

Odysseus - The protagonist of the *Odyssey*. Odysseus fought among the other Greek heroes at Troy and now struggles to return to his kingdom in Ithaca. Odysseus is the husband of Queen Penelope and the father of Prince Telemachus. Though a strong and courageous warrior, he is most renowned for his cunning. He is a favorite of the goddess Athena, who often sends him divine aid, but a bitter enemy of Poseidon, who frustrates his journey at every turn.

Telemachus - Odysseus's son. An infant when Odysseus left for Troy, Telemachus is about twenty at the beginning of the story. He is a natural obstacle to the suitors desperately courting his mother, but despite his courage and good heart, he initially lacks the poise and confidence to oppose them. His maturation, especially during his trip to Pylos and Sparta in Books 3 and 4, provides a subplot to the epic. Athena often assists him.

Penelope - Wife of Odysseus and mother of Telemachus. Penelope spends her days in the palace pining for the husband who left for Troy twenty years earlier and never returned. Homer portrays her as sometimes flighty and excitable but also clever and steadfastly true to her husband.

Athena - Daughter of Zeus and goddess of wisdom, purposeful battle, and the womanly arts. Athena assists Odysseus and Telemachus with divine powers throughout the epic, and she speaks up for them in the councils of the gods on Mount Olympus. She often appears in disguise as Mentor, an old friend of Odysseus. She also intervenes to help Odysseus.

Poseidon - God of the sea. As the suitors are Odysseus's mortal antagonists, Poseidon is his divine antagonist. He despises Odysseus for blinding his son, the Cyclops Polyphemus, and constantly hampers his journey home. Ironically, Poseidon is the patron of the seafaring Phaeacians, who ultimately help to return Odysseus to Ithaca.

Zeus - King of gods and men, who mediates the disputes of the gods on Mount Olympus. Zeus is occasionally depicted as weighing men's fates in his scales. He sometimes helps Odysseus or permits Athena to do the same.

Antinous - The most arrogant of Penelope's suitors. Antinous leads the campaign to have Telemachus killed. Unlike the other suitors, he is never portrayed sympathetically, and he is the first to die when Odysseus returns.

Eurymachus - A manipulative, deceitful suitor. Eurymachus's charisma and duplicity allow him to exert some influence over the other suitors.

Amphinomus - Among the dozens of suitors, the only decent man seeking Penelope's hand in marriage. Amphinomus sometimes speaks up for Odysseus and Telemachus, but he is killed like the rest of the suitors in the final fight.

Eumaeus - The loyal shepherd/servant who, along with the cowherd Philoetius, helps Odysseus reclaim his throne after his return to Ithaca by fighting in the battle against suitors. Even though he does not know that the vagabond who appears at his hut is Odysseus, Eumaeus gives the man food and shelter.

Eurycleia - The aged and loyal servant/nurse who nursed Odysseus and Telemachus when they were babies. Eurycleia is well informed about palace intrigues and serves as confidante to her masters. She keeps Telemachus's journey secret from Penelope, and she later keeps Odysseus's identity a secret after she recognizes a scar on his leg.

Polyphemus - One of the Cyclopes (uncivilized one-eyed giants) whose island Odysseus comes to soon after leaving Troy. Polyphemus imprisons Odysseus and his crew and tries to eat them, but Odysseus blinds him through a clever ruse and manages to escape. In doing so, however, Odysseus angers Polyphemus's father, Poseidon.

Circe - The beautiful witch-goddess who transforms Odysseus's crew into swine when he lands on her island. With Hermes' help, Odysseus resists Circe's powers and then becomes her lover, living in luxury at her side for one year as a captive.

Calypso - The beautiful nymph who falls in love with Odysseus when he lands on her island-home of Ogygia. Calypso holds him prisoner there for seven years until Hermes, the messenger god, persuades her to let him go.

Laertes - Odysseus's aging father, who resides on a farm in Ithaca. In despair and physical decline, Laertes regains his spirit when Odysseus returns and eventually kills Antinous's father.

Tiresias - A Theban prophet who inhabits the underworld (or Land of the Dead). Tiresias meets Odysseus when Odysseus journeys to the underworld in Book 11. He shows Odysseus how to get back to Ithaca and allows Odysseus to communicate with the other souls in Hades.

Nausicaa - The beautiful daughter of King Alcinous and Queen Arete of the Phaeacians. Nausicaa discovers Odysseus on the beach at Scheria and, out of budding affection for him, ensures his warm reception at her parents' palace.

Alcinous - King of the Phaeacians, who offers Odysseus hospitality in his island kingdom of Scheria. Alcinous hears the story of Odysseus's wanderings and provides him with safe passage back to Ithaca.

Aeolus – Master of the winds that helps Odysseus get within sight of home.

Eupithes – Antinous' father who seeks revenge on Odysseus.