

THE ODYSSEY (2026)

Screenwriter's Breakdown for Students & Educators

Nick Runyard
8FLiX Institute for Screenwriters (8FLiX), Toronto
nick@8flix.com

SOURCE MATERIAL

SCREENPLAY: The Odyssey (2026)

WRITTEN BY: Christopher Nolan (based on Homer's *Odyssey*)

VERSION: Final/Edited for Screenplay Book (Red Pages)
25 January 2026
146 pages
<https://8flix.com/scripts/film/the-odyssey-2026-screenplay/>

GENRES: Action, Adventure, Fantasy, Political Thriller

PSEUDO SYLLABUS

MENTOR: Nick Runyard

PROFICIENCY: NOVICE | **ADVANCED BEGINNER** | COMPETENT | PROFICIENT | EXPERT

REQUIRED READING: The Odyssey (2026) Screenplay (8FLiX.com [free account required for downloads]).

OPTIONAL READING: The Odyssey (Homer, public domain work)

DUE DATES: What you can, when you can.

OVERVIEW

Adaptation, Memory, Leadership, and the Dangerous Stories Nations Tell About Victory

After twenty years of war and wandering, a battle-scarred Odysseus must recover the memory of what he has done, survive the consequences of his command, and return in disguise to a kingdom where his wife and son are fighting a quieter war for their home.

Educator Sensitivity Note

The screenplay contains graphic combat, cannibalism, animal death, child sacrifice, coercive relationships, mutilation, mass killing and references to sexual violence committed during war. Circe directly confronts Odysseus with the rape and pillage carried out by soldiers under his command.

The material is best suited to senior secondary or postsecondary study, particularly when paired with discussion of trauma, military authority, historical memory and the ethics of representing civilian suffering.

WHY THIS SCREENPLAY MATTERS

It treats adaptation as interpretation.

A weaker adaptation might simply arrange the Trojan Horse, the Cyclops, Circe, the Sirens, Scylla and the bow contest into an expensive mythological parade.

This screenplay gives those episodes a common purpose. Each one tests a different aspect of Odysseus's leadership:

- The Cyclops tests courage, ingenuity and vengeance.
- Circe forces him to confront the appetite and savagery of his own soldiers.
- Hades makes the dead witnesses against the living.
- The Sirens expose what Odysseus secretly desires.
- Scylla and Charybdis turn leadership into an unbearable calculation.
- Apollo's cattle reveal that a commander cannot save people from choices they insist on making.
- Calypso offers him the narcotic comfort of forgetting.

The result is a story in which spectacle never sits apart from character. Every creature is also a question.

It reframes the hero.

Odysseus remains brilliant, brave and resourceful. He returns to the Cyclops's cave rather than abandon the soldiers trapped inside, devises their escape, saves Telemachus at Pylos and ultimately defeats the suitors. But the screenplay refuses to let competence equal innocence.

His intelligence helped win the Trojan War, yet the victory enabled a night of massacre and the collapse of a social order built upon hospitality, trade and mutual obligation. His celebrated trick becomes, in his own assessment, the act that taught the world how completely sacred trust could be weaponized.

That is the screenplay's sharpest adaptation choice: the legendary solution becomes the original wound.

CORE TEACHING FOCUS

Adapting a familiar story by changing the dramatic question.

The screenplay does not ask whether Odysseus will survive the famous monsters. Most viewers already know that he will. Instead, it asks:

Can a man return home after helping destroy the world that made home possible?

That question converts a collection of legendary adventures into one sustained moral argument.

The monsters, storms and gods remain spectacular, but the screenplay repeatedly brings the narrative back to human responsibility. Odysseus's decisions save lives, cost lives and gradually fracture the trust of the men he commands. In Hades, the dead confront him not merely with loss, but with the consequences of the stories he told and the people he treated as pieces in a strategy.

