



“We lit a fire, burnt an offering,  
 and took some cheese to eat; then sat in silence  
 around the embers, waiting. When he came  
 he had a load of dry boughs on his shoulder  
 5 to stoke his fire at suppertime. He dumped it  
 with a great crash into that hollow cave,  
 and we all scattered fast to the far wall.  
 Then over the broad cavern floor he ushered  
 the ewes he meant to milk. He left his rams  
 10 and he-goats in the yard outside, and swung  
 high overhead a slab of solid rock  
 to close the cave. Two dozen four-wheeled wagons,  
 with heaving wagon teams, could not have stirred  
 the tonnage of that rock from where he wedged it  
 15 over the doorsill. Next he took his seat  
 and milked his bleating ewes. A practiced job  
 he made of it, giving each ewe her suckling;  
 thickened his milk, then, into curds and whey,  
 sieved out the curds to drip in withy baskets,<sup>1</sup>  
 20 and poured the whey to stand in bowls  
 cooling until he drank it for his supper.  
 When all these chores were done, he poked the fire,  
 heaping on brushwood. In the glare he saw us.

‘Strangers,’ he said, ‘who are you? And where from?  
 25 What brings you here by seaways—a fair traffic?  
 Or are you wandering rogues, who cast your lives  
 like dice, and **ravage** other folk by sea?’

We felt a pressure on our hearts, in dread  
 of that deep rumble and that mighty man.

30 But all the same I spoke up in reply:

‘We are from Troy, Achaeans, blown off course  
 by shifting gales on the Great South Sea;

1. **withy baskets:** baskets made from willow twigs.

### INFER

Pause at line 3. Odysseus and his men are in the cave of the Cyclops, Polyphemus. To whom do the men burn an offering?

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### MONITOR YOUR COMPREHENSION

Who is the “he” in line 3?

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### INTERPRET

Re-read lines 5–23, and pay attention to the Cyclops’s actions. What qualities does he have?

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### VOCABULARY

**ravage** (rav’ij) *v.*: destroy violently; ruin.



and caught two in his hands like squirming puppies  
to beat their brains out, spattering the floor.

Then he dismembered them and made his meal,  
gaping and crunching like a mountain lion—

65 everything: innards, flesh, and marrow bones.

We cried aloud, lifting our hands to Zeus,  
powerless, looking on at this, appalled;  
but Cyclops went on filling up his belly  
with manflesh and great gulps of whey,

70 then lay down like a mast among his sheep.

My heart beat high now at the chance of action,  
and drawing the sharp sword from my hip I went  
along his flank to stab him where the midriff  
holds the liver. I had touched the spot

75 when sudden fear stayed me: if I killed him  
we perished there as well, for we could never  
move his ponderous doorway slab aside.

So we were left to groan and wait for morning.

When the young Dawn with fingertips of rose

80 lit up the world, the Cyclops built a fire  
and milked his handsome ewes, all in due order,  
putting the sucklings to the mothers. Then,

his chores being all dispatched, he caught  
another brace<sup>3</sup> of men to make his breakfast,

85 and whisked away his great door slab

to let his sheep go through—but he, behind,  
reset the stone as one would cap a quiver.<sup>4</sup>

There was a din of whistling as the Cyclops  
rounded his flock to higher ground, then stillness.

90 And now I pondered how to hurt him worst,  
if but Athena granted what I prayed for.

Here are the means I thought would serve my turn:

## HERO

How does Odysseus show both his bravery and his intelligence in lines 71–78?

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## WORD STUDY

Line 79 contains a famous **epithet**—a group of words used repeatedly to describe a character. How is Dawn described in this epithet?

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## MONITOR YOUR COMPREHENSION

Pause at line 87. What prevents Odysseus and his men from escaping when the Cyclops leaves?

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3. **brace** (brās) *n.*: pair.

4. **quiver** (kwiv'ər) *n.*: case for arrows.

### IDENTIFY

Pause at line 105. What do Odysseus and his men do with the olive tree they find in the Cyclops's cave?

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### VOCABULARY

**profusion** (prō·fyōō'zhən) *n.*: large supply; abundance.

### CLARIFY

Pause at line 111. Apparently, it was the custom among the ancient Greeks for men to toss coins, dice, or something else for the honor of participating in a dangerous task. Why is Odysseus happy with the outcome?

