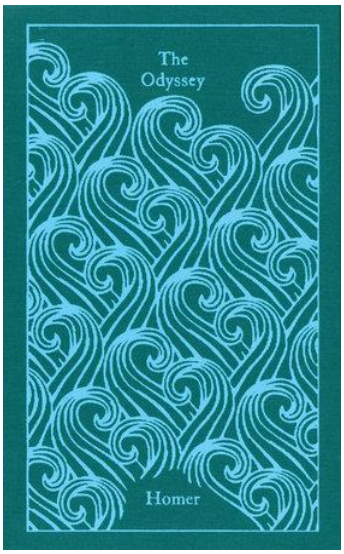
Translation We are Reading

For this seminar we will use the translation by **E. V. Rieu**, long considered one of the best introductions to the *Odyssey* for first-time readers.

Rieu's goal was simple: to tell the story clearly and powerfully in modern English. His translation captures the energy of Homer's narrative while remaining highly readable.

For readers encountering the epic for the first time, it offers the ideal balance between **clarity, accessibility, and dramatic storytelling**.



What You'll Learn

The *Odyssey* is one of the foundational works of Western literature. Over the course of this seminar we will explore the story itself while also investigating the deeper ideas that have made this poem endure for nearly three thousand years.

Reading Schedule & Weekly Discussions

Week 1 — The Telemachy Begins

Sunday, April 26

Read:
Book 1 — *Athene Visits Telemachus*
Book 2 — *The Debate in Ithaca*

Week 2 — Searching for News of Odysseus

Sunday, May 3

Read:
Book 3 — *Telemachus with Nestor*
Book 4 — *Menelaus and Helen*

Week 3 — The Hero Revealed

Sunday, May 10

Read:
Book 5 — *Calypso*
Book 6 — *Nausicaa*

Week 4 — The Court of the Phaeacians

Sunday, May 17

Read:
Book 7 — *The Palace of Alcinous*
Book 8 — *The Phaeacian Games*

Week 5 — The Wanderings Begin

Sunday, May 24

Read:
Book 9 — *The Cyclops*
Book 10 — *Circe*

Week 6 — The Land of the Dead

Sunday, May 31

Read:
Book 11 — *The Book of the Dead*
Book 12 — *Scylla and Charybdis*

Week 7 — The Return to Ithaca

Sunday, June 7

Read:
Book 13 — *Odysseus Lands in Ithaca*
Book 14 — *In Eumaeus' Hut*

Week 8 — Father and Son

Sunday, June 14

Read:
Book 15 — *Telemachus Returns*
Book 16 — *Odysseus Meets His Son*

Week 9 — The Beggar in the Palace

Sunday, June 21

Read:
Book 17 — *Odysseus Goes to the Town*
Book 18 — *The Beggar in the Palace*

Week 10 — Recognition Begins

Sunday, June 28

Read:
Book 19 — *Eurycleia Recognizes Odysseus*
Book 20 — *Prelude to the Crisis*

Week 11 — The Test of the Bow

Sunday, July 5

Read:
Book 21 — *The Great Bow*
Book 22 — *The Battle in the Hall*

Week 12 — Reunion and Resolution

Sunday, July 12

Read:
Book 23 — *Odysseus and Penelope*
Book 24 — *The Feud is Ended*

What Is a Hero?

The Greeks were fascinated by a question that still shapes storytelling today: **what makes someone a hero?**

In the *Iliad*, the heroic ideal is embodied by Achilles—the greatest warrior on the battlefield. The *Odyssey* presents a very different kind of hero.

Odysseus survives not through brute strength alone, but through intelligence, adaptability, endurance, and strategy. His story reveals a new heroic model—one in which cleverness and psychological insight are as important as physical power.

The World of Homeric Values

The poem also opens a window into the moral world of early Greek civilization.

As we read, we will explore key Homeric ideas such as:

- **honor and reputation**
- the sacred duties of **guest and host**
- the tension between **mortality and lasting fame**
- loyalty to **home and family**

These values shape the decisions of both gods and mortals throughout the story.

The Art of Storytelling

The *Odyssey* is not only a great story—it is one of the earliest masterpieces of narrative art.

The poem introduces storytelling techniques that still define literature and film today: long journeys, disguised identities, dramatic recognitions, and the hero recounting his own adventures.

Many of the narrative patterns we take for granted today first appear in Homer's epic.