STORY STRUCTURE BREAKDOWN

Act I: The House Without a King

The screenplay opens not with Odysseus, but with a bard performing his legend. Penelope interrupts because she does not want another song about her husband. She wants the man himself.

That distinction establishes the central conflict immediately:

- Public myth versus private memory.
- Heroic reputation versus human absence.
- The story of Odysseus versus the cost of being loved by him.

Ithaca is rotting from the inside. The suitors exploit the laws of hospitality, consume the palace's resources and bait Telemachus into giving them justification to kill him. Penelope delays remarriage by weaving and secretly unravelling a burial shroud, but the deception cannot last forever.

Telemachus wants to inherit his father's authority before he has inherited his discipline. His inability to string Odysseus's bow makes the problem physical: he wants the role, but cannot yet carry its weight.

After the suitors abuse Eumaeus and nearly kill Argus, Telemachus decides to sail for Sparta and seek information from Menelaus. His journey begins as a search for his father, but it will become an education in leadership.

Meanwhile, Odysseus lives with Calypso, drugged by lotus and unable to remember his past. He feels that someone is waiting for him, but cannot yet name Penelope. His conscious goal is home; his unconscious desire is not to remember why he has avoided it.

Act I Turning Point

Odysseus begins reconstructing the voyage after Troy, while Telemachus leaves Ithaca to find him.

Father and son are now travelling toward one another through different versions of the same story.

STORY STRUCTURE BREAKDOWN (cont.)

Act II(a): The Heroic Story Begins to Rot

Odysseus leaves Troy with three ships and chooses an unfamiliar route rather than follow Agamemnon along the known supply line. The decision contains his entire character:

- He is independent.
- He is curious.
- He trusts his own intelligence.
- He believes risk can be mastered.
- He wants to see the world and still beat everyone home.

It is adventurous, charming and catastrophically revealing.

The Cyclops

The Cyclops sequence establishes Odysseus's leadership at its most impressive and most dangerous.

He refuses to abandon trapped soldiers and invents a brutal escape. Yet after reaching safety, he fires another arrow at the blinded creature. The action does nothing to help his men. It is vengeance, pride and grief disguised as justice.

That unnecessary arrow turns survival into a feud with Poseidon and begins the crew's loss of faith in him.

Telemachus and the Trojan Horse

At Sparta, Telemachus hears the heroic version of his father from Menelaus. The Trojan Horse is described from inside its cramped, flooded body, where men drown, bleed and wait among decomposing comrades.

This is exposition presented as ordeal rather than lecture. The famous legend becomes tactile, claustrophobic and morally unstable.

Telemachus receives the version that nations prefer to preserve: Odysseus the brilliant strategist who ended the war.

The audience is gradually being prepared for the version Odysseus cannot bear to tell.

STORY STRUCTURE BREAKDOWN

Act II(a): The Heroic Story Begins to Rot (cont.)

The Laestrygonians and Circe

The Laestrygonians destroy two of Odysseus's remaining ships. The loss weakens his authority and allows Eurylochus to emerge as the voice of the crew.

Circe then pushes the screenplay beyond a conventional enchantment narrative. She insists that she has not transformed the men into pigs. She has merely *revealed* what they already are: soldiers governed by appetite, entitlement and violence.

Her accusation also implicates Odysseus. A commander cannot praise savagery in war and then pretend to be surprised when his men carry it into another person's home.

Midpoint: Hades Changes the Question

The journey into Hades is the screenplay's structural and moral midpoint.

Until this point, the dramatic question appears to be:

How can Odysseus get his men home?

Tiresias changes it to:

Why does Odysseus believe he can defeat every consequence of his own decisions?

Sinon confronts Odysseus over the lie that made the Trojan Horse possible. Agamemnon warns him that homecomings can be traps. Tiresias reveals that Odysseus's men will die through a combination of fate, fear, hunger, mutiny and their leader's refusal to accept sacrifice.

Odysseus hears the prophecy and immediately treats it as another problem to solve. He does not yet understand that his compulsion to defeat fate is part of the machinery fulfilling it.

