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# The Odyssey

Adapted by R.N. Sandberg from Homer's epic poem

# The Odyssey

*Adapted by R.N. Sandberg from Homer's epic poem. Cast: 4 to 20+ actors, gender flexible. The Odyssey is the story not only of Odysseus' journey home from the Trojan War but of his son Telemachus' path to find out who he truly is. As Odysseus encounters the one-eyed Cyclops, Telemachus struggles to keep their home safe from greedy suitors. As Odysseus battles raging seas and the sly Circe, Telemachus himself sets sail to find his father. And on their parallel journeys, Odysseus and Telemachus encounter monsters and seas so treacherous that they are challenged to their limits. Will they survive to return home? If they do, what kind of heroes will they have become? This *Odyssey* imagines a somewhat different ending from Homer's epic. But the questions to be faced are the same set out in the ancient story. How do we protect our homes? What makes something or someone a monster? How do we deal with the monsters we encounter overseas? What does it mean to be a hero, to grow up, to be civilized? How does each one of us, despite our age, fears or background, confront the obstacles that life places in our path and find our way through? *Area staging. Approximate running time: 40 minutes. Code: 073.**

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# THE ODYSSEY

Adapted

by

R.N. SANDBERG

from Homer's epic poem



**Dramatic Publishing**

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*The Odyssey* was commissioned by Tales and Scales, Evansville, Indiana. It was presented as a staged reading in the Provincetown Playhouse's New Plays for Young Audiences series, June 2003. It was premiered by Tales and Scales in September 2003 and toured nationally during the 2003-2004 and 2004-2005 seasons.

## AUTHOR'S NOTES

Comments on music casting and music:

*The Odyssey* was commissioned and premiered by Tales and Scales, an ensemble of classically trained musician/actors. The Tales and Scales performers used their instruments as props (trombone as Odysseus' bow, flute as Circe's scepter, for instance) and played a sophisticated musical score, composed by Jon Deak, as they acted *The Odyssey*. Though the Tales and Scales approach was wonderful, the piece works equally well done as any play, with actors singing at a few points and a bit of musical underscoring. This was how we presented the play when I worked on it at the Provincetown Playhouse. You should add as much music as you'd like, but please don't be concerned about making Odysseus or Telemachus singers. If they are, fine. But, really, the sea chantey and any other singing they do can be as simple as an improvised ditty they make up.

*The Odyssey* was written for four actors to do as a touring production on a bare stage. The script is spare and crisp. But for those of you who have a large company of actors or a theater capable of lighting and scenic effects, the play offers you exciting possibilities. Odysseus' crew, Polyphemus's cave, singing sirens that can be brought onstage, sea monsters that could be a whirling ensemble of ten—these are only some of the opportunities for your performers and imaginative theatrical staging.



In addition to the production benefits of *The Odyssey* and the various curricular tie-ins, it should be noted that this story is not merely one of the great touchstones of the cultural past. What I surprisingly discovered as I worked on the play is that the questions Homer was raising thousands of years ago—How do we protect our homes? How do we deal with “monsters” we encounter overseas? What does it mean to be a hero, to grow up, to be civilized?—are ones we’re still grappling with. *The Odyssey*, it seems, is a necessary journey not only for Odysseus and Telemachus but for all of us still.

# THE ODYSSEY

## CHARACTERS

ATHENA  
ODYSSEUS  
TELEMACHUS  
ANTINOUS  
CREW  
POLYPHEMUS  
CIRCE  
SIRENS  
SCYLLA  
CHARYBDIS

*The Odyssey* can be performed with 20 or more actors (for instance, a CREW of 6, 3 SIRENS and CHARYBDIS as an ensemble of 5) or with as few as 4 actors (as Tales and Scales did):

Actor 1 - ATHENA / CREW / CIRCE / SIRENS /  
SCYLLA

Actor 2 - TELEMACHUS / CREW

Actor 3 - ODYSSEUS

Actor 4 - ANTINOUS / POLYPHEMUS / CREW /  
SIRENS / CHARYBDIS

Though most of the characters in the play are of a specific gender (e.g., ODYSSEUS – male, CIRCE – female), there’s no reason an actor has to be the same gender as the character. In the Provincetown Playhouse production, TELEMACHUS was played by a female. In ancient Greece as in Shakespeare’s time, males played all female characters in plays. I’d be perfectly happy to see an all-male or an all-female production of the play.

