Reading Comprehension Worksheet

Grade 9

Answer Key

Odysseus and the Cyclops

A retelling from Homer's Odyssey*. After ten years of war at Troy, the Greek hero Odysseus sails for his home on the island of Ithaca. On the way, he and his men land on the island of the Cyclopes, a race of one-eyed giants.*

Odysseus chose twelve of his best men and set out to explore. In a great cave they found baskets of cheese and pens full of lambs and young goats. His men begged him to take what food they could carry and hurry back to the ship. Odysseus refused. He wanted to see who lived there, and he hoped the owner might honor them with gifts, as custom demanded for travelers.

At dusk, the owner returned: Polyphemus, a Cyclops and the son of Poseidon, god of the sea. He drove his flocks inside and rolled a boulder across the entrance so enormous that no team of men could ever move it. When Odysseus asked for hospitality in the name of Zeus, the giant laughed. The Cyclopes, he said, cared nothing for the gods. Then he seized two of the men and devoured them.

Odysseus wanted to drive his sword into the sleeping giant, but he stopped himself. Only Polyphemus could move the boulder, and with him dead, they would all be trapped. Instead, Odysseus made a plan. His men sharpened a long olive-wood stake and hardened its point in the fire. That evening, Odysseus offered the Cyclops a bowl of strong wine. Pleased, Polyphemus asked his guest's name. "My name is Nobody," Odysseus answered. The giant promised that, as a gift, he would eat Nobody last. Then he fell into a heavy, wine-soaked sleep, and the men drove the glowing stake into his single eye.

Polyphemus's screams brought the other Cyclopes running. "Who is hurting you?" they called through the rock. "Nobody is hurting me!" he roared. "Nobody!" Puzzled, they went home. In the morning, the blinded giant rolled back the stone to let his flock out to graze, feeling the back of each animal as it passed. But Odysseus had tied his men beneath the bellies of the rams, and he himself clung to the wool of the largest one. One

by one, they slipped out into the daylight.

Safe on board his ship, Odysseus could not resist. "Cyclops!" he shouted across the water. "If anyone asks who blinded you, tell them it was Odysseus, son of Laertes, of Ithaca!" His crew begged him to be silent. Polyphemus hurled a boulder that nearly swamped the ship, then lifted his hands to the sky and prayed to his father, Poseidon, to curse Odysseus's journey home. Poseidon heard him, and Odysseus's voyage would last years longer than he ever imagined.

Part A: Multiple Choice

Circle the best answer.

1. Why did Odysseus insist on staying in the cave?

   Answer: b) He wanted to see the owner and hoped to receive gifts.

2. Why didn't Odysseus kill Polyphemus while he slept?

   Answer: c) Only the Cyclops could move the boulder blocking the cave.

3. What name did Odysseus give the Cyclops?

   Answer: b) Nobody

4. What happened after Odysseus shouted his real name?

   Answer: c) Polyphemus prayed to Poseidon to curse his journey.

Part B: True or False

Write T for true or F for false.

5. Odysseus's men urged him to take the food and leave quickly.

   Answer: True

6. The other Cyclopes rushed in to help Polyphemus fight Odysseus.

   Answer: False

7. Odysseus escaped by clinging to the underside of a ram.

   Answer: True

Part C: The Epic Hero

An epic hero is a larger-than-life figure who shows great courage, strength, and cleverness, but often has a flaw. A common flaw is hubris: excessive pride that leads to trouble.

8. Identify two heroic qualities Odysseus shows in this episode. Support each with evidence.

   Sample answer: Cleverness: he calls himself "Nobody" so the other Cyclopes will not help. Self-control and strategy: he decides not to kill the sleeping giant because only Polyphemus can move the boulder. (Also accept: courage, leadership in the escape under the rams.)

9. Identify the moment when Odysseus shows hubris. What are the consequences?

When he shouts his real name from the ship, he lets pride overcome good judgment. As a result, Polyphemus nearly sinks the ship and asks Poseidon to curse Odysseus, which makes his journey home years longer.

Part D: Think and Explain

10. Is Odysseus a good leader in this episode? Evaluate his choices, using evidence from both the beginning and the end of the story.

Sample answer: He is both a good and a flawed leader. His clever escape plan saves most of his men. However, his curiosity at the beginning traps them in the cave and costs lives, and his pride at the end endangers the whole crew. A great leader needs both cleverness and restraint, and Odysseus only shows restraint some of the time.