This is an excellent midpoint because it supplies information while making the protagonist less capable of understanding himself.

STORY STRUCTURE BREAKDOWN (cont.)

Act II(b): Knowing the Future Does Not Prevent It

The Sirens

Odysseus orders his men's ears blocked but has himself tied to the mast so he can hear the Sirens.

The decision is quintessential Odysseus. He will obey the warning and violate it simultaneously.

The song does not simply promise pleasure. It exposes regret, failed promises and his buried reluctance to return home. For the first time, Odysseus admits that some part of him does not want to go back.

Scylla and Charybdis

Tiresias told Odysseus that Charybdis would kill everyone while Scylla would take six.

Odysseus conceals this information. When Eurylochus chooses the apparently safer channel, six men are seized by Scylla. Odysseus defends the result as the only choice that preserved the ship.

Eurylochus's answer contains the entire ethical problem:

Some of us live.

The scene turns leadership into a debate over consent. Odysseus may have made the correct tactical decision, but he denied the crew the truth required to understand the cost.

Apollo's Cattle

The crew lands on Apollo's island after promising not to harm the cattle. A persistent wind prevents departure, their supplies disappear, and starvation defeats obedience.

When Odysseus discovers the slaughtered ox, his response is not fury but exhaustion. He wanted his men to live, but could not save them from hunger, despair or themselves.

The storm that follows destroys the final ship and kills the crew. Odysseus survives alone, clutching Penelope's pin even after he has forgotten her name.

STORY STRUCTURE BREAKDOWN

Act II(b): Knowing the Future Does Not Prevent It (cont.)

Calypso and the Memory Reveal

Calypso reveals that Odysseus has lived with her for seven years. She saved his body, fed him lotus and postponed the return of his memory because she had fallen in love with him.

Her island offers something more dangerous than imprisonment: happiness without accountability.

The golden pin restores Penelope's name and reconnects Odysseus with the self he tried to bury. He constructs a raft and finally accepts that he cannot outfight the sea. To reach Ithaca, he must surrender control and allow Poseidon's punishment to carry him home.

Act II Turning Point

Odysseus washes ashore on Ithaca.

He has reached home geographically, but the screenplay delays emotional homecoming until he has faced his son, his wife and the truth about Troy.

STORY STRUCTURE BREAKDOWN (cont.)

Act III: The Last Battlefield Is Home

Odysseus returns disguised as a beggar and finds Eumaeus injured after an attack ordered by the suitors. He learns that Telemachus is walking into an ambush and races to Pylos.

At the temple, Odysseus and Telemachus fight together before either can fully acknowledge their relationship. Telemachus refuses to abandon Mentor's body, directly challenging the survival-first philosophy Odysseus employed throughout the voyage.

The son has inherited his father's courage but not yet his willingness to treat the dead as necessary losses.

The Recognition of Argus

Telemachus eventually recognizes Odysseus through Argus.

Odysseus speaks the dog's name, and Argus survives long enough to acknowledge his master before dying. Telemachus understands that no ordinary beggar could know where Odysseus first met the animal.

The recognition works because it depends on private memory rather than heroic proof. A dog accomplishes what songs, armour and war stories cannot.

The Beggar's View

Odysseus enters the palace as a beggar because, as he tells Telemachus:

The clearest view of a person is from below.

The disguise lets him test the suitors, witness Telemachus's growing authority and approach Penelope without demanding immediate recognition.

STORY STRUCTURE BREAKDOWN

Act III: The Last Battlefield Is Home (cont.)

Odysseus and Penelope at the Screen

The conversation between Odysseus and Penelope is the screenplay's true emotional climax.

They sit inches apart, divided by a screen. Penelope asks the stranger about her husband, while Odysseus describes himself in the third person. Eurycleia recognizes his scar, but Penelope is allowed to reach the truth through emotional testimony rather than a simple reveal.

