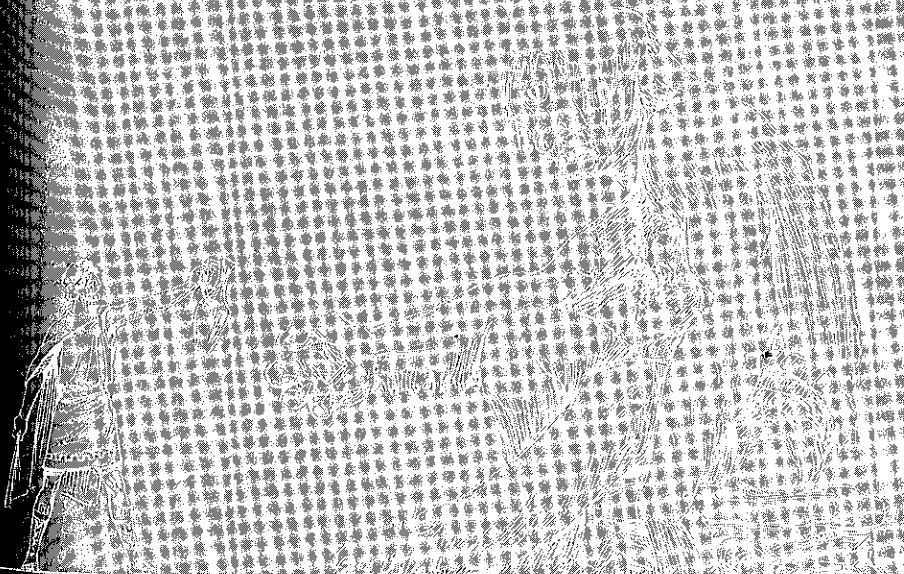


# ULYSSES AND THE CYCLOPS



### *Vocabulary Preview*

- fleece [FLEECE]—sheep's wool before it is made into yarn  
Every spring the farmer sold the *fleece* from his sheep.
- herd [HERD]—to watch over animals  
A shepherd's job is to *herd* sheep.
- rage [RAJE]—to move or shout with anger  
The lion *raged* when it saw the hunters.
- shrug [SHRUG]—to raise your shoulders to show you don't  
know about something  
Jane *shrugged* when her sister asked the date of the school  
play.



The Greek myths are so old that their authors have been long forgotten. The first author we know anything about is the man who wrote the legends about Ulysses. His name was Homer. (The Greeks used only first names. Last names were invented later.)

Except for his name, we know very little about Homer. We don't know where he was born, when he was born, or when he died. We think that he was born nearly three thousand years ago. Legends about Homer himself tell us that he was a blind storyteller. His friends are supposed to have led him from city to city.

Today some people believe that no "Homer" ever lived at all. These people think that he is as much of a legend as any of the characters he is supposed to have invented. Homer, they say, should be thought of along with the strange beings in his stories—Circe, the Sirens, and the Cyclopes [*sy KLO pee-z*].

We have already met the beautiful, sad Circe. Some of us have read about the dangerous Sirens. Now, let us hope, we are ready to meet the Cyclopes, the most ugly monsters that ever *never* lived. For as makers of monsters, the Greeks have never been beaten.

**ULYSSES AND THE CYCLOPS** Day after day, the small boat holding Ulysses and his men sailed toward Ithaca. Around them, as far as the eye could see, there was nothing but blue water. Were they never to see their families again? Were they never to see the one place in the world they called *home*?

It seemed not. There was no escape from the hot sun and the restless waves. They ate the last of their food. Their water was almost gone too. Each man was given only enough to

wet the inside of his mouth twice a day. But still they sailed on, hoping to see land.

The worst thing was the lack of water. This was strange, for there was water all around them. But Ulysses knew that the sea water was too salty for his men to drink. It would make them more thirsty than they already were. And too much salt would make them ill.

As time passed, the burning sun did strange things to the men from Ithaca. Some of them went blind for hours at a time. Others began to see strange and wonderful sights. They thought they saw friendly green islands in front of the boat. They saw big meals floating in the air before their eyes. The food looked real—until they tried to eat it. Then it disappeared.

Finally the Greeks saw something that was very real. The water around the boat was changing from blue to green. "This means that the water is becoming shallow," Ulysses said. "Watch carefully from now on. We may be nearing land."

Ulysses was right. That night they came to an island. Working in the dark, they pulled their boat up onto the beach. They had no idea where they were. But it didn't matter. It was enough to sleep on dry land.

