

The Odyssey

An Illustrated Retelling of
Homer's Epic
for Young Readers

Adapted by Frances Bianchi & Mara Seronda



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by Frances Bianchi & Mara Seronda

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First Edition, September 2025

Reformatted, September 2026

This work is a literary adaptation of Homer's The Odyssey, rewritten and simplified for young readers for educational purposes.

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ISBN: 9791399178920

Editorial Note

This edition has been adapted to make the original epic accessible to middle-grade readers. Certain scenes, descriptions, and narrative structures have been modified or expanded to support comprehension and age-appropriate engagement.

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Prologue – Odysseus and the Trojan War	5
Chapter 1 – The Gift	9
Chapter 2 – The Raid	15
Chapter 3 – The Flowers of Forgetfulness	21
Chapter 4 – Polyphemus	25
Chapter 5 – The Treacherous Winds	31
Chapter 6 – The Laestrygonians	37
Chapter 7 – Circe	43
Chapter 8 – The Land of the Dead	51
Chapter 9 – The Sirens	59
Chapter 10 – A Hard Choice	67
Chapter 11 – The Island of the Sun	71
Chapter 12 – Telemachus' Journey	77
Chapter 13 – The Nymph Calypso	83
Chapter 14 – The Phaeacians	89
Chapter 15 – Ithaca	95
Chapter 16 – The Return of the King	101
Epilogue	109
Acknowledgments	113



Prologue – Odysseus and the Trojan War

Long ago, when the gods still walked among men and the sea hid monsters in its depths, there lived a king named Odysseus.

He ruled the small island of Ithaca, with green mountains, golden beaches, and a safe harbor. His wife, Penelope, wove at her loom by the fire, while their son, Telemachus, dreamed of the day his father would return.

But Odysseus was far away. He camped outside the walls of Troy, a city so proud and strong that no army could defeat it. For ten long years of war, he looked toward the horizon. Smoke and cries filled the air. His heart belonged to Ithaca, but he knew he could not return without victory.

Odysseus was not the strongest warrior or the fastest runner. His true weapon was his mind. Where others saw only walls, he searched for doors. And in those dusty fields, surrounded by tired soldiers, he began to imagine a plan that would change everything.

Meanwhile, in Ithaca, greedy men filled the palace. They wanted to marry Penelope and steal Odysseus' throne. They drank his wine and ate his cattle, certain the king would never return. But Penelope never gave up. Every day she sat at her loom, weaving a great tapestry she claimed was for Laertes, Odysseus' old father.

She promised that once it was finished, she would choose a husband from the suitors.

Every night, in secret, she undid the work she had woven during the day. The tapestry never grew. With this clever trick, she won time and kept the hope of Odysseus' return alive.

Young Telemachus often stood by the sea. He dreamed of spotting a sail on the horizon, of seeing his father step off a ship. But only the waves answered him, endless and empty.

And so the story begins: with a king far from home, longing for his family, about to face the greatest trials of his life on the long road back home.



Chapter 1 – The Gift

Odysseus hadn't slept for days. From his tent he could hear the Trojans shouting insults from the top of their walls. Each word reminded him just how far he was from Ithaca. That morning, in the middle of the silent camp, he suddenly stopped and declared:

"I know how we'll win."

The men stared at him. Whenever Odysseus spoke with such certainty, they knew something unexpected was about to happen.

"We'll build a horse," he announced.

A wave of surprise ran through the camp.

"A horse for battle?" blurted Antiphos, always impatient, resting his sword on his knee.

"Or to ride around in?" laughed Perimedes, who never missed a chance for a joke.

Eurylochus frowned, suspicion darkening his face.

"This sounds like another one of your impossible schemes..." he muttered.

Young Antenor, still shy, didn't dare say a word. He only ran his hand along his spear, as if searching for courage in it.



Odysseus stayed calm and explained his plan.

“It will be a gift. A wooden horse as tall as a house, hollow inside, with room to hide our best warriors. The Trojans will bring it into their city themselves—you’ll see.”

For days the sound of hammers and saws echoed through the camp. The horse grew taller and taller until its shadow stretched across the plain. From the walls, the Trojans stared in confusion, unable to make sense of it.

When the work was done, Odysseus chose his companions. Under cover of darkness, they climbed inside.

“Breathe softly... not a sound,” he whispered.

Inside the horse, every breath sounded too loud. Their hearts thudded, and even the tiniest movement echoed through the hollow shell. They stayed frozen in the dark, listening to the silence of the deserted camp.

At dawn, dozens of ships sailed away into the horizon. The Greek camp, which had surrounded Troy for so long, now stood empty.

