

*The Odyssey*  
**Guided Reading**  
**Book 11: Land of the Dead**

*Odysseus and his crew set out for the land of the dead. They arrive and find the place to which Circe has directed them. Odysseus sees some the “shades” of his men. One crew member, Elpenor, approaches Odysseus and explains that he fell from Circe’s roof, drunk and careless. Odysseus and his men left Elpenor’s body where it fell. He implores Odysseus to return to Aeaea to properly bury his body. Odysseus promises to do so. Next he sees his mother, surprised that she is in the Land of the Dead. Although tears and grief overcome him, he holds her off and continues to seek Tiresias. Once he finds Tiresias, he makes the proper sacrifices and follows to expected rites. Finally Tiresias, the famous blind prophet of Thebes, addresses Odysseus.*

| TEXT FROM EPIC  | SUMMARY   | IMPORTANCE/ ANALYSIS  |
|---|---|---|
| <p>Then spoke the prince of those with gift of speech:<br/>           ‘Great captain,</p>   | <p>Then Tiresias said, “Great Captain, I know you just want to get home, but hard times lie ahead. Poseidon is still angry at you for blinding his son.</p>   | <p>(From the summary above) Why is it so important to Elpenor to be buried properly?</p>  |
| <p>A fair wind and the honey lights of home are all you seek. But anguish lies ahead; the god who thunders on the land prepares it, not to be shaken from your track, implacable<sup>1</sup>, in rancor<sup>2</sup> for the son whose eye you blinded.</p>  | <p>[Empty summary box]</p>  | <p>Tiresias speaks vaguely here when he says “denial of yourself, restraint of shipmates. How do you think Odysseus feels upon hearing such a vague prediction?</p>   |
| <p>One narrow strait may take you through his blows: denial of yourself, restraint of shipmates. When you make landfall on Thrinacia first and quit the violet sea, dark on the land you’ll find the grazing herds of Helios by whom all things are seen, all speech is known. Avoid those kine<sup>3</sup>, hold fast to your intent, and hard seafaring brings you all to Ithaca. But if you raid the beeves<sup>4</sup>, I see destruction for ship and crew.</p>  | <p>[Empty summary box]</p>  | <p>Based on context clues, what do you think <u>bereft</u> means?</p>   |
| <p>Though you survive alone, <u>bereft</u> of all companions, lost for years, under strange sail shall you come home, to find your own house filled with trouble: insolent men eating your livestock as they court your lady. Aye, you shall make those men <u>atone</u> in blood! But after you have dealt out death—in open combat or by stealth—to all the suitors, go overland on foot, and take an oar, until one day you come where men have lived with meat unsalted, never known the sea, nor seen seagoing ships, with crimson bows and oars that fledge light hulls for dipping flight.</p> | <p>You will know the place when people do not even recognize the oar you carry, mistaking it for a fan. Once you’ve reached the place, make a sacrifice. Then go home and make a sacrifice of 100 oxen to all the gods.</p> | <p><u>Atone</u> means to make amends. Why should Odysseus make the suitors atone for their actions?</p>   |
| <p>The spot will soon be plain to you, and I can tell you how: some passerby will say, “What winnowing fan is that upon your shoulder?” Halt, and implant your smooth oar in the turf and make fair sacrifice to Lord Poseidon: a ram, a bull, a great buck boar; turn back, and carry out pure <u>hekatombs</u><sup>5</sup> at home to all wide heaven’s lords, the undying gods, to each in order.</p>  | <p>[Empty summary box]</p>  | <p>Tiresias’s instructions seem strange, but the point is that he must go on another long journey to atone for his own sins against the gods and his own men. Do you think Odysseus will obey? Explain.</p> |
| <p>Then a seaborne death soft as this hand of mist will come upon you when you are wearied out with rich old age, your country folk in blessed peace around you. And all this shall be just as I foretell. . . .”</p>   |   |   |

*Odysseus then speaks to the shade of his mother. She tells him that Penelope and Telemachus are still grieving for him and that his father, Laertes, has moved to the country, where he, too, mourns his son. Odysseus’ mother explains that she died from a broken heart. Odysseus also speaks with the spirits of many great ladies and men who died, as well as those who were being punished for their earthly sins. Filled with horror, Odysseus and his crew set sail.*

<sup>1</sup> **Implacable:** unstoppable  
<sup>2</sup> **rancor:** bitterness  
<sup>3</sup> **kine:** cattle  
<sup>4</sup> **beeves:** plural of beef  
<sup>5</sup> **hekatombs:** great public sacrifice, usually 100 oxen