The Cyclops

In the next land we found were Cyclopes, 15
giants, louts, without a law to bless them.
In ignorance leaving the fruitage of the earth in mystery to the immortal gods, they neither plow nor sow by hand, nor till the ground, though grain—wild wheat and barley—grows untended, and wine-grapes, in clusters, ripen in heaven's rains.
Cyclopes have no muster and no meeting, no consultation or old tribal ways, but each one dwells in his own mountain cave dealing out rough justice to wife and child, indifferent to what the others do. . . .

As we rowed on, and nearer to the mainland, at one end of the bay, we saw a cavern yawning above the water, screened with laurel, and many rams and goats about the place inside a sheepfold—made from slabs of stone earthfast between tall trunks of pine and rugged towering oak trees.

A prodigious 16 man slept in this cave alone, and took his flocks to graze afield—remote from all companions, 130 knowing none but savage ways, a brute so huge, he seemed no man at all of those who eat good wheaten bread; but he seemed rather a shaggy mountain reared in solitude.

We beached there, and I told the crew 135 to stand by and keep watch over the ship: as for myself I took my twelve best fighters and went ahead. I had a goatskin full of that sweet liquor that Euanthes' son, Maron, had given me. He kept Apollo's 17 holy grove at Ismarus; for kindness we showed him there, and showed his wife and child,

and then this liquor—twelve two-handled jars
of brandy, pure and fiery. Not a slave
in Maron's household knew this drink; only
he, his wife and the storeroom mistress knew;
and they would put one cupful—ruby-colored,
honey-smooth—in twenty more of water,

he gave me seven shining golden talents¹⁸

perfectly formed, a solid silver winebowl,

15. Cyclopes (sī klō' pēz')

n. plural form of Cyclops
(sī kläps'), a race of giants
with one eye in the middle
of the forehead.

Literary Analysis
The Epic Hero and
Conflict Based on
Odysseus' description of
Cyclopes, what conflicts
might arise for Odysseus
and his men?

16. prodigious (prō dij əs) adj. enormous.

Reading Strategy

Reading in Sentences Rephrase the description of the Cyclops in lines 130–133, using your own words.

17. Apollo (a päl' ō) god of music, poetry, prophecy, and medicine.

talents units of money in ancient Greece. but still the sweet scent hovered like a fume over the winebowl. No man turned away when cups of this came round.

A wineskin full

I brought along, and victuals¹⁹ in a bag, for in my bones I knew some towering brute would be upon us soon—all outward power, a wild man, ignorant of civility.

We climbed, then, briskly to the cave. But Cyclops had gone afield, to pasture his fat sheep, so we looked round at everything inside:

160 a drying rack that sagged with cheeses, pens crowded with lambs and kids, 20 each in its class: firstlings apart from middlings, and the 'dewdrops,'

19. victuals (vit' els) n. food or other provisions.

20. kids n. young goats.

Reading Check

What does Odysseus bring along when he goe to inspect the Cyclops' cave?



does this image of Apollo compare with your impressions of the other gods

Generated by CamScanner

or newborn lambkins, penned apart from both.

And vessels full of whey²¹ were brimming there—
bowls of earthenware and pails for milking.

My men came pressing round me, pleading:

21. whey (hwa) at thin, watery part of milk separated from the thicker ourse

Why not

take these cheeses, get them stowed, come back, throw open all the pens, and make a run for it?
We'll drive the kids and lambs aboard. We say
put out again on good salt water!'

Ah.

how sound that was! Yet I refused. I wished to see the cave man, what he had to offer—no pretty sight, it turned out, for my friends. 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 boughs²² on his shoulder 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 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 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 withy²³ baskets, 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? 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?'

boughs (bouz) n. tree branches.

23. withy (with ê) adj. made from tough, flexible twigs.