# THE ODYSSEY

ATHENA. Let us sing, O muses.

ALL. With the Goddess Athena

ATHENA. Let us tell the tale

ODYSSEUS. Of Odysseus

TELEMACHUS. And his son Telemachus,

ATHENA & MALE 3. A tale of

Home and sea

TELEMACHUS & ODYSSEUS. Of how we are lost

And how we must find our way

ATHENA & TELEMACHUS. Despite our youth or age

ATHENA & ODYSSEUS. Despite our rashness or fear

ATHENA & MALE 3. How? How to find our path?

ATHENA. Let us tell the tale of

ALL. The Odyssey.

*(A huge wave crashes. ODYSSEUS rows through the storm singing a sea chantey.)*

ODYSSEUS. My ship sails on the raging seas

The wind blows gainst my steadfast knees

TELEMACHUS. Father, where are you?

ODYSSEUS. But still I bluster through and through  
Till I come back to you, my dears  
Heigh ho.

TELEMACHUS. Father, we need you.

*(ODYSSEUS repeats his song as ATHENA speaks.)*

ATHENA.

Ten years Odysseus  
Led the Greeks  
In their fight  
Against Troy.  
Troy now vanquished,  
The others all safely home,  
Only brave Odysseus  
Has not returned.  
And his good-hearted son Telemachus  
Despairs.

TELEMACHUS. Father, come home.

*(ODYSSEUS drifts off.*

*ANTINOUS, an Ithacan lord, struts on.)*

ANTINOUS. Hey. Prince of Ithaca.

TELEMACHUS. Antinous.

ANTINOUS. Stop whinin. You're fatherless. Accept it.

TELEMACHUS. Why haven't you guided him home, Athena?

ANTINOUS. Look, you know how many guys got killed fightin in Troy? You know how many didn't make it through storms comin back?

TELEMACHUS. My father is not other people.

ANTINOUS. Your father's not here. And he's not gonna be. Ever. It's been years. He's dead, swallowed up by the sea, or starved on some desert island. And you're just like any other kid whose old man's not around. You're alone, you and your mom, and you gotta face it. Look, I know it's hard. That's why me and the guys are here.

TELEMACHUS. You're here because you want to take his place.

ANTINOUS. Exactly right. You need a dad. Your mother needs a husband.

TELEMACHUS. No.

ANTINOUS. Your mom's gotta choose which of us'll slip that ring on her finger and plop himself down on the throne of Ithaca.

TELEMACHUS. My father is the only one who'll sit on that throne.

ANTINOUS. Am I missing something? Hello. He's not here.

TELEMACHUS. You're not worthy to take his place. You couldn't even string his bow.

ANTINOUS. Who cares about your old man's famous bow? Look, peewee, she's gonna choose, and if you're lucky, that means we won't toss you out.

TELEMACHUS. You wouldn't dare.

ANTINOUS. Try me, little prince. She's choosin, now. (*He exits.*)

TELEMACHUS. O Athena, help us. Bring back my father.

ATHENA. Stop tossing empty words at Athena, child. You must act. Stand up to Antinous. Tell him to leave this house at once.

TELEMACHUS. He won't listen to me. He's a grown man and I'm a kid.

ATHENA. You're a prince. And this is your house.

TELEMACHUS. A prince.

Like my father.

ATHENA. Like and not like your father.

(*ODYSSEUS rows on the distant sea.*)

ATHENA. There are many ways to be strong.

What gleams as riches

May not always be wealth.

ODYSSEUS. Comrades, come, come.

(*The actors playing TELEMACHUS and ATHENA become ODYSSEUS' CREW.*)

ODYSSEUS. Pull with all your strength for Greece. For Ithaca. For our families.

CREW (ATHENA). Look, Captain, there's an island.

ODYSSEUS. The island of the Cyclops, friends. Riches and pleasures. Row for it.

CREW (TELEMACHUS). But what about Ithaca?

ODYSSEUS. After we fill our stomachs. Row. Row.

CREW (T). What is this Cyclops, Captain?

ODYSSEUS. His cave is filled with rich meat and luscious cheese.

