

THE ODYSSEY

A GRAPHIC NOVEL BY
GARETH HINDS
BASED ON HOMER'S EPIC POEM



BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The story of Odysseus's long journey home has been captivating audiences for more than 2,500 years. It blends bits of Greek history and mythology with universal themes of the human experience. *The Odyssey's* early verse form helped specialized bards known as rhapsodes remember the story's details when relaying the epic adventure in live performances, and listeners enjoyed the stylized result. Scholars attribute the enduring written version of *The Odyssey* to the poet Homer, although it is unclear how much he borrowed directly from other bards. Today, the "original" text has been translated repeatedly and remains a favorite in high-school English curricula. From its roots in oral storytelling to the transcription and later translations of the text, Odysseus's story has evolved over time. With his new graphic-novel adaptation, Gareth Hinds continues the tradition of breathing new life into an ancient and universal story.

HC: 978-0-7636-4266-2
PB: 978-0-7636-4268-6

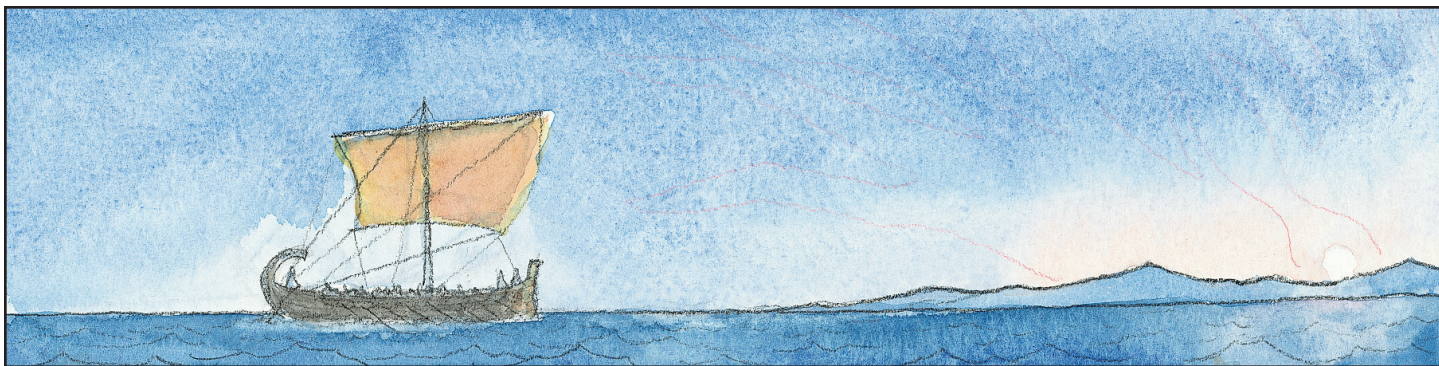


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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Homer's *Odyssey* is one of the most famous and frequently adapted works of classic literature in the Western canon. What is it about this story that continues to resonate with people? Why do you think writers, artists, and film directors are drawn to it?
2. Odysseus is impressively strong physically, as shown by his dominance in sporting games with the Phaeacians (pages 84–85), his winning fight against the beggar (pages 183–186), and his ability to string his bow (page 210). He is also smart, wily, and cunning, cleverly manipulating his way out of trouble when physically overpowered or outnumbered. Gareth Hinds depicts Odysseus's physical strength by showing his build and muscularity. What are some ways in which he conveys Odysseus's mental strength?
3. Books 9 through 12 of the story depict the trials and tribulations Odysseus faces as he tries to make his way home after the Trojan War. What do these encounters and events tell us about Odysseus's character? What do the tests teach Odysseus, and how do his experiences make him wiser and better prepared to return to his role as king?
4. In Book 9, when Odysseus faces off with the Cyclops, Gareth Hinds chooses shades of orange to illustrate the segment where Odysseus and his men are trapped in the monster's cave. In Book 11, the author-illustrator uses shades of gray with small additions of color to convey the austere tone of the Land of the Dead. In what other ways does Gareth Hinds use color symbolically throughout this adaptation?
5. Throughout the story, we often see characters experiencing the consequences of their own reckless behavior or failure to heed clear warnings. Two particular temptations that Odysseus's men must avoid or overcome are the lotus fruit (page 92) and the sirens' song (page 135). What are some of today's strongest or most dangerous temptations?
6. On page 175, a disguised Odysseus stumbles upon Argos, a dog he raised who was not yet fully grown when Odysseus left. Now old and ailing, Argos has been waiting for his master to return. Upon seeing Odysseus, even in disguise, Argos is able to let go, and Athena removes the dog's spirit from the earth. Compare and contrast the panels on pages 176 and 177 with this same passage in a different text of *The Odyssey*. How does Gareth Hinds wordlessly convey the tenderness and sadness of this scene?
7. In the time of Odysseus, men believed that the gods could do wondrous things and directly intervene in mortals' lives. Worship was a matter not just of securing eternal rewards but also of avoiding the more immediate and often dire consequences of an angered god or goddess. Throughout his adaptation, Gareth Hinds uses soft colors and sometimes outlines to depict gods, goddesses, and magical elements. Are these techniques an effective way to convey the sense of pervasive magic in people's everyday lives? Give two examples of ways that shifts in color may help the reader recognize godly influences that the characters may not perceive.