Odysseus finally confesses what he saw after opening Troy's gates. The Greeks did not merely win a battle. They transformed hospitality into a weapon, turned combat into slaughter and broke a bond upon which civilization depended.

Penelope does not absolve him. She corrects him:

What all of you had done.

The line refuses both individual innocence and convenient solitary guilt. Odysseus conceived the trick, but an entire culture participated in the destruction.

The Bow Contest

Penelope announces that she will marry the man capable of stringing Odysseus's bow and firing through the twelve axe heads.

The challenge is simultaneously:

- A political trap.
- A recognition ritual.
- A weapon-delivery system.
- A test of masculine performance.
- Penelope's way of engineering Odysseus's return without publicly declaring it.

When Odysseus strings the bow, the screenplay collapses twenty years of memory into one sound: the resonant twang introduced near the beginning.

STORY STRUCTURE BREAKDOWN

Act III: The Last Battlefield Is Home (cont.)

The Final Battle

The slaughter of the suitors is not clean or triumphal. Odysseus is overwhelmed, wounded and nearly killed. Telemachus gives him the sword that allows him to reach Antinous.

Odysseus places Sinon's wooden lot into Antinous's mouth before killing him, returning the shame Antinous had spent years rewriting into a heroic story.

The climax therefore resolves three stories at once:

- Odysseus reclaims his house.
- Telemachus becomes capable of ruling it.
- Sinon's forgotten sacrifice is finally answered.

The Ending

The screenplay does not restore the old world.

Odysseus takes responsibility for the bloodshed so Telemachus can remain in Ithaca and become king. Rather than die, Odysseus accepts exile. Penelope joins him on a voyage west to honour the men whose bodies were never properly buried.

The ending fulfils the dream Penelope described before Odysseus left for Troy: taking the fastest ship, holding hands and chasing the escaping sun. What once represented escape from duty now becomes an act of remembrance and restitution.

Their final conversation moves from personal history to civilizational memory. Writing may disappear, stories may survive only in song, and the world may eventually rebuild.

Odysseus's final observation is darker: civilization will rise, and humanity will forget its mistakes again.

The screenplay ends not on the peaceful western horizon, but on the burning Trojan Horse collapsing against Athena's temple. Victory remains the image beneath every homecoming.

CHARACTER STUDY

Odysseus

External Want: Return to Ithaca and reunite with Penelope.

Internal Need: Accept responsibility without believing that responsibility gives him control over everything.

Defining Contradiction: Odysseus genuinely loves his men, yet repeatedly makes decisions for them without giving them the knowledge needed to understand those decisions

He is capable of extraordinary compassion and ruthless calculation, sometimes within the same scene.

Strength as Flaw

His intelligence allows him to survive every impossible situation. It also convinces him that every situation can be solved.

He can escape a Cyclops, deceive a city and navigate between monsters. What he cannot do is outthink grief, history or the independent will of other human beings

Arc

Odysseus begins as a commander who believes outcomes validate methods. He ends as a man who understands that survival does not erase obligation.

His final voyage is not another attempt to escape consequence. It is a deliberate journey toward it.

CHARACTER STUDY (cont.)

Penelope

Penelope is not written as a woman passively waiting beside a loom. She has governed Ithaca for twenty years while being denied recognition as its legitimate ruler.

Her screen is a rich dramatic device. It protects her reputation and limits the suitors' access, but it also makes visible the political boundary imposed upon her. She runs the kingdom while men call the throne empty.

Her methods parallel Odysseus's:

He survives through disguise.

She survives through performance.

He constructs a wooden horse.

She constructs an unfinished shroud.

He tests the suitors as a beggar.

She tests them with the bow.

Both understand that direct force must sometimes be preceded by deception.

Penelope is therefore not simply the destination of Odysseus's journey. She is his strategic equal and the person most capable of understanding what his intelligence has cost

CHARACTER STUDY (cont.)

