaeacians show excellent hospitality to Odysseus and give him a safe journey home. The author then tells us that Poseidon wants to teach the Phaeacians a lesson for helping Odysseus and he turns a ship to stone so that it sinks to the bottom of the sea. We are then told that the Phaeacians "never again showed kindness to any stranger passing through their land" (p. 82). This shows the cruelty of Poseidon, as the Greeks stress the importance of treating strangers hospitably, and in the interactions between Odysseus, Telemachus and Eumaeus we see hospitality in a positive light. Odysseus, testing the hospitality of Eumaeus asks Eumaeus for a cloak as he is cold. Eumaeus, "Although he has none extra…gave Odysseus the cloak off

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his own back." (p. 88). Further, Telemachus also demonstrates hospitality to Odysseus when disguised as a beggar. Telemachus enters Eumaeus hut and Odysseus rises to give him his seat, to which Telemachus replies "sit down, stranger, I can sit on the floor" (p. 92). Odysseus, we are told, is proud of how his son treated a poor stranger. So, even though the Phaeacians are punished for demonstrating hospitality to the wrong man, the strength and importance of hospitality shines through in the interactions in Eumaeus' hut. Though the ancient Greek concept of xenia will be far removed from a twenty-first-century 7–10-year-old, simple concepts such as offering a seat to an old man or offering clothing to someone less fortunate than yourself will strike a chord with a young audience and conveys the overall message of hospitality.

Penelope is represented as a beautiful woman, who is sad and longing for the return of her husband. Though we are constantly reminded that she is beautiful, the author tells us that the toll of waiting for Odysseus to return and dealing with the suitors has left its mark: "Penelope was still beautiful. But sadness and worry had clearly left their marks upon her face." (pp. 97–98). Though every time she appears we are told of her beauty, the author makes a point to tell us that she is more than just a beautiful woman: "But Penelope was clever, too." (p. 12). And later Odysseus reminds us of why he loves Penelope: "Your mother's cleverness is one of the things I love about her." (p. 137). This is an important distinction, as Homer's Odysseus and Penelope were known for their wisdom and all too often women in children's literature can be represented solely by their physical appearance. The significance of strong female role models in children's literature is well documented,* and by stressing the intelligence of Penelope, this goes some way to combating gender stereotypes that exist within children's literature.

There are ten questions for discussion at the back of the book. These are a brilliant addition, and as the author notes:

> "But this is not a quiz! They are designed to help you look at the people, places, and events in the story from different angles. These questions to not have specific answers." (p. 147)

These questions teach critical thinking and are an introduction to the philosophical discussion rather than a simple comprehension style "quiz" on the text. The questions are framed around the text, but require the children to think about their own lives, for example:

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	"Even though Calypso's island is a paradise, how would you feel if you were on the island? Would you want to go home, too?" (p. 148) The questions cover a range of topics involving Odysseus, Penelope, the Gods and friends and family. * See for example *Gender roles in children's literature and their influence on learners* (accessed: January 20, 2021).
Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	Athena Charybdis Circe Cyclops / Cyclopes Hermes Magic Odysseus / Ulysses Penelope Poseidon Scylla Trojan War Zeus
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Conflict Death Good vs evil Heroism Intellect Journeys Judgement Masculinity Revenge Violence War

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