We felt a pressure on our hearts, in dread of that deep rumble and that mighty man. 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;
homeward bound, but taking routes and ways
uncommon; so the will of Zeus would have it.
We served under Agamemnon,²⁴ son of Atreus—
the whole world knows what city

210 he laid waste, what armies he destroyed. It was our luck to come here: here we stand, beholden for your help, or any gifts you give—as custom is to honor strangers. We would entreat you, great Sir, have a care

215 for the gods' courtesy: Zeus will avenge the unoffending guest.'

from his brute chest, unmoved:

He answered this

You are a ninny, or else you come from the other end of nowhere, telling me, mind the gods! We Cyclopes

220 care not a whistle for your thundering Zeus or all the gods in bliss; we have more force by far.

I would not let you go for fear of Zeus—
you or your friends—unless I had a whim²⁵ to.

Tell me, where was it, now, you left your ship—

225 around the point, or down the shore, I wonder?

He thought he'd find out, but I saw through this, and answered with a ready lie:

'My ship?

Poseidon²⁶ Lord, who sets the earth a-tremble, broke it up on the rocks at your land's end.

230 A wind from seaward served him, drove us there.

We are survivors, these good men and I.'

Neither reply nor pity came from him,
but in one stride he clutched at my companions
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—
everything: innards, flesh, and marrow bones.

Literary Analysis

The Epic Hero Which quality of an epic hero does Odysseus demonstrate by addressing the mighty man?

24. Agamemnon (ag' ə mem' nän') king who led the Greek army during the Trojan War.

Literary Analysis

The Epic Hero and Conflict What conflict is revealed in lines 217–223?

25. whim (hwim) *n*. sudden thought or wish to do something.

26. Poseidon (pō sī den) god of the sea, earthquakes, horses, and storms at sea.

Reading Check

What does Odysseus tell Cyclops happened to their ship? 'Nohbdy's my meat, then, after I eat his friends. 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.

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, reddened and glowed as if about to catch. I drew it from the coals and my four fellows 330 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 deep in his crater eye, and leaned on it turning it as a shipwright turns a drill 335 in planking, having men below to swing the two-handled strap that spins it in the groove. So with our brand we bored34 that great eye socket while blood ran out around the red-hot bar. Eyelid and lash were seared; the pierced ball 340 hissed broiling, and the roots popped.

In a smithy one sees a white-hot axehead or an adze plunged and wrung in a cold tub, screeching steam—the way they make soft iron hale and hard—: just so that eyeball hissed around the spike.

345 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, threw it away, and his wild hands went groping; then he set up a howl for Cyclopes

350 who lived in caves on windy peaks nearby.

Some heard him; and they came by divers³⁵ ways to clump around outside and call:

Polyphemus?³⁶ 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?'

Reading Strategy Reading in Sentences What is the main idea of lines 323–326?

34. bored (bôrd) v. made a hole in.

35. divers (dī verz) adj. several; various.

36. Polyphemus (päl' i fē' mes)

What ails you,

Out of the cave

the mammoth Polyphemus roared in answer:

'Nohbdy, Nohbdy's tricked me, Nohbdy's ruined me!'

To this rough shout they made a sage³⁷ 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, 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.
Now Cyclops, wheezing as the pain came on him,
fumbled to wrench away the great doorstone
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?
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.

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 the woolliest ram, the choicest of the flock, 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.

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,
the master stroked each ram, then let it pass,

mammoth (mam' eth) adj. enormous

37. sage (sāj) adj. wise.

Reading Strategy

Reading In Sentences
How many questions do
the other Cyclopes ask
Polyphemus? What two
basic things do they want
to know?

Literary Analysis

The Epic Hero Which heroic quality does Odysseus demonstrate in lines 371–375?

Reading Check

What do the other
Cyclopes think
Polyphemus is saying
when he says, "Nohbdy's
tricked me"?

Generated by Camscanner

but my men riding on the pectoral³⁸ fleece
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.
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
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 rogue³⁹ and his accurst companions burnt it out when he had conquered all my wits with wine. Nohbdy will not get out alive, I swear.

where he may be now, dodging all my fury!
Bashed by this hand and bashed on this rock wall
his brains would strew the floor, and I should have
rest from the outrage Nohbdy worked upon me.'

