

The Odyssey Character List (*alphabetical*)

Agamemnon - Former king of Mycenae, brother of Menelaus, and commander of the Achaean forces at Troy. Odysseus encounters Agamemnon's spirit in Hades. Agamemnon was murdered by his wife, Clytemnestra, and her lover, Aegisthus, upon his return from the war. He was later avenged by his son Orestes. Their story is constantly repeated in the *Odyssey* to offer an inverted image of the fortunes of Odysseus and Telemachus.

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.

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.

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.

Arete - Queen of the Phaeacians, wife of Alcinous, and mother of Nausicaa. Arete is intelligent and influential. Nausicaa tells Odysseus to make his appeal for assistance to Arete.

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.

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.

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 a year.

Eumaeus - The loyal shepherd who, along with the cowherd Philoetius, helps Odysseus reclaim his throne after his return to Ithaca. 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 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.

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

Helen - Wife of Menelaus and queen of Sparta. Helen's abduction from Sparta by the Trojans sparked the Trojan War. Her beauty is without parallel, but she is criticized for giving in to her Trojan captors and thereby costing many Greek men their lives. She offers Telemachus assistance in his quest to find his father.

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.

Melanthius - The brother of Melanthis. Melanthis is a treacherous and opportunistic goatherd who supports the suitors, especially Eurymachus, and abuses the beggar who appears in Odysseus's palace, not realizing that the man is Odysseus himself.

Melantho - Sister of Melanthius and maidservant in Odysseus's palace. Like her brother, Melantho abuses the beggar in the palace, not knowing that the man is Odysseus. She is having an affair with Eurymachus.

Menelaus - King of Sparta, brother of Agamemnon, and husband of Helen, he helped lead the Greeks in the Trojan War. He offers Telemachus assistance in his quest to find Odysseus when Telemachus visits him.

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.

Nestor - King of Pylos and a former warrior in the Trojan War. Like Odysseus, Nestor is known as a clever speaker. Telemachus visits him in Book 3 to ask about his father, but Nestor knows little of Odysseus's whereabouts.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

Tiresias - A Theban prophet who inhabits the underworld. 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.

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.