Objectives

1. Engage students in the plot, characters, themes, setting, and language of Homer's *The Odyssey* so that they are prepared to discuss and write about the excerpt.

2. Practice and reinforce the following Grade 9-10 ELA Common Core Standards for reading literature, writing, and speaking/listening:
   - **READING:** LITERATURE - RL.9-10.1-7, 9-10
   - **WRITING** - W.9-10.1-2, 4-6, 7-10
   - **SPEAKING/LISTENING** - SL.9-10.1-3

Time

160 minutes (with up to an additional 140 minutes of extension possibilities)

Materials

SyncTV Premium Lesson of Homer’s *The Odyssey* (translated by Samuel Butler)

Overview

Along with its prequel (of sorts), *The Iliad*, Homer’s *The Odyssey* is considered to be the oldest still-surviving work in the entire canon of Western literature. Though next to nothing is known about the author (some speculate that Homer was not a single individual but a series of different authors), the epic poem has been translated into hundreds of different languages, and is one of the most widely read and influential stories in our literary history. It is centered on a Greek hero, Odysseus, and his ten-year journey home after the fall of Troy—an episodic journey fraught with peril, adventure, and fantastical encounters across mythical lands. This excerpt shows how Odysseus is caught between the human failings of his men and the inescapable vengeance of the gods. Close examination of this text will prepare students to develop thoughtful responses to higher-level literary texts, and to write thoughtful, informed, and textually-rooted responses, consistent with the ELA Common Core Standards for the high school grades.

Background (15 minutes)

1. **Watch the Preview** *(SL.9-10.1-2)*. As a group, watch the video preview of the premium lesson. Use the following questions to spur discussion following the preview:
Lesson Plan: The Odyssey

a. What does the word odyssey mean? What kinds of images and emotions does it conjure?

b. Which elements mentioned in the preview are based on actual or plausible historical events? Which elements are fantasy? How does this story blend fact with fantasy? What effects does this have?

c. Listen to the music and consider the images in the preview. In what other stories or films have you encountered images like these?

Extension (additional 30 minutes)

d. Research and Discuss (RL.9–10.1, SL.9-10.1-2). The preview mentions the Trojan War, the fall of Troy, and the heroes’ voyage home to Ithaca. Discuss, as a class, what is commonly known about these historical events. Who fought in the Trojan War? Who won? Where is Ithaca? Where must Odysseus be from?

e. Write Creatively (W.9–10.3) Invite students to draw or write their own interpretation of the hazards Odysseus faces, based on the images in the preview—storms, wind, sea monsters, goddesses, the Sirens, the Cyclops—and other dangers they imagine will happen.

Engaging the Text (145 minutes)

2. Read the Text (30 minutes)

   a. Read and Annotate (RL.9-10.1-6). As students read the excerpt from The Odyssey, have them annotate the text with any questions or responses they may have. If your classroom has a projector, model note-taking and annotating skills, using the first paragraph as an example. Student responses are visible to you after students submit their writing assignments or beforehand if using the “mimic” function to access students’ accounts.

   b. Discuss (SL.9–10.1-3). Have students meet in small groups or pairs and briefly discuss the questions and inferences they had while reading. As a class, discuss the following: How did the images in the preview affect your understanding of the text? What other images came to mind as you read the excerpt? How has your sense of the excerpt’s themes changed now that you’ve read it? What words were new to you? What meanings did you infer?

Extension (additional 20 minutes)

c. Listen and Discuss (RL.9-10.1-2, SL.9-10.1-2). As a class, listen to the audio reading of the text. Discuss: How does the experience of listening to The Odyssey differ from reading it on the page? What events does the author use to develop the characters and setting?

d. Comprehend (RL.9-10.1-2, 4–5). Have students complete the multiple-choice questions. Collect papers or discuss answers as a class.

3. Watch SyncTV (40 minutes)

   a. Watch. Either watch the SyncTV discussion associated with The Odyssey as a class or ask students to watch it on their individual computers.
b. **Focus (SL.9-10.1-3, RL.9-10.2, 5)** From 3:40-5:20, the SyncTV students discuss the literary concept of allegory, and explore *The Odyssey*’s allegorical meaning. Have students focus on the SyncTV students' interpretations, and consider their own ideas. Think of what is being represented, both by the individual characters and the story as a whole.

c. **Focus (SL.9-10.1-3, RL.9-10.2).** In the portion of the episode from 5:45-7:00, the students discuss the philosophy of humanism—the idea that reason and logic dictate the workings of the world—as it relates to Odysseus, the hero of *The Odyssey*. Review the discussion of Odysseus’ heroic traits. Ask: what makes Odysseus a hero? What is his responsibility as a hero, if any?