8. At the end of the story, there is a brief battle before Athena intervenes. How does Gareth Hinds use facial expressions, body language, tension lines, color, and sound effects to convey the drama of this final scene? What do the final books tell us about Odysseus's character? Have his earlier bravado and glory-seeking been tempered by the long journey home, or is he more or less the same? After you have thought about Gareth Hinds's interpretation, consider Robert Fitzgerald's translation of the final lines of the epic poem below. Do you get the same impression? Why or why not?

*Athena cast a grey glance at her friend and said:
"Son of Laërtēs and the gods of old,
Odysseus, master of land ways and sea ways,
Command yourself. Call off this battle now,
Or Zeus who views the wide world may be angry."*

*He yielded to her, and his heart was glad.
Both parties later swore to terms of peace
set by their arbiter, Athena, daughter
of Zeus who bears the storm cloud as a shield—
though still she kept the form and voice of Mentor.*

The Odyssey, translated by Robert Fitzgerald. Farrar, Straus and Giroux (1998) (page 462).

9. Due to his penchant for concocting elaborate stories about himself, Odysseus is often considered one of literature's first unreliable narrators. Does Gareth Hinds's adaptation hint at this possibility in any ways?
10. What differences do you notice between this graphic novel and any other versions of *The Odyssey* you have read? Why do you think Hinds made these changes?