Telemachus

Telemachus begins by confusing anger with authority.

He reaches for a sword when provoked, wants the throne before he can string the bow and measures himself against an idealized father he never knew.

His journey to Sparta dismantles that fantasy. Menelaus gives him heroic stories, political advice and evidence that homecoming can destroy families rather than restore them.

By the time he returns, Telemachus can:

- Conceal information.
- Control a public room.
- Read political danger.
- Coordinate loyal servants.
- Protect the future of Ithaca.
- Fight beside his father without disappearing beneath him.

His final act of maturity is remaining behind. Odysseus sails away, allowing the son to inherit responsibility rather than merely inherit a legend.

Eurylochus

Eurylochus is not a cowardly subordinate inserted to make Odysseus look heroic. He functions as the crew's political voice.

He questions unnecessary risks, challenges Odysseus's secrecy and eventually refuses to let one man's certainty determine every life aboard the ship.

He *is* sometimes wrong, but his objections are legitimate. His presence prevents the screenplay from treating command as a magical property possessed by the protagonist.

Through Eurylochus, the screenplay asks:

At what point does leadership become ownership?

CHARACTER STUDY (cont.)

Antinous

Antinous understands that power depends upon controlling the story.

He recasts his avoidance of the Trojan War as proof that Odysseus trusted him with Ithaca's future. He presents coercion as courtship, exploitation as hospitality and ambition as concern for political stability.

His deepest shame is not simply that Sinon went to war in his place. It is that Antinous has spent years rewriting the exchange into a story in which he was brave.

The wooden lot makes that buried truth physical.

Calypso

Calypso is rescuer, captor, lover and anesthetist.

She gives Odysseus something Penelope cannot: a life untouched by history. Her island allows him to remain alive without being accountable to the living or the dead.

Her tragedy is that the happiness she creates is real to her, but cannot be fully real to a man deprived of his memory and will.

CHARACTER STUDY (cont.)

Athena

Athena occupies a deliberately unstable space.

She may be:

- A literal divine presence.
- Odysseus's conscience.
- Read political danger.
- A recurring trauma image.
- The memory of a Trojan woman he failed to save.
- Several of these simultaneously.

The screenplay associates her with grey eyes, judgment, strategy and the repeated image of her decapitated statue.

That ambiguity lets mythology and psychology occupy the same frame without forcing the audience to choose between them.

MAJOR THEMES

1. Stories Can Preserve Truth or Launder It

Bards turn war into rhythm, sacrifice into heroism and destroyed lives into memorable verses.

The screenplay values stories, but distrusts the people who control them. Menelaus's version of the Horse celebrates Odysseus's brilliance. Odysseus's later version remembers what poured through the gates.

The difference is *not* factual. It is moral.

2. Hospitality Is Civilization in Miniature

Zeus's law is treated as more than ancient etiquette. It is the fragile agreement that strangers will not exploit vulnerability.

The Cyclops violates it by devouring guests. The suitors violate it by consuming their host's home. The Greeks violate it by disguising an invasion as a sacred offering.

Once hospitality becomes a weapon, every threshold becomes dangerous.

3. Homecoming Is Not the Same as Going Back

The physical house may remain, but neither Odysseus nor Ithaca is unchanged.

The screenplay rejects restoration fantasy. There is no return to the morning before the war. The only possible homecoming requires truth, succession and departure.

4. Leadership Is the Management of Unpayable Costs

Odysseus repeatedly chooses between terrible outcomes. The script does not pretend that command can remain morally clean.

Its harder question is whether a leader has the right to hide the cost from those who must pay it.

MAJOR THEMES (cont.)

4. Memory Is Painful, but Forgetting Is Captivity

The lotus removes grief by removing agency.

Odysseus cannot return to Penelope until he remembers not only that he loves her, but *why* he became afraid to face her.

5. Civilization Is Fragile and Cyclical

Palaces, writing, trade and law appear permanent until people stop respecting what they represent.

