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B. What are your most striking memories of returning home, or returning to civilian life? What was familiar and what was new? How did you (or do you) adapt or change the stories you tell about your time in service based on who you are addressing?

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## 2. Getting help from a higher power, p. 483-4

*... Athena's heart  
became enraged, and angrily she scolded  
Odysseus. "Where is your courage now?  
You fought nine years on end against the Trojans...  
you slaughtered many men when war was raging,  
and formed the plan that made the city fall.  
Now you are home at last, how can you flinch  
from being brave and using proper force  
against these suitors? Come now, stand by me  
and watch how [I]  
will treat your enemies as recompense  
for all your service."*

A. Why does Athena want to help Odysseus? What are the answers to her questions – why does Odysseus act differently at war than he does at home? Athena seems to suggest that is a negative quality; do you agree?

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B. What outside forces propel people to act in moments of self-doubt, violence, fear? Are the forces different in civilian life than they are in the military?

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### 3. Recalling images of violence, p. 486

*As eagles with their crooked beaks and talons  
swoop from the hills and pounce on smaller birds  
that fly across the fields beneath the clouds;  
the victims have no help and no way out,  
as their attackers slaughter them, and men  
watch and enjoy the violence. So these  
four fighters sprang and struck, and drove the suitors  
in all directions. Screaming filled the hall,  
as skulls were cracked; the whole floor ran with blood.*

A. Homer uses vivid imagery here to explain violence – appealing to the reader’s senses. What do you think of the wording and the pictures he provides? Do they help you envision what happened? Why do you think he choose to tell the story this way?

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B. How do you think Odysseus will feel when he looks back on this episode a decade later? Is there any utility to recounting and recalling violent encounters?

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### 4. Asserting power; protecting honor, p. 491

*Tell me now about the household women.  
Which ones dishonor me? And which are pure?  
The slave who loved her master answered...  
Twelve stepped away from honor: those twelve girls  
Ignore me; and Penelope our mistress...  
The master strategiast Odysseus*

*Said...*

*“Call the women  
who made those treasonous plots while I was gone...  
we must start  
to clear the corpses out. The girls must help...  
When the whole house is set in proper order,  
restore my halls to health: take out the girls  
between the courtyard wall and the rotunda.  
Hack at them with long swords, eradicate  
all life from them. They will forget the things  
the suitors made them do with them in secret,  
through Aphrodite.”*

A. Why do you think Odysseus is determined to “eradicate all life” from the enslaved women? If you think about this scenario from the perspective of the women, rather than Odysseus, how does your interpretation of it change?

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B. Looking back on your own departure from military life, how would you advise Odysseus to manage feelings of jealousy and vengefulness? Is there a way to avoid these emotions after a long absence? Should they be avoided?

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## **THREE TAKEAWAYS**

**1. Review the answers to the “A” questions above to assess: What higher powers and bad habits strengthen and threaten Odysseus? How do they work for and against him? How could he better manage the forces? What positive tendencies does he possess that counteract the negative ones?**

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**2. Review the answers to the “B” questions above to assess: How common or unique are Odysseus’ struggles with higher powers and bad habits? What could he learn from us, and what can we learn from him?**

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**3. What was your favorite excerpt from this week’s reading? Why? (Feel free to choose from #1-4 above, or a different excerpt from the book.)**

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