“Victory! They’ve given up!” shouted the Trojans.

But something else caught their eyes even more: the enormous horse on the beach, its shadow stretching across the sand like a giant.

Some men started arguing over what it meant.

“It’s an offering,” said one. “The Greeks always leave gifts to win the favor of the gods.”

“Let’s go see it up close,” another suggested.

Not everyone was convinced. An old man named Laocoön warned them:

“Beware! The Greeks are always hiding something.”

But no one listened. Overjoyed at the end of the war, the Trojans dragged the horse into their city.

“It will be our trophy! It will stand forever in the square as a memory of our victory!”

That day was filled with laughter, music, and celebration. Joy swept through the streets, as if nothing could ever stop it.

Late that night, as the city fell silent, a trapdoor creaked open. One by one, the warriors slipped out like shadows. The gates of Troy were forced open, and the Greek army—secretly returned—stormed the city.

Troy fell at last. Amid smoke and screams, Odysseus lifted his gaze to the stars.

“Soon I’ll be home in Ithaca,” he promised himself.

But among the ruins, an old Trojan pointed at him and cried:

“The gods do not forget, Odysseus! The sea will guard your punishment, and every wave will rise against you.”



Chapter 2 – The Raid

The wind carried Odysseus' fleet far from Troy for days. At last, they reached the city of Ismarus, home of the Cicones. From the deck, they could see white houses, golden wheat fields, and vineyards sparkling in the sun. The barrels of water on the ships already smelled rotten, and their food had run out.

"We can fill the holds here," said Perimedes, eyes bright with excitement.

Odysseus went ashore with Eurylochus and Antiphos to negotiate. They offered gifts, but the guards slammed the gates in their faces.

"We don't deal with strangers!" they spat.

Back on the beach, Odysseus gathered his men. Their faces were pale and hollow from hunger.

"If we don't get food, we'll die at sea," he said firmly, though doubt gnawed at him. "We'll take what we need."

Still drunk with victory from Troy, the sailors stormed the city.

They seized grain, wine, sheep, and chests of gold. Some hesitated, glancing at the city they had just attacked, a flicker of doubt in their eyes.



“Let’s get out of here!” Odysseus urged, a hidden tremor in his throat.

On the beach, bonfires crackled, and laughter rang out. One man played a flute; another danced, holding a wine jar. The air smelled of smoke and spilled wine.

Then, a war horn blared in the distance. Another answered from the hill.

“Grab your weapons!” Odysseus shouted.

The Cicones poured in like waves, spears flashing, chariots thundering, shields gleaming. Odysseus fought his way through, swinging his sword and dragging his men toward the shore.

The clash was brutal. Iron rang against iron. Mud and blood mixed underfoot. Screams were muffled by the pounding of hooves. An arrow whistled past his ear.

“To the ships!” he ordered, torn between rage and fear.

Inside the ships, every man’s heart raced. Hands shook on the oars. Eyes darted to the dark water. Even the bravest sailors swallowed hard as the Cicones chased them along the shore.

Waves slapped the hull, rocking the boats. Every gust reminded them that the sea could be as deadly as any sword.

When the wind finally filled the sails, several men had been lost from each ship. No one sang that night. The silence weighed heavier than the waves. Beyond the chaos, the water shimmered calm and endless, mocking what had just happened.

Odysseus stood at the prow, biting his lip. He felt the weight of every life lost in Ismarus pressing down on him.

He knew the sea would be more merciless than any enemy—and that every choice he made here would follow them, like shadows, shaping the journey ahead.



Chapter 3 – The Flowers of Forgetfulness

For several days, the sea had been cruel to them. The wind howled without pause. Waves rose like walls. The sky offered no light—not the sun by day, nor stars by night. Odysseus, who had trusted the stars so many times to guide him, now felt as if they were drifting in a void, at the mercy of the wind and waves.

The men were exhausted. Each day seemed to mirror the one before.

Then, suddenly, the storm died down. The sea calmed as if it had forgotten its rage. The air grew gentle, and a coastline appeared in the distance. It looked like a place plucked from a dream. Sand sparkled like treasure, and shrubs bloomed with white and blue flowers. Their sweet scent filled the air, teasing their senses.

The sailors breathed deeply. For a moment, all their weariness seemed to vanish.

“A little rest won’t hurt us, right?” muttered Perimedes, rubbing his eyes.

Young Antenor whispered, tugging at the hem of his tunic:

“What if we get trapped here too?”



Odysseus sent Eurylochus, Antiphos, and another sailor to explore the island. Hours passed, and they did not return. Worried, Odysseus went down with a few men. They found the explorers under trees, laughing with men and women whose eyes were calm. Golden fruit glimmered in their hands, catching stray sunbeams.