The screenplay's bleakest idea is that societies do not collapse only because monsters arrive from outside. They collapse when ordinary violations become acceptable inside the house.

MAJOR THEMES (cont.)

Recurring Motifs

Eyes and Blindness

The screenplay repeatedly separates sight from understanding:

- The Cyclops has one enormous eye but little interest in seeing humans as people.
- Eumaeus is blind but recognizes loyalty.
- Tiresias is blind but sees the future.
- Athena is associated with wise grey eyes.
- Telemachus repeatedly looks for divinity in human eyes.
- Odysseus sees Troy's destruction but spends years refusing to understand what he saw.

The Bowstring and the Beat

The bard's staff, marching weapons, and Odysseus's plucked bow create a recurring percussion.

The sound links:

- Storytelling.
- War.
- Hunting.
- Recognition.
- Execution.
- Memory.

By the climax, the bow's twang functions almost as a name spoken aloud.

MAJOR THEMES

Recurring Motifs (cont.)

Gifts

The screenplay repeatedly corrupts the idea of a gift:

- The Horse is presented as an offering.
- Hospitality becomes exploitation.
- Calypso's care becomes captivity.
- Antinous offers protection in exchange for Penelope.
- Penelope's bow challenge appears to offer marriage but delivers judgment.

Thresholds, Screens and Gates

Characters are constantly crossing or defending boundaries:

- The gates of Troy.
- The entrance to the Cyclops's cave.
- Circe's doorway.
- The screen protecting Penelope.
- The locked palace doors.
- The western horizon.

The plot advances whenever someone violates, opens or chooses to cross a threshold.

Objects as Memory Containers

The screenplay gives emotional history to a small group of physical objects:

- Sinon's wooden lot.
- Penelope's golden pin.
- Eurylochus's ring.
- Odysseus's scar.
- The hunting bow.

Each object carries information that dialogue alone would struggle to deliver without becoming explanatory soup.

CRAFT LESSONS FOR SCREENWRITERS

Lesson 1: Adapt the Meaning, Not Merely the Events

A canonical source is not a museum exhibit. The writer must decide what the story means now.

Here, the adaptation is organized around moral consequence, historical memory and leadership rather than simple adventure.

Lesson 2: Give Parallel Timelines a Thematic Relationship

The timelines do not merely alternate for variety.

Telemachus learns the heroic story while Odysseus remembers its cost. Penelope fights to preserve Ithaca while Odysseus discovers how his victory helped destabilize the world beyond it.

Each thread changes how the others are understood.

Lesson 3: Make Spectacle the Result of Character Choice

The Cyclops, Scylla, the cattle and the suitor massacre do not occur because the screenplay needs action every fifteen pages.

Each sequence grows from a decision:

- Enter the cave.
- Fire the extra arrow.
- Conceal the prophecy.
- Land on the island.
- Remove the weapons.
- Give the beggar the bow.

The action therefore reveals character rather than interrupting it.

CRAFT LESSONS FOR SCREENWRITERS (cont.)

Lesson 4: Let the Protagonist's Gift and Flaw Share an Engine

Odysseus survives because he believes a solution exists.

He suffers because he believes a solution always exists.

That unity makes the flaw feel organic rather than attached during revision with narrative duct tape.

Lesson 5: Turn Exposition Into Testimony

Menelaus, Sinon, Agamemnon and Odysseus recount past events, but *none* provides neutral information.

Every account contains pride, guilt, grief, denial or accusation.

The audience learns the plot while deciding whose moral interpretation to trust.

Lesson 6: Use Objects to Delay Recognition

The pin, scar, lot, dog and bow allow different characters to recognize Odysseus at different moments.

This creates a ladder of revelation rather than one large identity dump.

Lesson 7: Give the Antagonist Social Power

The suitors are dangerous not merely because they have weapons. They understand law, reputation, inheritance and hospitality well enough to exploit them.

