

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Class: \_\_\_\_\_

## Excerpt from "The Odyssey": The Sirens

By Homer  
8th Century BCE

*Homer is the name that has been assigned by the ancient Greeks to the author of The Iliad and The Odyssey, as much of what we know about his life is considered to be legend. The Odyssey is an epic poem about a Greek hero named Odysseus, also known as Ulysses in Roman myths, and his 10-year journey home after the fall of Troy. In this excerpt, Ulysses encounters the Sirens while at sea.*

**As you read, take notes on what obstacles Ulysses encounters and how he overcomes them.**

[1] "O friends, oh ever partners of my woes,  
Attend while I what Heaven foredooms<sup>1</sup> disclose.  
Hear all! Fate hangs o'er all; on you it lies  
To live or perish! to be safe, be wise!

[5] "In flowery meads<sup>2</sup> the sportive<sup>3</sup> Sirens play,  
Touch the soft lyre,<sup>4</sup> and tine<sup>5</sup> the vocal lay;  
Me, me alone, with fetters<sup>6</sup> firmly bound,  
The gods allow to hear the dangerous sound.  
Hear and obey; if freedom I demand,

[10] Be every fetter strain'd, be added band to band.'

"While yet I speak the winged galley<sup>7</sup> flies,  
And lo! the Siren shores like mists arise.  
Sunk were at once the winds; the air above,  
And waves below, at once forgot to move;

[15] Some demon calm'd the air and smooth'd the deep,  
Hush'd the loud winds, and charm'd the waves to sleep.  
Now every sail we furl, each oar we ply;  
Lash'd by the stroke, the frothy waters fly.

[20] The ductile<sup>8</sup> wax with busy hands I mould,  
And cleft<sup>9</sup> in fragments, and the fragments roll'd;



*"The sirens and Odysseus - John Waterhouse" by Nick Morieson is licensed under CC BY-NC 2.0.*

1. destines
2. a meadow
3. playful
4. a stringed instrument, like a harp
5. a sharp point
6. a chain or manacle used to restrain a prisoner
7. a long, low ship
8. capable of being bent or pulled into different shapes
9. split, divided

- The aerial region now grew warm with day,  
The wax dissolved beneath the burning ray;  
Then every ear I barr'd against the strain,  
And from access of frenzy lock'd the brain.
- [25] Now round the masts my mates the fetters roll'd,  
And bound me limb by limb with fold on fold.  
Then bending to the stroke, the active train  
Plunge all at once their oars, and cleave the main.
- [30] "While to the shore the rapid vessel flies,  
Our swift approach the Siren choir descries;<sup>10</sup>  
Celestial<sup>11</sup> music warbles from their tongue,  
And thus the sweet deluders<sup>12</sup> tune the song:
- [35] "Oh stay, O pride of Greece! Ulysses, stay!  
Oh cease thy course, and listen to our lay!  
Blest is the man ordain'd our voice to hear,  
The song instructs the soul, and charms the ear.  
Approach! thy soul shall into raptures<sup>13</sup> rise!  
Approach! and learn new wisdom from the wise!  
We know whate'er the kings of mighty name
- [40] Achieved at Ilion in the field of fame;  
Whate'er beneath the sun's bright journey lies.  
Oh stay, and learn new wisdom from the wise!
- [45] "Thus the sweet charmers warbled o'er the main;  
My soul takes wing to meet the heavenly strain;  
I give the sign, and struggle to be free;  
Swift row my mates, and shoot along the sea;  
New chains they add, and rapid urge the way,  
Till, dying off, the distant sounds decay;  
Then scudding swiftly from the dangerous ground,
- [50] The deafen'd ear unlock'd, the chains unbound.

*The Odyssey by Homer (8th Century BCE) is in the public domain.*

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10. to catch sight of
  11. **Celestial** (*adjective*) belonging or relating to heaven
  12. **Delude** (*verb*) to deceive someone
  13. **Rapture** (*noun*) a feeling of intense pleasure or joy

## Text-Dependent Questions

**Directions:** For the following questions, choose the best answer or respond in complete sentences.

1. PART A: Read line 15 from the passage from *The Odyssey*: "Some demon calm'd the air and smooth'd the deep." What does the line describe?
  - A. The ship seems to be in danger.
  - B. Ulysses is enchanted by the Sirens.
  - C. The weather has suddenly changed.
  - D. Ulysses thinks he can see the Sirens.
  
2. PART B: Which evidence from the passage provides the best clue about the meaning of the line?
  - A. "And lo! The Siren shores like mists arise." (Line 12)
  - B. "Sunk were at once the winds; the air above" (Line 13)
  - C. "Lash'd by the stroke, the frothy waters fly." (Line 18)
  - D. "Plunge all at once their oars, and cleave the main." (Line 28)
  
3. PART A: Which sentence states a theme of the passage from *The Odyssey*?
  - A. Pleasure is temporary, but knowledge is eternal.
  - B. Beautiful appearances can disguise evil intentions.
  - C. In difficult situations, people must learn to cooperate.
  - D. Even the greatest leaders can sometimes make mistakes.
  
4. PART B: Which evidence from the passage most strongly supports the answer in Part A?
  - A. "Celestial music warbles from their tongue, / And thus the sweet deluders tune the song" (Lines 31-32)
  - B. "'Approach! thy soul shall into raptures rise! / Approach! and learn new wisdom from the wise!'" (Lines 37-38)
  - C. "'We know whate'er the kings of mighty name / Achieved at Ilion in the field of fame'" (Lines 39-40)
  - D. "Then scudding swiftly from the dangerous ground, / The defean'd ear unlock'd, the chains unbound." (Lines 49-50)

## Discussion Questions

***Directions: Brainstorm your answers to the following questions in the space provided. Be prepared to share your original ideas in a class discussion.***

1. What traits does Ulysses possess that align with how you view a hero? In what ways could Ulysses' actions be seen as heroic in this passage? How does Ulysses' character compare to modern day heroes you know?
2. How does Ulysses exhibit good leadership skills in this passage? What traits do you think are necessary for a leader to possess? Cite evidence from this text, your own experience, and other literature, art, or history in your answer.
3. Why do you think Ulysses wanted to hear the Sirens' song even though he knew it was a risk? Is it ever worth taking a risk to have a new experience? Why or why not? Cite evidence from this text, your own experience, and other literature, art, or history in your answer.