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a club, or staff, lay there along the fold—  
an olive tree, felled green and left to season  
95 for Cyclops' hand. And it was like a mast  
a lugger<sup>5</sup> of twenty oars, broad in the beam—  
a deep-seagoing craft—might carry:  
so long, so big around, it seemed. Now I  
chopped out a six-foot section of this pole  
100 and set it down before my men, who scraped it;  
and when they had it smooth, I hewed again  
to make a stake with pointed end. I held this  
in the fire's heart and turned it, toughening it,  
then hid it, well back in the cavern, under  
105 one of the dung piles in **profusion** there.  
Now came the time to toss for it: who ventured  
along with me? Whose hand could bear to thrust  
and grind that spike in Cyclops' eye, when mild  
sleep had mastered him? As luck would have it,  
110 the men I would have chosen won the toss—  
four strong men, and I made five as captain.

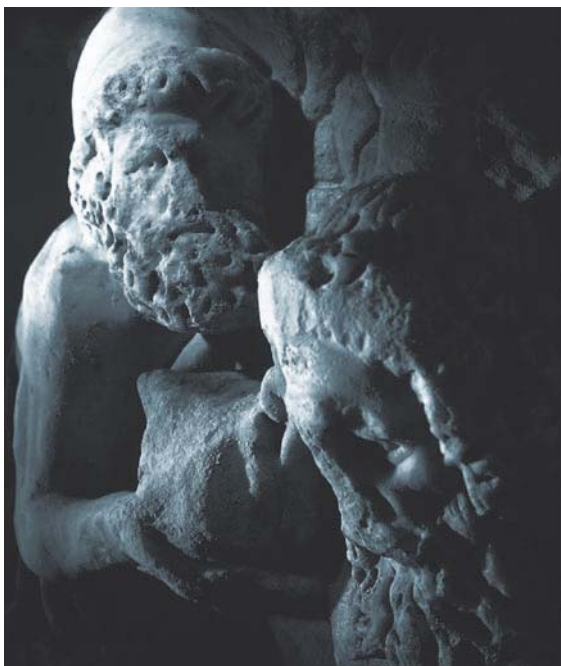
At evening came the shepherd with his flock,  
his woolly flock. The rams as well, this time,  
entered the cave: by some shepherding whim—  
115 or a god's bidding—none were left outside.  
He hefted his great boulder into place  
and sat him down to milk the bleating ewes  
in proper order, put the lambs to suck,  
and swiftly ran through all his evening chores.  
120 Then he caught two more men and feasted on them.  
My moment was at hand, and I went forward  
holding an ivy bowl of my dark drink,  
looking up, saying:

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5. **lugger** (lug'ər) *n.*: type of sailboat.



Odysseus handing the drink to Polyphemus. Relief on a Grecian marble sarcophagus (1st century A.D.). Museo Archeologico Nazionale, Naples, Italy. Art Resource, NY.



‘Cyclops, try some wine.  
Here’s liquor to wash down your scraps of men.  
125 Taste it, and see the kind of drink we carried  
under our planks. I meant it for an offering  
if you would help us home. But you are mad,  
unbearable, a bloody monster! After this,  
will any other traveler come to see you?’

130 He seized and drained the bowl, and it went down  
so fiery and smooth he called for more:

‘Give me another, thank you kindly. Tell me,  
how are you called? I’ll make a gift will please you.  
Even Cyclopes know the wine grapes grow  
135 out of grassland and loam in heaven’s rain,  
but here’s a bit of nectar and ambrosia!’

Three bowls I brought him, and he poured them down.  
I saw the fuddle and flush come over him,  
then I sang out in cordial tones:

## Notes \_\_\_\_\_

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### PREDICT

Pause at line 126. Why do you think Odysseus offers the Cyclops wine?

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### WORD STUDY

Underline the **alliteration**—repetition of consonant sounds in words close together—in line 138. Here *fuddle* means “drunkenness.”

### IDENTIFY

Pause at line 143. Odysseus doesn't tell the Cyclops his real name. Underline the name he uses. What word does the name sound like?

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### MONITOR YOUR COMPREHENSION

What happens in lines 146–167?

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### WORD STUDY

Underline the **extended similes** in lines 160–163 and 166–171, which use gruesome comparisons to help you see how the eye is gouged out.

'Cyclops,

140 you ask my honorable name? Remember  
the gift you promised me, and I shall tell you.  
My name is Nohbdy: mother, father, and friends,  
everyone calls me Nohbdy.'

And he said:

'Nohbdy's my meat, then, after I eat his friends.  
145 Others come first. There's a noble gift, now.'

Even as he spoke, he reeled and tumbled backward,  
his great head lolling to one side; and sleep  
took him like any creature. Drunk, hiccuping,  
he dribbled streams of liquor and bits of men.