CREW (A). All right, I'm starving!

ODYSSEUS. Out of the boats, comrades. There's the cave. It's dinnertime!

*(They enter the cave.)*

ODYSSEUS. Look.

CREW. Oh!

ODYSSEUS. Look at this loaf of bread! It's as big as my son probably is by now. And this hunk of cheese, it's the size of my bed at home. Eat, friends, eat. But make it quick. For the Cyclops—is a one-eyed—brutish—giant!

*(POLYPHEMUS enters driving in the "flock" with his staff.)*

POLYPHEMUS. Come on, sheep sheep. Good lamb chops, fat mutton rams, in you go.

ODYSSEUS. Look at those animals! They're bigger than we are.

CREW (T). We need to go home.

POLYPHEMUS. Into the cave, now, you little choppies and lambie roasts.

ODYSSEUS. And look at him. He's gigantic!

CREW (T). We need to go home.

ODYSSEUS. Ssh.



POLYPHEMUS. Into the cave for the night. Time to rest, time to let your flesh grow sweet and tender.

ODYSSEUS. Careful, comrades. Very quiet. Slowly by the edge and we can get around him.

POLYPHEMUS. What's been going on here? Someone's been eating my food. And that someone's—still here! Who's in my den? Who are you? Ah, humans.

ODYSSEUS. Quickly, comrades. Run.

POLYPHEMUS. Too late. This rock closes the entrance. You'll have to stay for dinner. I'll love having you for dinner. There's nothing tastier than human flesh.

ODYSSEUS. Hide, try to get in the cracks of the rocks.

*(POLYPHEMUS catches one of the CREW.)*

POLYPHEMUS. Oh, you smell good. Nice and sweaty and hairy.

ODYSSEUS & CREW. Let him go. Let him go, you brute.

POLYPHEMUS. Let's see if you taste as good as you smell.

ODYSSEUS & CREW. No! No! Nooo!

POLYPHEMUS. Umm, not too bad. A little salty, but very juicy. I think I'll have another.

CREW. No! No!

ODYSSEUS. It's horrible. I can't look.

POLYPHEMUS. Um, that's what I call nicely aged meat. Well, good night, humans. Or should I say "Good night, breakfast." *(He goes to sleep.)*

ODYSSEUS. Help me with his staff. If we heat the tip in the fire...

CREW (A). It's starting to glow.

ODYSSEUS. Just a little more. Careful, now. Bring it this way. Ready? One. Two. Three.

POLYPHEMUS. Ahhhhhhh! Ahhhhhhhhhhh! My eye! I can't see! I can't see! Light! Give me light! (*He moves the rock.*) Get out of my way, you sheep! Out of— Oh no, the humans!

ODYSSEUS. Yes, we've escaped!

POLYPHEMUS. You! You're the one who did this to me!

ODYSSEUS. Yes, I, Odysseus, did it! Think of Odysseus the next time you want to eat human flesh. Think of Odysseus when your head throbs and the world's dark.

(*ODYSSEUS and the CREW "row" away.*)

POLYPHEMUS. Odysseus! I curse you, you thief. You broke into my home. You took my sight. O my father, powerful Poseidon, god of the sea, hear me and punish him! Bring your storms! Blind him! Let him suffer in darkness as I do!

(*The seas are tumultuous.*)

ODYSSEUS. Oh. Whoa. Ohhhhhh. (*ODYSSEUS disappears.*)

TELEMACHUS. My father is never afraid. He's brave and resourceful.

ATHENA. But now, it is up to you.  
This house holds your battle.

TELEMACHUS. How can I be strong like him?

ATHENA. Find your own way.

Make this house

Yours.

TELEMACHUS. This is my house.

*(ANTINOUS strides on.)*

ANTINOUS. What are you looking so scared about, pee-wee? I'm not gonna do anything to you—yet. You know why, pal? Cause I think your mom's ready for a new husband.

TELEMACHUS. No. As—as prince of this land, I—say it is time for you, and all the others—to leave.

ANTINOUS. Leave?

TELEMACHUS. Honor the code of hospitality and civilization. Gather your things and go.

ANTINOUS. Or what? You'll throw us out?

TELEMACHUS. Honor the law, Antinous.

ANTINOUS. Make me.

