

**Close Reading 1 - Use as a pre-reading exercise, since this is the beginning of the epic.**  
from *The Odyssey* - *HOLT Elements of Literature* - Third Course - Pg. 651

### **Tell the Story**

Sing in me, Muse, and through me tell the story  
of that man skilled in all ways of contending,  
the wanderer, hurried for years on end,  
after he plundered the stronghold  
on the proud height of Troy.

He saw the townlands  
and learned the minds of many distant men,  
and weathered many bitter nights and days  
in his deep heart at sea, while he fought only  
to save his life, to bring his shipmates home.  
But not by will nor valor could he save them,  
for their own recklessness destroyed them all--  
children and fools, they killed and feasted on  
the cattle of Lord Helios, the Sun,  
and he who moves all day through heaven  
took from their eyes the dawn of their return.

Of these adventures, Muse, daughter of Zeus,  
tell us in our time, lift the great song again.  
Begin when all the rest who left behind them  
headlong death in battle or at sea  
had long ago returned, while he alone still hungered  
for home and wife. Her ladyship Calypso  
clung to him in her sea-hollowed caves--  
a nymph, immortal and most beautiful,  
who craved him for her own.

And when long years and seasons  
wheeling brought around that point of time  
ordained for him to make his passage homeward,  
trials and dangers, even so, attended him  
even in Ithaca, near these he loved.  
Yet all the gods had pitied Lord Odysseus,  
all but Poseidon, raging cold and rough  
against the brave king till he came ashore  
at last on his own land...

(from Book 1)

## Background Info 2

- ❖ Homer - the classic storyteller - is probably entertaining a group of people at an important event or dinner by sharing the story of *The Odyssey* to those in attendance
- ❖ Muses - These are the daughters of Zeus and Mnemosyne. They are known for the music of their song, which brings joy to any who hear it. There are nine Muses, each with her own specialty: Clio (History), Urania (Astronomy), Melpomene (Tragedy), Thalia (Comedy), Terpsichore (Dance), Calliope (Epic Poetry), Erato (Love Poetry), Polyhymnia (Songs to the Gods), Euterpe (Lyric Poetry).
- ❖ Homer opens with an invocation, or prayer, asking the Muse to help him sing his tale.
- ❖ Notice how the singer gives his listeners hints about how his story is to end.

Questions- *Answer these as part of your close reading on the other side.*

1. Rhythm is an important element in poetry. Does this selection have rhythm?
2. Is rhythm important to the reading of poetry?
3. Who is the Muse singing to? Why?
4. In line 2, there is a reference to someone who is "skilled in all ways of contending..." Who is this person? Look in line 29 for the answer and circle his name. What do you think is meant by "skilled in all ways of contending?"
5. In line 3, this person is referred to as a "wanderer." What is a wanderer?
6. In lines, 5-9, someone's journey is mentioned. Highlight the significant parts of his journey--beginning with, "He saw the townland, . . ." in ONE COLOR.
7. Next, move to lines 10-15. Highlight in a different color what happens to his "shipmates"?
8. Go to line 18, and read lines 18-21. What does it mean to hunger "for home and wife"?
9. Calypso is introduced in line 21. Circle the words that describe who or what she is.
10. Circle the words that identify the length of time this adventure took.
11. All of the gods "pitied" the person this story is about--except for which god? Underline his name.
12. Did the "brave king" finally come ashore on his own land?

**Concluding Assignment:** In a paragraph or two, relate what Homer tells you about the hero and what will happen to him.