The heroes cannot simply kill them without creating political consequences.

CRAFT LESSONS FOR SCREENWRITERS (cont.)

Lesson 8: Continue Beyond the Apparent Victory

Many versions could end with the death of the suitors.

This screenplay continues long enough to ask what reclaiming the palace actually costs. The answer is succession for Telemachus and exile for Odysseus.

KEY SCENES TO STUDY

1. Penelope Stops the Song

Study: Theme declaration, public myth versus private need.

2. Telemachus Tries to String the Bow

Study: Physicalizing inadequacy and planting the climax.

3. Odysseus Returns to the Cyclops's Cave

Study: Demonstrating courage before exposing pride.

4. The Trojan Horse From Inside

Study: Making a familiar set piece unfamiliar through viewpoint and physical detail.

5. Circe Reveals the Pigs

Study: Turning magic into character judgment.

6. Sinon Confronts Odysseus in Hades

Study: Making a minor mythological figure central to the protagonist's guilt.

7. The Sirens' Song

Study: Externalizing subconscious desire without explaining it literally.

KEY SCENES TO STUDY (cont.)

8. Scylla and Charybdis

Study: Leadership, secrecy and the ethics of sacrifice.

9. Calypso Returns the Pin

Study: Object-based memory recovery and emotional reversal.

10. Argus Recognizes Odysseus

Study: Quiet recognition following large-scale spectacle.

11. Odysseus Speaks to Penelope Through the Screen

Study: Dramatic irony, confession and delayed reunion.

12. The Bow Contest

Study: Plant-and-payoff construction, tension, reversal and symbolic action.

CRITICAL LENS – *OPINE*

What the Screenplay Gets Right

It Questions Heroism Without Making Courage Meaningless

Odysseus remains genuinely heroic. The screenplay simply refuses to treat heroism as moral immunity.

It Gives Penelope Political Intelligence

Her resistance is strategic, administrative and emotionally complicated. She is not frozen in devotional amber.

It Makes the Crew Matter

The men are not merely a countdown of future corpses. Through Eurylochus, their fear and distrust become part of the central dramatic conflict.

It Connects Private Violence to Civilizational Collapse

The fall of the Bronze Age is framed not as an abstract historical event, but as the cumulative result of broken agreements, corrupted hospitality and normalized predation.

CRITICAL LENS – *OPINE* (cont.)

Where It May Fall Short

Penelope's Departure Can Be Debated

Penelope has governed Ithaca for twenty years while men describe its throne as empty. The conclusion gives the kingdom to Telemachus and sends her west with Odysseus.

That ending is emotionally satisfying, but students may reasonably ask whether it undercuts the screenplay's own critique of a society that refuses to recognize her authority.

Anonymous Suffering Sometimes Serves Odysseus's Arc

The destruction of Troy is presented as evidence of Odysseus's trauma and guilt. Many of the victims remain anonymous.

This creates a productive but uncomfortable question: does the screenplay fully centre the people harmed by war, or does their suffering primarily deepen the returning soldier?

Antinous Loses Some Early Complexity

His early scenes combine charm, political logic, insecurity and manipulation. As the assassination plot advances, he becomes more openly monstrous.

That strengthens the climax but narrows the moral ambiguity established earlier.

The Density Can Compress Emotional Aftermath

The screenplay moves rapidly through famous episodes. The structural momentum is impressive, but some deaths and reversals receive limited recovery time before the next trial arrives.

This may be intentional, reflecting the numbing accumulation of war. It may also leave some supporting characters feeling functional rather than fully lived.

CLASSROOM DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. At what moment does Odysseus's intelligence become destructive rather than protective?
2. Is Odysseus morally justified in concealing the truth about Scylla from his crew?
3. Why does Telemachus recognize his father through Argus rather than through strength, appearance or military skill?
4. Is Calypso's relationship with Odysseus loving, coercive or both?
5. What does the screenplay gain by presenting the Trojan Horse first as a heroic story and later as a moral catastrophe?
6. Does Penelope know who the beggar is before the bow contest? What evidence supports either interpretation?
7. How does Zeus's law connect the Cyclops, the suitors and the destruction of Troy?
8. Is exile a punishment, an escape or the first responsible choice Odysseus makes freely?
9. What does the final image of the burning Horse suggest about humanity's ability to learn from history?