“Try it, Odysseus,” said Eurylochus, eyes half-closed. “It will make you forget your troubles.”

“Stay. There are no storms or wars here,” added Antiphos, yawning as he leaned against a tree.

The lotus was not only sweet. Each bite made them forget Ithaca, as if home had never existed. A shiver ran down Odysseus’ spine. Not them too... Not my men, he thought.

“To the ship, now!” Odysseus ordered, voice sharp.

But no one moved. One sank onto the grass with a sigh. Another tried to run toward the shore again. Odysseus dragged them back, with a few still struggling against him. He tied the disobedient to the deck to keep them from jumping into the sea.

From the beach, the lotus-eaters watched calmly, as if they knew the men would eventually return.

The scent of the flowers lingered in the air. Odysseus fixed his gaze on the horizon. For a heartbeat, even Penelope and Telemachus seemed like a fading dream. He gritted his teeth. We’re lost... and only the gods know where we’re headed.



Chapter 4 – Polyphemus

They sailed without a clear course, landing on barren coasts or tiny coves. They found only a little brackish water and tough roots that barely eased their hunger. The men were exhausted. Each landing brought empty hands and heavier hearts.

Odysseus watched in silence, aware that the sea tested them not only with storms but with slow despair.

One day, they came ashore at the foot of a grassy hill. The breeze carried the scent of fresh milk. Soon, they discovered a cave filled with stacked cheeses, bowls of milk, and sheep hides hanging from the walls.

“Someone here takes good care of their animals,” observed Perimedes, eyes gleaming with hunger.

“And eats better than we do,” added Antiphos, reaching for a cheese.

Eurylochus hissed,

“This doesn’t feel right. If they have this much, they won’t share.”

Young Antenor swallowed hard.

“Maybe... maybe it’s just a shepherd...”

Suddenly, a thunderous sound shook the ground. A massive shadow blocked the entrance. An enormous being appeared—a single eye in the middle of his forehead, hands huge enough to crush a man.

“I am the Cyclops Polyphemus, son of Poseidon. What are you doing in my cave?” he bellowed.

Odysseus stepped forward, forcing calm into his voice.

“We are travelers, seeking only rest.”

The Cyclops rolled a colossal boulder across the entrance.

“Today I have eaten. Tomorrow, you will be my dinner,” he said, laughing so deeply it chilled the sailors’ hearts.

At dawn, Polyphemus went out with his sheep. Inside, the men trembled. Odysseus gathered them silently.

“We can’t move the rock. Our only chance is to wait until he returns,” he said. “And if we want any hope, he mustn’t see us.”

Odysseus lifted a wineskin.

“With this, sweetened with honey, we’ll make him sleep. Then we’ll sharpen a stake in the fire...and drive it into his eye.”

As evening fell, Polyphemus returned. Odysseus stepped forward, feigning respect.

“Great Polyphemus, we have a gift for you—a wine unlike any you’ve tasted.”

The Cyclops drank.

“It’s delicious... give me more,” he commanded.

A gulp... another... and another followed. His eyelids drooped. His voice slowed.

“What’s your name, stranger?”

“My name is Nobody,” replied Odysseus.

“You are a good guest, Nobody... as a reward... I’ll save you for last,” Polyphemus murmured before collapsing into a drunken stupor.

The men heated the stake until the tip glowed. Odysseus held it steady. At his signal, everyone pushed. The Cyclops’s scream shook the island.

“My eye! I can’t see!” he roared, clutching the wound.

Steps echoed outside.

“What’s happening, brother?” called another Cyclops.

“Nobody is attacking me!” cried Polyphemus.

A brief silence, then laughter.

“If Nobody is attacking you, it must be a nightmare. Sleep and stop screaming,” they replied, and walked away.

The night dragged on. Blind and furious, Polyphemus groped through the cave. Each time he passed, the men held their breath. Finally, he collapsed, exhausted and in pain.



At dawn, the bleating of sheep woke him. He pushed the rock aside with one hand, feeling each animal's back. He did not suspect the Greeks hidden beneath the largest rams' wool.

The last sheep passed. The men had all escaped. They ran to the shore, cast off, and sailed away. Only then did Odysseus sigh with relief.

From the deck, he shouted with pride, despite the danger:

"Tell your father Poseidon that it was Odysseus of Ithaca who left you like this!"

Polyphemus' roar echoed across the island. Far beneath the sea, a powerful presence heard his name, and deep within the restless sea, something stirred, awakening to his challenge.

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