150 Now, by the gods, I drove my big hand spike  
deep in the embers, charring it again,  
and cheered my men along with battle talk  
to keep their courage up: no quitting now.  
The pike of olive, green though it had been,  
155 reddened and glowed as if about to catch.  
I drew it from the coals and my four fellows  
gave me a hand, lugging it near the Cyclops  
as more than natural force nerved them; straight  
forward they sprinted, lifted it, and rammed it  
160 deep in his crater eye, and I leaned on it  
turning it as a shipwright turns a drill  
in planking, having men below to swing  
the two-handled strap that spins it in the groove.  
So with our brand we bored that great eye socket  
165 while blood ran out around the red-hot bar.  
Eyelid and lash were seared; the pierced ball  
hissed broiling, and the roots popped.

In a smithy<sup>6</sup>

one sees a white-hot axhead or an adze<sup>7</sup>  
 plunged and wrung in a cold tub, screeching steam—  
 170 the way they make soft iron hale and hard—  
 just so that eyeball hissed around the spike.  
 The Cyclops bellowed and the rock roared round him,  
 and we fell back in fear. Clawing his face  
 he tugged the bloody spike out of his eye,  
 175 threw it away, and his wild hands went groping;  
 then he set up a howl for Cyclopes  
 who lived in caves on windy peaks nearby.  
 Some heard him; and they came by divers<sup>8</sup> ways  
 to clump around outside and call:

‘What ails you,

180 Polyphemus? Why do you cry so sore  
 in the starry night? You will not let us sleep.  
 Sure no man’s driving off your flock? No man  
 has tricked you, ruined you?’

Out of the cave

the mammoth Polyphemus roared in answer:

185 ‘Nohbdy, Nohbdy’s tricked me. Nohbdy’s ruined me!’

To this rough shout they made a sage<sup>9</sup> reply:

‘Ah well, if nobody has played you foul  
 there in your lonely bed, we are no use in pain  
 given by great Zeus. Let it be your father,  
 190 Poseidon Lord, to whom you pray.’

So saying

they trailed away. And I was filled with laughter  
 to see how like a charm the name deceived them.

6. **smithy** (smith'ē) *n.*: blacksmith's shop, where iron tools are made.

7. **adze** (adz) *n.*: axlike tool with a long, curved blade.

8. **divers** (dī'vərz) *adj.*: diverse; various.

9. **sage** (sāj) *adj.*: wise.

### FLUENCY

Read the boxed passage aloud twice. On your first reading, pause at the end of a line if it ends in punctuation. Read on when the line does not end with a comma, dash, semicolon, colon, or period. On your second reading, focus on reading with expression.

### MONITOR YOUR COMPREHENSION

Re-read lines 178–191. What happens when Polyphemus's fellow Cyclopes come to his aid?

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Odysseus escaping the cave of Polyphemus under the belly of the ram. Detail from a krater, a vessel for holding wine (c. 510 B.C.).

Badisches Landesmuseum,  
Karlsruhe, Germany.



### HERO

Pause at line 202. What **character trait** helps Odysseus defeat the Cyclops?

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Now Cyclops, wheezing as the pain came on him,  
fumbled to wrench away the great doorstone  
195 and squatted in the breach with arms thrown wide  
for any silly beast or man who bolted—  
hoping somehow I might be such a fool.  
But I kept thinking how to win the game:  
death sat there huge; how could we slip away?  
200 I drew on all my wits, and ran through tactics,  
reasoning as a man will for dear life,  
until a trick came—and it pleased me well.  
The Cyclops' rams were handsome, fat, with heavy  
fleeces, a dark violet.

Three abreast

205 I tied them silently together, twining  
cords of willow from the ogre's bed;  
then slung a man under each middle one  
to ride there safely, shielded left and right.  
So three sheep could convey each man. I took  
210 the woolliest ram, the choicest of the flock,

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and hung myself under his kinky belly,  
pulled up tight, with fingers twisted deep  
in sheepskin ringlets for an iron grip.  
So, breathing hard, we waited until morning.

215 When Dawn spread out her fingertips of rose  
the rams began to stir, moving for pasture,  
and peals of bleating echoed round the pens  
where dams with udders full called for a milking.  
Blinded, and sick with pain from his head wound,  
220 the master stroked each ram, then let it pass,  
but my men riding on the pectoral fleece<sup>10</sup>  
the giant's blind hands blundering never found.  
Last of them all my ram, the leader, came,  
weighted by wool and me with my meditations.  
225 The Cyclops patted him, and then he said:

'Sweet cousin ram, why lag behind the rest  
in the night cave? You never linger so,  
but graze before them all, and go afar  
to crop sweet grass, and take your stately way  
230 leading along the streams, until at evening  
you run to be the first one in the fold.  
Why, now, so far behind? Can you be grieving  
over your Master's eye? That carrion rogue<sup>11</sup>  
and his accurst companions burnt it out  
235 when he had conquered all my wits with wine.  
Nohbdy will not get out alive, I swear.  
Oh, had you brain and voice to tell  
where he may be now, dodging all my fury!  
Bashed by this hand and bashed on this rock wall  
240 his brains would strew the floor, and I should have  
rest from the outrage Nohbdy worked upon me.'