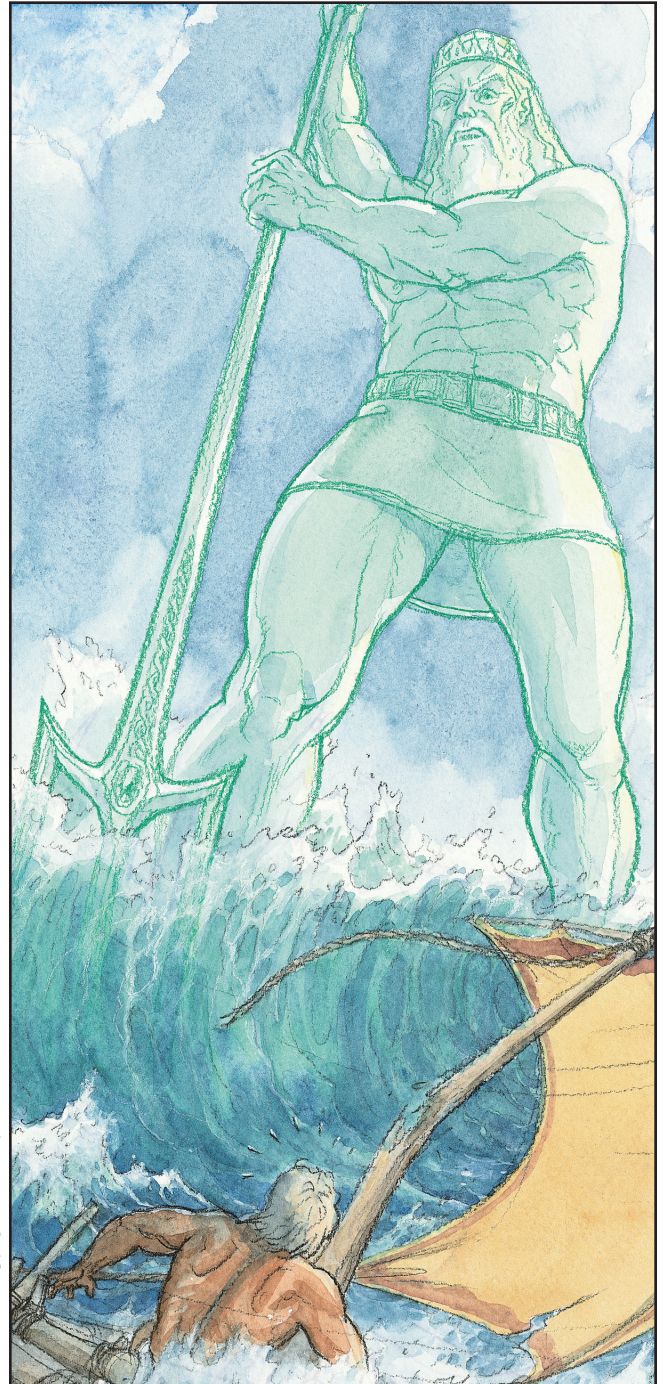


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ACTIVITIES

1. *The Odyssey* is often considered a timeless epic classic, with themes of hospitality, loyalty, perseverance, and vengeance present throughout. We continue to see these themes in books and movies published and produced today. Pick two modern books or movies that contain at least one of the main themes from *The Odyssey*. Compare and contrast the two stories and their characters.
2. Greek gods and goddesses such as Athena, Zeus, Hermes, and Poseidon appear throughout *The Odyssey*. Search online for alternative graphic representations of these characters. How do the images compare and contrast with Gareth Hinds's images?
3. After Zeus's mandate in Book 5, Calypso releases Odysseus from his seven years of servitude on her island. In the pages following this exchange, Odysseus sets off to build a raft that will carry him off the island and back to Ithaca. Using your own words, narrate Odysseus's preparations, his good-bye to Calypso, his setting sail, and the beginning of his journey on the open seas (pages 54–59).
4. In Book 8, Odysseus begs the Phaeacians to help him return home to Ithaca. They agree but decide to first throw a farewell feast in his honor. During the feast, a bard plays music for the guests. Gareth Hinds uses comic balloons within the panels to relay the bard's songs, one of which is about those who died during the battle of Troy. Using your own words, create text for the comic balloons on pages 88 and 89 to help tell these stories.



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5. *The Odyssey* features more than a dozen characters that fit an archetype, the basic model of a universal human personality. In the list of paired characters and archetypes below, whom do you most closely identify with, and why? Explain why your parents or friends would or would not recognize this archetype in you.

Antinous: Bad Boy / Bully

Athena: Mentor

Circe: Femme Fatale

Eumaeus: Loyal Companion

Eurycleia: Nurse / Caretaker

Eurymachus: Charmer

Hermes: Messenger

Laertes: Father / Patriarch

Odysseus: Hero

Penelope: Faithful Partner

Poseidon: Saboteur / Envious Other

The Sirens: Temptresses

Telemachus: Good Son

Teachers' guide written by Michele Gorman, Teen Services Coordinator, Charlotte Mecklenburg Library, Charlotte, North Carolina. Michele Gorman is also a freelance writer, a national speaker, and certified by YALSA as a "Serving the Underserved" Trainer. She is the "Getting Graphic" columnist for *Library Media Connection* and her books include *Getting Graphic! Comics for Kids*, and *Getting Graphic! Using Graphic Novels to Promote Literacy with Preteens and Teens*.



ABOUT GARETH HINDS

Gareth Hinds has always been an artist. Growing up in small-town Vermont, he was a “nerdy kid who drew all the time.” He wrote his first comics in elementary school.

“I used to make these thirty-page *Star Trek* stories with markers on scrap paper, using wallpaper samples for covers,” he recalls. “But I never said, ‘I want to draw comics when I grow up.’ I just liked telling stories with pictures.” He started illustrating in earnest while in high school, where he did editorial illustrations and comics for his high-school newspaper, coedited and illustrated the

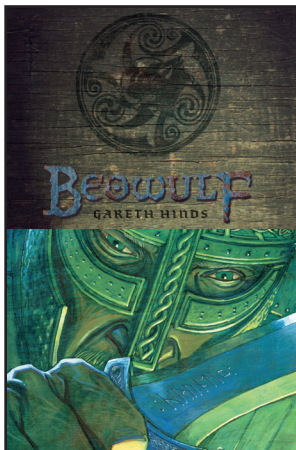
literary magazine, and painted a mural in one of the school hallways.

Gareth Hinds ended up studying illustration at Parsons School of Design and Rochester Institute of Technology. After graduating, he found a job making computer games and worked in that field for more than ten years, creating animation, characters, and environments for numerous PC and console games.

About *The Odyssey*, he says, “It was incredibly exciting to work with this material. Gods, monsters, flawed heroes, battles, and all the best and worst of human nature, set against an ancient Mediterranean backdrop. It’s a dream project.”

Gareth Hinds lives in New York and creates graphic novels full-time.

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