d. **Focus (SL.9-10.1, RL.9-10.2)** From 7:30-8:25, students discuss the relevance of *The Odyssey* both then and now. Have students consider the discussion in the episode: why was *The Odyssey* thematically important in ancient Greece, and why does it continue to be important now?

e. **Discuss (SL.9-10.1-3 and RL.9-10.1-6).** After watching the model discussion, have a conversation with the class about the ideas discussed in the episode that stood out the most. What new thoughts do they have after hearing the SyncTV discussion? Next, divide students into small groups (3-4 students). Move around the room monitoring the groups as students follow the SyncTV episode as a model to discuss some of the following questions:

1. What is a hero, and why is Odysseus a classical hero? What heroic attributes does Odysseus possess? Have students list the traits that make Odysseus a hero.

2. Are the gods good, or bad, or neither? What is their role in the story? Are they all-powerful, or is there anything (a character, or an idea?) that is more powerful? Can anything possibly stand in the way of their will?

3. Is *The Odyssey* an allegory, and if so, what larger ideas or concepts do the characters and situations represent? Especially consider Odysseus, Eurylochus, the men and the god—as well as the larger narrative of the story.

4. Whose perspective is this story told from? When is it being told? To whom do you think the narrator is speaking?

5. Though it is thousands of years old, does *The Odyssey* have any thematic relevance today? Is this story truly timeless, as Marcus attests? How can we see its influence in popular modern works?

6. Compare/contrast fact vs. fantasy as it appears in the text. Which places/events in the excerpt are real? Which are fantasy? Which are believable, and which are impossible?

**Extension (additional 20 minutes)**

f. **Write (W.9-10.2, 4-6).** Use the StudySync assignment creation tool to create a “Writing” assignment that asks students to address the following prompt:

1. There are at least two dozen different English translations of *The Odyssey* from Ancient Greek, in both poetry and prose. Think about how a translation into a different language, genre, or medium might affect the telling of *The Odyssey*. What kinds of
choices and/or changes does a translator need to make? Write an essay about how *The Odyssey* might be different today than it was thousands of years ago? Think about factors such as audience, technology, and culture.

4. Think (10 minutes)
   
a. **Respond** (*W.9-10.1–2*). Ask students to read the “Think” questions, watch the corresponding video clips, and respond to the questions, either in class or for homework.

5. Write (50 minutes)
   
a. **Discuss** (*SL.9-10.1*). Read the prompt you have chosen for students, and then solicit questions regarding the prompt or the assignment expectations. Whichever prompt you have chosen, make sure you are clear about the assignment expectations and the rubric by which you and the other students will be evaluating them.

b. **Organize** (*RL.9-10.1-6 and W.9-10.1-2, 4*). Ask students to go back and annotate the text with the prompt in mind. They should be organizing their thoughts and the points they’ll address in their writing as they make annotations. If you’ve worked on outlining or other organizational tools for writing, this is a good place to apply them.

c. **Write** (*W.9-10.1-2, 4-6, 9-10*). Have students go through the writing process of planning, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing their writing responses.

d. **Review** (*W.9-10.4-6*). Use the StudySync “Review” feature to have students complete one to two evaluations of their peers’ work based on your chosen review rubric. Have the students look at and reflect upon the peer evaluations of their own writing. What might you do differently in a revision? How might you strengthen the writing and the ideas?

**Extension (additional 30 minutes)**

e. **Self-Assess** (*W.9-10.3-6*). Use the StudySync assignment creation tool to create a “Writing” assignment that asks students to address the following prompt:

   1. Reread your essay and the reviews of your essay on *The Odyssey*. After reading these reviews, what do you believe were the biggest strengths of your essay? What could you do better next time? If you were to go back and write this essay again, what would you change about your writing process? How has writing this essay made you a better writer?

**Extension (additional 50 minutes)**

f. **Write** (*W.9-10.1, 4-6, 9-10*). For homework, have students write a persuasive essay using the following prompt:

   1. Taking either the perspective of Eurylochus and the men or the gods, write a persuasive essay defending the actions your characters carried out in this excerpt from *The Odyssey*. 
Have students outline their essays before they begin. Walk students through the expectations of basic 5-paragraph persuasive essay outlining:

2. Choose the side you are arguing for.
3. Develop the argument into a solid thesis statement.
4. Outline three supporting examples for your argument.
5. Review the criteria for a good concluding paragraph. Write a concluding sentence.