TELEMACHUS. Athena? Athena, I can't.

ANTINOUS. Yeah, cause you don't have a famous bow like your father and I don't need any arrows to squeeze the life out of you.

TELEMACHUS. Antinous—

ANTINOUS. No one's leaving. *(He tosses TELEMACHUS aside and sweeps off.)*

*(A huge storm begins.)*

TELEMACHUS. I know what my father would do.

ODYSSEUS. Fight the storm, comrades!

ATHENA. Telemachus

ODYSSEUS. We can make it!

ATHENA. Telemachus, find your own way.

ODYSSEUS. Throw everything into it.

ATHENA. What you will do.

ODYSSEUS. Row, friends!

TELEMACHUS. My path is

ODYSSEUS. Through the waves!

TELEMACHUS. The sea, like my father. I will find him  
and bring him home.

ATHENA. In that storm?

TELEMACHUS. I'm my father's child. I can do it.

ATHENA. And what about your mother?

TELEMACHUS. My mother's strong. My absence will  
make her stronger. She won't give in till she knows  
what's happened to me.

ATHENA. Then board your ship, Telemachus.

*(The storm abates as ODYSSEUS and CREW "row" on.  
They are tossed to shore.)*

ODYSSEUS. We made it, comrades.

CREW (T). And this island looks—

*(CIRCE enters playing her "scepter.")*

CREW (ANTINOUS). Enchanting.

CIRCE. Yoohoo? Yoohoo? Oh boys, come here.

ODYSSEUS. It's Queen Circe. She's a sorceress.

CIRCE. Oh my, a boatload o' sailors. And don't you poor  
things look beat. You must be famished. Come on, come  
on and get a little nourishment, sailors. Drink some of

my nectar and you'll be more refreshed than you ever imagined.

CREW (A). All right!

ODYSSEUS. Thank you, Queen. Your offer is kind, but we do not wish to trouble you. We are used to hunting for our food.

CIRCE. O silly, there's nothing for you to hunt on this island. Everything wild's been tamed. All the beasts live in peace here. Come and have a drink.

CREW (A). Okay!

ODYSSEUS. Careful, comrades. She's not what she seems.

CIRCE. Say, you're that tricky Odysseus, aren't you? Don't be so suspicious. I only wanna relieve you of your burdens. Come on, sailor boys, drink up.

CREW (A). All right!

*(She pours from her "scepter" into the sailors' mouths.)*

ODYSSEUS. Wait, comrades, wait.

CIRCE. You see, they aren't afraid. They're lappin it up like wildcats. And now they're peaceful as kittens. Come on, Ody, have a drink.

ODYSSEUS. Your nectar, I'm sure is sweet, Queen, but I will find my own food.

CIRCE. If that's the way you want it, be my guest, big boy. Roam the island. Knock yourself out.

ODYSSEUS. I thank Your Highness. *(He moves off and hides.)*

CIRCE. Now, you sailors, now, my pets, up, up, up. *(She touches them with her "scepter.")*

CREW. Oink, oink.

ODYSSEUS. Oh no. No! She's turned them into pigs. My comrades are pigs!

CREW. Oink, oink. Oink, oink.

CIRCE. Oh, you cute little piggies, with your floppy ears and your curlicue tails and your fat little pink bellies. I just wanna eat you up.

CREW. Oink, oink.

CIRCE. And you know what, piggies? That's what I'm gonna do. Cause I just love barbecue. Umm um um. Now, into the oven.

ODYSSEUS. Queen Circe.

CIRCE. Ah, Odysseus.

ODYSSEUS. I've searched the island and I've found nothing as enticing as your nectar.

CIRCE. Oh, you smart little boy.

ODYSSEUS. My crew seemed to like it so much.

CIRCE. They're in pig heaven.

ODYSSEUS. If your offer still stands, I'd like to join them.

CIRCE. By all means. Why should you be the only poor sufferin human?

ODYSSEUS. Let me drink, then.

*(She pours from her "scepter.")*

CIRCE. Oh, you good boy. You good, sweet boy.

*(ODYSSEUS holds her "scepter" as she pours. He takes the "scepter" from her, turning it all the way upside down.)*

CIRCE. That's it, get every last drop. It'll make you so—nice—and—tender. Ha ha ha.