

Harkness Seminar on *The Odyssey*

Participation Guidelines

- **Refer to the text** when needed during the discussion. A seminar is not a test of memory.
 - Your goal is to understand the ideas, issues, and values reflected in the text.
- Do not stay confused; ask for clarification.
- Talk to each other, not just the moderators.
- Stick to the point currently under discussion; make notes about ideas you want to come back to.
- **Don't raise hands; take turns speaking.**
- **Listen carefully and respectfully.**
 - **Make eye contact with the speaker and be aware of your body language.**

In an ideal class:

EVERYONE has participated significantly and, more or less, equally.

The pace allows for clarity and thoughtfulness, but not boredom.

There's a sense of balance and order: focus is on one speaker at a time and one idea ("on the floor") at a time.

There's an attempt to resolve questions and issues before moving on to new ones.

There's a clear sense of what the group has covered and how.

Comments are not lost, the loud do not dominate, the shy are encouraged.

Students are animated, sincere and helpful.

The discussion is lively without being "hyper" or superficial.

Everyone is clearly understood. Those who are not heard are urged to repeat. Those who do not hear or understand are urged to speak up.

Students take risks and dig for deep meanings, new insights.

Students back up what they say with examples, quotations, etc.

Students ask each other to back up assertions with proof (if possible). (Not all of the time: there is also a need for much speculation and even "uneducated" guessing in a discussion like this).

The TEXT is referred to often!

• **Remember**

You will ask a lot of questions, and not all of them will have easy answers. The emphasis is on discovery rather than conclusion. It's ok not to answer all of the questions, if you think of an interesting sidetrack to take.

Questions for First Harkness Discussion on *The Odyssey*

Note: these are questions to get the discussion started and/or move it along. You don't need to get to all these questions in your discussion—your own questions are just as good—better, in fact!

1. Why does Alkinoos offer his daughter in marriage to Odysseus when he doesn't even know who Odysseus is? (p.120) What makes Odysseus so desirable as a potential son-in-law?
2. Who is more powerful: Alkinoos or Arete?
3. Are women generally represented as powerful or weak in *The Odyssey*?
 - a. If you think women are powerful, what kind of power do they wield?
 - b. If you think women are weak, weak in what way?
4. What are the key characteristics that make Odysseus seem more heroic as we get to know him better?
 - a. Does he fit the modern definition of a hero in your opinion?

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