

WEEK 2: Leadership and Heroism

Excerpt Analysis

1. Approaching the land of the enemy, p. 243, p. 245

*With heavy hearts we sailed along and reached
the country of the reckless Cyclopes,
lacking in customs. They put trust in Gods
and do not plant their food from seed, nor plow,
and yet the barley, grain, and clustering wine-grapes
all flourish there, increased by rain from Zeus.
They hold no councils, have no common laws,
but live in caves on lofty mountaintops,
and each makes laws for his own wife and children,
without concern for what the others think.*

*... We looked across the narrow strip of water
at the Cyclopic island, saw their smoke,
and heard the baaing of their sheep and goats.
The sun went down and in the hours of darkness
we lay and slept on shore beside the sea.
But when the rosy hands of Dawn appeared,
I called my men together and addressed them.*

*'My loyal friends! Stay here, the rest of you,
while with my boat and crew I go to check
who those men are, find out if they are wild,
lawless aggressors, or the type to welcome
strangers, and fear the gods.'*

A. What does this excerpt say about Odysseus as a leader? Why do you think he is compelled to approach the seemingly treacherous land of the Cyclopes?

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B. How you can relate to the descriptions, ideas, or experiences in the excerpt? How is Odysseus' description of the land of the Cyclopes typical of representations of "the enemy"?

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2. Encountering the enemy, p. 246-7

*We soon were at the cave, but did not find
the Cyclops; he was pasturing his flocks.
We went inside and looked at everything.
We saw his crates weighed down with cheese, and pens
crammed full of lams divided up by age:
the newborns, middlings, and those just weaned.
There were well-crafted bowls and pails for milking,
and full of whey. My crew begged, 'Let us grab
some cheese and quickly drive the kids and lambs
out of their pens and down to our swift ships,
and sail away across the salty water!'
That would have been the better choice. But I
refused. I hoped to see him and find out
if he would give us gifts. In fact he brought
no joy to my companions.*

A. What does this excerpt say about Odysseus as a leader, and about his men? Why do you think his men resist staying, and why do you think he goes against their pleas?

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B. How you can relate to the descriptions, ideas, or experiences in the excerpt? What motivates leaders to act?

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3. Enemy attack, p. 249

*... Leaping
up high, he reached his hands toward my men,
seized two, and knocked them hard against the ground
like puppies, and the floor was wet with brains.
He ripped them limb by limb to make his meal,
then ate them like a lion on the mountains,
devouring flesh, entrails, and marrow bones,
and leaving nothing. Watching this disaster,
we wept and lifted up our hands in prayer
to Zeus. We felt so helpless. When the Cyclops
had filled his massive belly with his meal
of human meat and unmixed milk, he lay
stretched out among his flocks. Then thinking like
a military man, I thought I should
get out my sword, go up to him and thrust
right through his torso, feeling for his liver.
That would have doomed us all. On second thoughts,
I realized we were too weak to move
the mighty stone he set in the high doorway.
So we stayed there in misery until dawn.*

A. What does this excerpt say about Odysseus as a leader, and about his men? Should Odysseus have done more?

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B. How you can relate to the descriptions, ideas, or experiences in the excerpt? Are there some scenarios that do not lend themselves to action? Is there a 'right' or 'wrong' way to escape death in battle?

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4. Plotting against the enemy, p. 251-253

*... I approached
and offered him a cup of ivy wood,
filled full of wine. I said,
‘Here, Cyclops! You
have eaten human meat; now drink some wine,
sample the merchandise our ship contains...
... He took and drank the sweet delicious wine;
he loved it, and demanded more.*

*‘Another!
And now tell me your name, so I can give you
a present as my guest, one you will like...
... So I gave him
another cup of wine, and then two more.
He drank them all, unwisely. With the wine
gone to his head, I told him, all politeness,
‘Cyclops, you asked my name. I will reveal it;
then you must give the gift you promised me,
of hospitality. My name is Noman.
My family and friends call me Noman.’
He answered with no pity in his heart,
‘I will eat Noman last; first, I will eat
the other men. That is my gift to you.’*

- Plotting against the enemy, p. 251-253

*... I was strategizing, hatching plans,
so that my men and I could all survive.
I wove all kinds of wiles and cunning schemes;
danger was near and it was life or death.*

A. What does this excerpt say about Odysseus as a leader? How do you think he feels about Cyclops’ ‘gift’?

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B. How you can relate to the descriptions, ideas, or experiences in the excerpt? How important is strategic thinking and intellect (v. physical strength) for leaders, and those who are assigned to follow them?

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5. Attacking the enemy, p. 252

*... All-conquering sleep
took him. In drunken heaviness, he spewed
wine from his throat and chunks of human flesh.
And then I drove the spear into the embers
to heat it up, and told my men, 'Be brave!'
I wanted none of them to shrink in fear...
... My crew
stood firm: some god was breathing courage in us.
They took the olive spear, its tip all sharp,
and shoved it into his eye. I leaned on top
and twisted it, as when a man drills wood
for shipbuilding...
... His blood
poured out around the stake, and blazing fire
seized his lids and brows, and fried the roots...
... So did his eyeball crackle on the spear.
Horribly then he howled, the rocks resounded,
and we shrank back in fear. He tugged the spear
out of his eye, all soaked with gushing blood.*

A. What does this excerpt say about Odysseus as a leader? Why do you think his crew stood firm?

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B. How you can relate to the descriptions, ideas, or experiences in the excerpt? What makes people able to act bravely and/or violently?

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6. Troop resistance, p. 255

*When I had gone as far as shouts can carry I jeered back,
‘Hey, you, Cyclops! Idiot!*

*The crew trapped in your cave did not belong
to some poor weakling. Well, you had it coming!
You had no shame at eating your own guests!
So Zeus and other gods have paid you back.’*

*My taunting made him angrier. He ripped
a rock out of the ground and hurled it at us...
... I told my men, ‘Row fast, to save your lives!’
and gestured with my head to make them hurry.
They bent down to their oars and started rowing.
We got out twice as far across the sea,
and then I called to him again. My crew
begged me to stop, and pleaded with me.*

‘Please!

*Calm down! Why are you being so insistent
and taunting this wild man? He hurled that stone
and drove our ship right back to land. We thought
that we were going to die...’*

*... But my tough heart was not convinced; I was
still furious, and shouted back again...*

A. What does this excerpt say about Odysseus as a leader? Why is he taunting the Cyclops? What does the excerpt tell us about Odysseus’ men?

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B. How you can relate to the descriptions, ideas, or experiences in the excerpt? How do you think you would have acted differently? What advice would you give Odysseus?

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THREE TAKEAWAYS

1. How would you characterize Odysseus as a leader? List at least three adjectives. Feel free to also write a fuller description.

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2. Which connections between the book excerpts and group members' perspectives/experiences seem most compelling?

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3. What was your favorite excerpt from this week's reading? Why? (Feel free to choose from #1-6 above, or a different excerpt from the book.)