10. **pectoral fleece:** wool on an animal's chest.

11. **carrion rogue:** rotten scoundrel. *Carrion* is decaying flesh.

**MONITOR YOUR  
COMPREHENSION**

Pause at line 214. What is Odysseus's plan to save himself and his men?

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**COMPARE &  
CONTRAST**

Re-read lines 226–232. How is the Cyclops's treatment of his ram different from his treatment of the Greeks?

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MONITOR YOUR  
COMPREHENSION

What is happening in lines  
242–255?

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VOCABULARY

**adversary** (ad'vər-ser'ē) *n.*:  
enemy; opponent.

MONITOR YOUR  
COMPREHENSION

Pause at line 271. What hap-  
pens when Odysseus taunts  
the Cyclops?

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He sent us into the open, then. Close by,  
I dropped and rolled clear of the ram's belly,  
going this way and that to untie the men.

245 With many glances back, we rounded up  
his fat, stiff-legged sheep to take aboard,  
and drove them down to where the good ship lay.  
We saw, as we came near, our fellows' faces  
shining; then we saw them turn to grief  
250 tallying those who had not fled from death.  
I hushed them, jerking head and eyebrows up,  
and in a low voice told them: 'Load this herd;  
move fast, and put the ship's head toward the breakers.'  
They all pitched in at loading, then embarked  
255 and struck their oars into the sea. Far out,  
as far offshore as shouted words would carry,  
I sent a few back to the **adversary**:

'O Cyclops! Would you feast on my companions?  
Puny, am I, in a Caveman's hands?

260 How do you like the beating that we gave you,  
you damned cannibal? Eater of guests  
under your roof! Zeus and the gods have paid you!

The blind thing in his doubled fury broke  
a hilltop in his hands and heaved it after us.  
265 Ahead of our black prow it struck and sank  
whelmed in a spuming geyser, a giant wave  
that washed the ship stern foremost back to shore.

I got the longest boathook out and stood  
fending us off, with furious nods to all  
270 to put their backs into a racing stroke—  
row, row or perish. So the long oars bent  
kicking the foam sternward, making head  
until we drew away, and twice as far.  
Now when I cupped my hands I heard the crew  
275 in low voices protesting:

‘Godsake, Captain!

Why bait the beast again? Let him alone!’

‘That tidal wave he made on the first throw  
all but beached us.’

‘All but stove us in!’

‘Give him our bearing with your trumpeting,  
280 he’ll get the range and lob<sup>12</sup> a boulder.’

‘Aye

He’ll smash our timbers and our heads together!’

I would not heed them in my glorying spirit,  
but let my anger flare and yelled:

‘Cyclops,

if ever mortal man inquire  
285 how you were put to shame and blinded, tell him  
Odysseus, raider of cities, took your eye:  
Laertes’ son, whose home’s on Ithaca!’

At this he gave a mighty sob and rumbled:

‘Now comes the weird<sup>13</sup> upon me, spoken of old.  
290 A wizard, grand and wondrous, lived here—Telemus,<sup>14</sup>  
a son of Eurymus;<sup>15</sup> great length of days  
he had in wizardry among the Cyclopes,  
and these things he foretold for time to come:  
my great eye lost, and at Odysseus’ hands.  
295 Always I had in mind some giant, armed  
in giant force, would come against me here.  
But this, but you—small, pitiful, and twiggy—  
you put me down with wine, you blinded me.

12. **lob** (läb) *v.*: toss.

13. **weird** (wird) *n.*: fate.

14. **Telemus** (tel’ə-məs).

15. **Eurymus** (yŏŏ’rē-məs).

### IDENTIFY

Odysseus’s men speak for the first time in lines 275–281. What is their reaction to their captain’s behavior?

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### HEROES

Odysseus ignores his men’s advice and continues to taunt the Cyclops in lines 282–287. What does Odysseus’s behavior reveal about him?

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### COMPARE & CONTRAST

Pause at line 298. Polyphemus had been warned by a wizard that Odysseus would blind him. In what ways is Odysseus different from the attacker the Cyclops had imagined?

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# The Cyclops

**Hero Chart** What makes a hero? Listed in the left-hand column of the chart below are some heroic traits. Give examples from “The Cyclops” to show whether or not Odysseus displays these traits. At the bottom of the chart is a row for weaknesses. If you find weaknesses in Odysseus, cite details from the story to support your opinion.

Key Traits of a Hero	Details from “The Cyclops”
Intelligence and resourcefulness	
Strength	
Bravery and loyalty	
Weaknesses	