

## **WEEK 5: Homecoming and Relationships** **Notes Sheet**

### **Excerpt Analysis**

#### **1. Encountering kin, p. 377-378**

*Stranger, you look so different from before.  
Your clothes, your skin – I think you must be  
some god who has descended from the sky.”  
... Long-suffering Odysseus replied,  
“I am no god. Why would you think such things?  
I am your father, that same man you mourn.  
It is because of me these brutal men  
are hurting you so badly.”  
Then he kissed  
his son and cried, tears pouring down his cheeks;  
he had been holding back till then. The boy  
did not yet trust it really was his father, and said,  
“No, you are not Odysseus,  
my father; some god must have cast a spell,  
to cause me further pain.”  
... Artful Odysseus said sharply, “No,  
Telemachus, you should not be surprised  
to see your father. It is me; no other  
is on his way. I am Odysseus.  
I suffered terribly, and I was lost,  
but after twenty years, I have come home.”  
... With that, he sat back down. Telemachus  
hurled his arms round his father, and he wept.*

A. When Odysseus meets Telemachus, Athena has just “dressed him up” in youth, removing his disguise as a beggar; his son doesn’t recognize him and doubts he is truly his father. How does this scenario compare to Odysseus’ other meetings we read about this week – with his wife and father? Homer uses different adjectives repeatedly throughout the book to refer to Odysseus – cunning, lying, and here, “long-suffering.” Do these descriptions seem to fit Odysseus’ character as he re-encounters his loved ones? Why do you think Odysseus tells his son, “I suffered terribly, and I was lost...” How open or selective is he being about his experiences?

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B. What makes encounters with loved one more or less easy, enjoyable, difficult, challenging, successful? How can friends and family ease the transition back to civilian life? What is the best way for former service members to “reintroduce” themselves and make the transition easier for loved ones who never served?

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## 2. Encountering partners and lovers, p. 497

*So she went downstairs. Her heart  
could not decide if she should keep her distance  
as she was questioning her own dear husband,  
or go right up to him and kiss his face  
and hold his hands in hers. She crossed the threshold  
and sat across from him beside the wall,  
in firelight. He sat beside the pillar,  
and kept his eyes down, waiting to find out  
whether the woman who once shared his bed  
would speak to him. She sat in silence, stunned.  
Sometimes when she was glancing at his face  
it seemed like him; but then his dirty clothes  
were unfamiliar.  
... “If this is really him,  
if my Odysseus has come back home,  
we have our ways to recognize each other,  
through secret signs known only to us two.”*

A. Like Telemachus, Penelope doubts Odysseus’ identity; in fact, Penelope and Odysseus seem equally hesitant to trust. Why is Penelope hesitant, and is that a justified instinct? What do you think of her words (directed at her son): “We have our ways to recognize each other...”? Based on that wording, and the larger excerpt above, do you think there is hope for this couple?

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B. How do relationships with partners change when one is in the military? How can they be strengthened or weakened? How can you tell when problems are too big to surmount, or changes are too drastic for the partnership to last?

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### 3. Encountering parents, p. 517-518

*“Father! It is me! I have  
been gone for twenty years, and now am home,  
In my own father’s country. Stop your tears.  
I will explain, though we do not have long.  
I killed the suitors in my house; I took  
revenge for all the pain they caused.”*  
Laertes  
answered, *“If you are really my own son  
Odysseus come home, show me a sign; let me be sure of it.”*  
*Odysseus was quick to answer...*  
*“... When I was little, I would follow you  
around the garden, asking all [the trees’] names.  
We walked beneath these trees; you named them all  
and promised them to me...”*  
*At that, Laertes’ heart  
and legs gave way; he recognized the signs  
Odysseus had given as clear proof.  
He threw both arms around his ruthless son,  
who caught him as he fainted.*

A. Initially, Odysseus tells his father he is someone else, and shares news that makes Laertes think Odysseus is gone forever. Why does he do that? How, if at all, does this change your view of Odysseus?

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B. Given Jerome and Bobby’s stories last week about their encounters with parents, and your own experiences, how would you recommend Odysseus make his meeting with his dad easier, more joyful, more productive? What is the best way to “make an entrance” and say hello when returning from service?

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## **THREE TAKEAWAYS**

**1. What do Odysseus' encounters with his son, wife, and father have in common? How do they differ? What do they tell you about his homecoming experience, and what his post-war experiences may be like? How could he have made the initial encounters better or easier?**

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**2. How do Odysseus' experiences reuniting with loved ones parallel those of current service members and their families? What role do relationships – whether with familiar loved ones and friends, or new people – play in the overall homecoming experience? What is the best way to reinforce relationships upon returning home?**

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

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