WRITING EXERCISES

Exercise 1: The Famous Story From the Wrong Seat

Choose a well-known historical, mythological or fairy-tale event.

Rewrite it from the perspective of someone trapped inside the mechanism that makes the famous event possible, as the screenplay does with the warriors inside the Trojan Horse.

Goal: Make familiar information feel physically and morally unfamiliar.

Exercise 2: Strength Becomes Flaw

Give a protagonist one exceptional ability.

Write two scenes:

- A scene in which the ability saves several people.
- A later scene in which the same ability causes harm because the protagonist cannot stop relying on it.

Goal: Build flaw and strength from the same psychological source.

Exercise 3: The Burden of Command

Place a leader in a situation with two bad outcomes:

- One option risks everyone.
- One option guarantees harm to a smaller group.

Write the scene twice. In the first version, the leader tells the group everything. In the second, the leader conceals part of the truth.

Goal: Explore how information changes consent, authority and blame.

WRITING EXERCISES (cont.)

Exercise 4: Recognition Without a Face

Write a reunion in which one character is disguised or physically transformed.

The other character must recognize them through:

- An object
- A private habit
- A shared location
- A piece of knowledge no one else possesses

Goal: Avoid recognition scenes based on explanation alone.

Exercise 5: A Contested Memory

Write a late-story scene revealing that your protagonist is less heroic than the audience believed.

Then write the later choice that allows them to become better.

Write one event from three viewpoints:

- The person celebrated for it.
- The person harmed by it.
- The person who turned it into a public story.

Goal: Convert exposition into conflict.

WRITING EXERCISES (cont.)

Exercise 6: The Victory Aftermath

Write five pages beginning ten minutes after the apparent climax of an existing story.

Ask:

- Who must govern now?
- Who carries legal responsibility?
- What promise remains unpaid?
- Who cannot remain at home?
- What has victory failed to restore?

Goal: Discover the story hiding beyond “and they won.”

VOCABULARY FOR STUDENTS

Adaptation thesis: The central interpretive idea guiding how source material is reshaped.

Anagnorisis: A moment of recognition or discovery that changes a character's understanding.

Dramatic irony: A situation in which the audience knows something a character does not.

Frame narrative: A story or storytelling situation that contains or organizes another narrative.

Hamartia: A protagonist's error, limitation or character tendency that contributes to suffering.

In medias res: Beginning a narrative after important events have already occurred (Latin phrase meaning "in the middle of things.")

Motif: A recurring image, sound, object or idea that accumulates meaning.

Parallel narrative: Two or more storylines developed alongside one another, often through thematic or causal connections.

Plant and payoff: Introducing an element early so that it can acquire greater significance later.

Xenia: The ancient Greek code of hospitality between hosts and guests, associated with Zeus.

FINAL TAKEAWAY

The Odyssey succeeds because it understands that an adaptation does not become modern by changing the costumes, dialogue or chronology.

It becomes modern by finding the unresolved question inside the old story.

Here, that question is not whether Odysseus deserves to be called a hero. It is whether heroism can survive honest memory.

The screenplay's answer is complicated. Odysseus is brave, loving, ingenious and culpable. He earns his return not by defeating one final monster, but by admitting that the worst monster in the story may be the idea that victory erases what was done to achieve it.

He reaches Ithaca.

He gets Penelope back.

And then, at last, he accepts that coming home does not mean he gets to stay.

Nick Runyard
© 2026
8FLiX Institute
545 King St., West
Toronto, ON., Canada M5V 1M1
+1 (647) 317-9057