By the end of the exercise, each student should have his/her own essay outline template.
Have students complete and submit their essays. If desired, have them go through the process of revising, editing and re-publishing their essay responses.

g. **Debate (SL.9-10.1-4)** Divide the class into two sides—humans and gods—and stage a mock debate between the two sides regarding this essay topic. Suggest that students take the opposite position from the one they argued in their essays.
SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIALS

Key Vocabulary
1. counsel (n.) - formal advice given to someone
2. insolence (n.) - rudeness or impoliteness, behavior showing a lack of respect
3. rebuke (v.) - to formally disagree with or criticize
4. abate (v.) - to weaken or decrease in strength or severity
5. squall (n.) - a sudden gust of wind or water
6. mast (n.) - a long, usually wooden pole that holds the sails of a ship
7. aft (adv.) - in the back part of a boat, behind
8. keel (n.) - a long piece of wood along the bottom of a ship that supports the frame

Reading Comprehension Questions
1. ____________ encourages the men to slaughter and eat the island's cattle.
   a. Lampetie
   b. Father Jove
   c. Eurylochus
   d. Odysseus

2. When Odysseus prays to the gods in Olympus, what is he praying for?
   a. food and a way off the island
   b. escape from Eurylochus and the men
   c. sleep, because he is exhausted
   d. more wind so they can set sail

3. "starved to death by inches" means "______________ starved to death."
   a. carefully
   b. almost
   c. slowly
   d. quickly

4. Why does Odysseus fall asleep at the beginning of the excerpt?
   a. he is exhausted and has not slept
   b. the gods put him to sleep
   c. he is finally away from the wind
   d. he is hungry and cannot bear it

5. The cattle on the desert island in the excerpt belong to
   a. Calypso
   b. the sun god
   c. the son of Saturn
   d. Lampetie

6. Which of the following is NOT a theme of this excerpt?
   a. temptation
   b. disobedience
c. vengeance
d. jealousy

7. What does Odysseus ultimately attribute his survival at sea to?
   a. his cunning
   b. his persistence
   c. the gods
   d. Calypso

8. This excerpt is narrated in
   a. third-person omniscient
   b. present tense
   c. past tense
   d. close third-person

9. "I will shiver their ship into little pieces with a bolt of white lightning..."
   In the above sentence, shiver most closely means
   a. freeze
   b. break
   c. shake
   d. sink

10. Why are the men unable to leave the island until the seventh day?
    a. the wind is too strong
    b. they are emaciated from hunger
    c. they want to kill and eat as many cattle as possible
    d. they have to fix and repair their boats

Answer Key

1. C
2. A
3. C
4. B
5. B
6. D
7. C
8. C
9. B
10. A
Further Assignments

1. Have students read and analyze in discussion or writing other excerpts from the Butler translation of *The Odyssey*. Since the story is episodic, they can focus on different chapters or read the story in its entirety. *(RL.9-10.1-6, 10, W.9–10.2, and SL.9-10.1)*

2. Have students discuss and evaluate Homer's structuring of *The Odyssey'*s narrative arc. Discussion questions: Since the story is told in past tense, well after the described events take place, what do we already know about the story's conclusion? How does this method of structuring the narrative create tension, in spite of what we already know? Is there anything we don't know? *(RL.9-10.5 and SL.9-10.1)*

3. Draw a scene from this excerpt of *The Odyssey*, using the details and descriptions in the story to inform the drawings. Students must use at least three details and/or descriptions in their drawings. *(RL.9-10.1)*

4. *The Odyssey* is replete with the gods of Greek mythology. Assign students different gods, places, and/or mythical figures from the excerpt, and in a short research assignment, have students look up these figures/places and write a brief descriptive paragraph response. *(RL.9-10.9 and W.9–10.2, 7–9)*

5. In literature, what is an "epic poem"? What are the typical elements of this genre? Have students research the history of the epic poem and write a brief paragraph description. For an added assignment, have students research a famous epic poem and come to class prepared to make a short presentation on their particular work: its author, the date(s) it was written, a brief summary, and why it remains relevant. *(W.9-10.2, 7-9 and SL.9–10.4)*

   Have students replace each past-tense verb in the first three paragraphs of the excerpt to shift the account from the past into the present. After students complete this task, explore issues such as distinguishing between verbs and gerunds, conjugating irregular verbs, and recognizing present tense speech within a past tense passage as appropriate for your ELL students and their language abilities. *(ELL)*