

The Adventures of Ulysses (The Odyssey) and Mythology

Course objectives covered this unit:

I, II, III, IV, VI, VII, VIII, X, XI, XII, XIII

- “Hook” for Ulysses/Odyssey Study

Use a mythology review (Most students will have a basic knowledge of mythology from elementary.) as the “hook” for this unit. Issue the Edith Hamilton *Mythology* books for the students to use as a resource. Place the names of the important gods, goddesses, and characters from mythology in a box, and have students draw a name. Require each student to read about the god/goddess/character he drew from Hamilton and then do a mini presentation in which the student becomes the god/goddess/character, telling his story using first person point of view. The teacher may require the student to dress as the persona portrayed as well as show visuals which represent the symbols/emblems of the god/goddess/character.

- Introduce the Epic

1. Review the elements of an epic with students.
2. Pose the questions, “What gets our ‘creative juices’ flowing?” “What inspires us to create?”
3. Follow the discussion with an introduction of the Nine Muses from Greek Mythology and how each artist invoked that muse for creativity in his particular area. Compare to the muses (inspirations) artists use today. (Examples: prayer, nature, taking a shower, listening to music, sitting in front of a computer, etc.) Discuss how fashion designers use a particular model to be a muse or how Shakespeare often called upon a muse in his writing. Also, visual artists often credit a particular muse for their inspiration. Ask students to name their muses—what/who inspires them to create. Then read the Invocation from *The Odyssey* and discuss. Teachers might also wish to assign students to write poems to invoke their own muses.

- The Reading of *The Adventures of Ulysses*

Focus on Plot

Teachers should read the epic along with the students in class. Teachers may wish to stop after each or some of the sections to show clips from the movie *The Odyssey* to emphasize the plot and to discuss dramatic license. Take opportunities to discuss the following:

1. hubris and the tragic flaw
2. the humanity of Ulysses in that he makes mistakes continuously
3. fate vs. man’s control of his own destiny
4. the elements of an epic as seen in reading
5. the human qualities seen in the Greek gods—How do you distinguish the gods from humanity?
6. Ulysses’ quest/journey and the obstacles he encounters as well as how he deals with each new situation

Focus on Figurative Language

During the reading of *Ulysses*, students should record examples of figurative language. Teachers should guide students as they complete their lists of examples. Students will use these lists for a post-reading activity.

Focus on Archetypes

Students should also complete an archetype chart during the reading of *Ulysses*.

- Post-Reading Activities

1. Focus on Theme

Upon completion of the epic, pose the following questions for discussion:

What does the epic say about the Greek society?

What were the Greeks' views of the hero?

What were the Greeks' views of the gods?

Why are journeys/quests so important to mankind as a whole?

What does it say about man today that we still write the same epic?

Examples of modern epics:

Star Wars

The Matrix

Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade

2001 Space Odyssey

The Lion King

2. Focus on Figurative Language and Literary Analysis

Using the figurative language lists compiled during the reading of *Ulysses*, students should create a class wall of Greek graffiti. The teacher places white or black butcher paper on a bulletin board or wall where students record their favorite examples of figurative language from the epic under the overall title "Greek Graffiti".

Assign students to write a literary analysis composition using the following thesis. The student should use the Jane Schaffer model.

Thesis: In the epic *The Adventures of Ulysses*, the author uses figurative language to capture the reader's interest and carry him through the episodes of Ulysses' journey. Each literary element helps paint a vivid picture for the reader of this ancient epic. The author uses metaphors, similes and personification in order to enhance the reader's experience.

3. Culminating Activity

Initiate a discussion of the Greeks' idea of fate and man's role in his fate as well as the role of the gods. How is this addressed in *Ulysses*? Do the Greeks see man's fate as being charted in the stars?

Assign students to create a mobile of stars. Each star should contain an aspect of Ulysses' character on one side and examples of how he used the trait in his journey on the other side. For example: Cunning as a trait with three examples of his cunning from the story on the other side. You could also include other elements from the epic from

whence he received help—the gods, etc.—in place of the personal characteristic. Display the mobiles in the classroom.

As a second option for the culminating activity, assign students to create a constellation of stars on a poster. The stars in the constellation should contain Ulysses' important traits as above with three examples of how the trait aided him in his quest as above. The shape the constellation forms should symbolize Ulysses' journey as a whole.