I dropped and rolled clear of the ram's belly, going this way and that to untie the men. 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
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 and struck their oars into the sea. Far out, as far off shore as shouted words would carry,

430 I sent a few back to the adversary:

'O Cyclops! Would you feast on my companions? Puny, am I, in a cave man's hands? How do you like the beating that we gave you, 38. pectoral (pek' te rel) adj. located in or on the chest.

39. carrion (kar' ē ən) rogue (rōg) repulsive scoundrel.

Reading Check

How do the men escape from the Cyclops' cave?

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. 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 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 in low voices protesting:

'Godsake, Captain! Why bait the beast again? Let him alone!'

450 '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,
he'll get the range and lob a boulder.'

'Aye

He'll smash our timbers and our heads together!'
455 I would not heed them in my glorying spirit,
but let my anger flare and yelled:

'Cyclops,

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

At this he gave a mighty sob and rumbled:
'Now comes the weird⁴⁰ upon me, spoken of old.
A wizard, grand and wondrous, lived here—Telemus,⁴¹
a son of Eurymus;⁴² 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.

Literary Analysis

The Epic Hero Despite his heroism, which human weaknesses does Odysseus reveal as he sails away?

Reading Strategy

Reading in Sentences
Rephrase the sentence in
lines 450–451.

40. weird n. fate or destiny

41. Telemus (tel e' mas)

42. Eurymus (yoo rim' es)

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.

Come back, Odysseus, and I'll treat you well, praying the god of earthquake⁴³ to befriend you—his son I am, for he by his avowal

fathered me, and, if he will, he may heal me of this black wound—he and no other of all the happy gods or mortal men.'

Few words I shouted in reply to him:

If I could take your life I would and take
your time away, and hurl you down to hell!
The god of earthquake could not heal you there!

At this he stretched his hands out in his darkness toward the sky of stars, and prayed Poseidon:

**O hear me, lord, blue girdler of the islands, if I am thine indeed, and thou art father: grant that Odysseus, raider of cities, never see his home: Laertes' son, I mean, who kept his hall on Ithaca. Should destiny intend that he shall see his roof again among his family in his father land, far be that day, and dark the years between. Let him lose all companions, and return under strange sail to bitter days at home.'

In these words he prayed, and the god heard him.

Now he laid hands upon a bigger stone
and wheeled around, titanic for the cast,
to let it fly in the black-prowed vessel's track.
But it fell short, just aft the steering oar,
and whelming seas rose giant above the stone
to bear us onward toward the island.

There

as we ran in we saw the squadron waiting,
the trim ships drawn up side by side, and all
our troubled friends who waited, looking seaward.
We beached her, grinding keel in the soft sand,
and waded in, ourselves, on the sandy beach.
Then we unloaded all the Cyclops' flock

 god of earthquake Poseidon.

Reading Strategy

Reading in Sentences Rephrase the second sentence of Cyclops' prayer to Poseidon.

titanic (ti tan' ik) adj. of great size or strength



What does Cyclops ask for in his prayer to Poseidon? to make division, share and share alike, only my fighters voted that my ram, the prize of all, should go to me. I slew him by the seaside and burnt his long thighbones to Zeus beyond the stormcloud, Cronus'44 son, who rules the world. But Zeus disdained my offering: destruction for my ships he had in store and death for those who sailed them, my companions. Now all day long until the sun went down we made our feast on mutton and sweet wine, till after sunset in the gathering dark we went to sleep above the wash of ripples.

When the young Dawn with fingertips of rose touched the world, I roused the men, gave orders to man the ships, cast off the mooring lines; and filing in to sit beside the rowlocks oarsmen in line dipped oars in the gray sea. So we moved out, sad in the vast offing.⁴⁵ baving our precious lives, but not our friends.

Literary Analysis

The Epic Hero Which admirable quality does Odysseus show in his actions with the stolen sheep?

44. Cronus (krō' nes)
Titan who was ruler of the universe until he was over-thrown by his son Zeus.

45. offing *n*. distant part of the sea visible from the shore.