

The Odyssey
Guided Reading
Book 12: Scylla & Charybdis

The Ithacans set off. Odysseus does not tell his men of Crice's last prophecy—that he will be the only survivor of their long journey. Still speaking to Alcinous's court, Odysseus continues his tale. Odysseus follows Circe's advice so that he may hear the beautiful (yet deadly) call of the sirens. He has his men tie him to the mast of the ship so that he can hear the Sirens' singing without succumbing to it. Odysseus plugs his men's ears with beeswax to keep them from hearing the Sirens' bewitching voices. Odysseus and his crew escape this danger, but they are now headed toward Scylla and Charybdis...

TEXT FROM EPIC	SUMMARY	IMPORTANCE/ ANALYSIS
<p>In travail¹, sobbing, gaining on the current, we rowed into the strait—Scylla to port ² and on our starboard ³ beam Charybdis, <u>dire</u> gorge of the salt sea tide. By heaven! When she vomited, <u>all the sea was like a cauldron seething over intense fire, when the mixture suddenly heaves and rises.</u> The shot spume ⁴ soared to the landside heights, and fell like rain.</p>		<p>Homer is not shy about expressing the fear and tears of his characters. Does this make them more or less admirable to you as a reader?</p> <p>Explain the Homeric simile in these <u>underlined</u> lines.</p>
<p>But when she swallowed the sea water down we saw the funnel of the maelstrom⁵, heard the rock bellowing all around, and dark sand raged on the bottom far below. My men all blanched ⁶ against the gloom, our eyes were fixed upon that yawning mouth in fear of being devoured. Then Scylla made her strike, whisking six of my best men from the ship. I happened to glance aft at ship and oarsmen and caught sight of their arms and legs, dangling high overhead. Voices came down to me in anguish, calling my name for the last time.</p>		<p>Explain the Homeric simile in these <u>underlined</u> lines.</p>
<p><u>A man surfcasting on a point of rock for bass or mackerel, whipping his long rod to drop the sinker and the bait far out, will hook a fish and rip it from the surface to dangle wriggling through the air: So these were borne aloft in spasms toward the cliff.</u> She ate them as they shrieked there, in her den, in the dire grapple, reaching still for me— and deathly pity ran me through at that sight—far the worst I ever suffered, questing the passes of the strange sea.</p>		<p>Odysseus was truly stuck between a rock and hard place. He purposefully goes close to Scylla to avoid Charybdis. How do you think he feels as their leader as they head into this conflict?</p>
<p>The Rocks were now behind; Charybdis, too, and Scylla dropped astern . . .”</p>		
<p>Then we were coasting the noble island of the god, where grazed those cattle with wide brows, and bounteous flocks of Helios, lord of noon, who rides high heaven. From the black ship, far still at sea, I heard the lowing of the cattle winding home and sheep bleating; and heard, too, in my heard the words of blind Tiresias of Thebes and Circe of Aeaia: both forbade me the island of the world's delight, the Sun...”</p>		

¹ **travail:** painful effort

² **port:** left side

³ **starboard:** right side

⁴ **spume:** froth or foam found on waves

⁵ **maelstrom:** very powerful whirlpool

⁶ **blanched:** turned pale