In the morning, when the men awakened, they cried for joy. They seemed to be on an island. Close to them a stream bubbled down out of the green hills. Wild goats dotted the hillsides. Joyful tears flowed down the faces of the men from Ithaca. They were saved!

But their tears soon became tears of sorrow. Not far from the island was a large body of land. One look told the Greeks that this was the land of the Cyclopes [*sy KLO peeze*].

The Cyclopes were giant monsters. They looked something

like humans, except that they had only one eye. These horrible eyes were set right in the middle of the monsters' foreheads. The Cyclopes had no government and no laws. They lived alone. They never washed. Everyone in ancient Greece had heard about the Cyclopes. But few people had seen them—and no one had ever left their land alive.

Ulysses' soldiers looked across the water at the Cyclopes. They lost all hope. But not Ulysses. "There seem to be no Cyclopes here on this island," said the clever king. "They must not know how to make boats. Come, let's explore the island, feast on the goats, and forget about the Cyclopes."

The Greeks could explore the island and feast on the goats. But they couldn't forget about the Cyclopes. They could see the smoke from the monsters' fires. When the wind was right, they could hear the monsters shouting at one another.

Ulysses sat on the shore watching the Cyclopes. He became more and more curious. Finally he called his men together. "My friends," he said, "I'm going to visit the Cyclopes. I want to find out what they're really like. Are they as cruel as we have heard? Or, when they see that I bring no harm, will they treat me as a guest?"

The soldiers backed away from Ulysses. Had their king gone mad?

"Anyone who wishes may come with me," Ulysses went on. "The rest of you will stay here and wait."

A few of the braver soldiers joined Ulysses at once. Then more decided to stick with their king. Soon the soldiers had divided themselves into two groups. Ulysses took those who were going with him and got into the boat. Silently they rowed across the water to the land of the Cyclopes.

"I wish we had a gift for the Cyclopes," Ulysses whispered.

"We need something to show them that we come as friends." Suddenly a light came to his eyes. He reached into the bottom of the boat and came up with a jug of wine. He looked at the jug and smiled.

"I've been saving this," he told his men. "Had we not found land, it might have tasted good. But now, I think the Cyclopes should have our wine."

They reached the shore of the land of the Cyclopes. Ulysses told some of the men to stay with the boat. Then, with twelve of his best friends, he set out to meet the monsters. As yet the Greeks had not been seen.

"Be careful," Ulysses warned. "A Cyclops [*SY klops*] has only one eye, it is true. But his one eye can see more than our two."

Soon the Greeks passed around a huge rock and found themselves looking into the mouth of a cave. "A Cyclops' cave!" Ulysses said in a loud whisper. "The monster must be out herding his animals."

Ulysses stepped into the cave first. It was a large, damp room. Hundreds of spiders ran for cracks in the stone walls. The only light came from a fire in the center of the dirt floor. Baskets of cheese were scattered here and there. In the back of the cave was a pile of wood for the fire. On one side was the giant's bed. On the other side were pens full of hungry little lambs.

Ulysses held a piece of cheese to his nose. "It looks as if the Cyclopes can do one thing well," he said. "Here, taste the cheese."

The men did as they were told. The cheese was so good, they couldn't stop eating.

"Listen!" one of the soldiers cried suddenly. "Do you——"

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“Shhh!” Ulysses put a finger to his lips. All was quiet for an instant. Then came the sound of the monster’s steps.

The men ran to all parts of the cave. Some hid under the giant’s bed. Others ran behind the pile of wood. Still others dived in among the lambs.

In a minute the Cyclops began to herd his sheep into the cave. He had a huge head, long arms covered with hair, and feet like a bear’s. His ugly eye was at least four inches wide. The skins of three sheep were stitched together around his dirty body.

Thirteen pairs of eyes watched every move the Cyclops made. He had not seen or heard the Greeks, for he went about his work as though nothing had happened. First he threw wood on the fire. Then he put the sheep in their pens. When this was done, he reached outside and pulled the huge rock up against the mouth of the cave.

Suddenly someone sneezed. “*Ker-chew!*” The sound echoed from wall to wall.

“Ha!” cried the Cyclops. His one eye looked around the cave, now well lighted by the roaring fire. Then the eye came to rest. It was looking at a foot that stuck out from behind the pile of wood.

The Cyclops pulled the owner of the foot from his hiding place. “Ha! Ho! Ha!” he laughed, walking around the cave. He pulled men out from everywhere. Before long the Greeks were lined up in front of the sheep pens. The monster’s huge eye moved slowly up and down the line.

“Who are you?” he asked in a deep voice. “Are you pirates? Robbers? Have you come to kill, or to be killed yourselves?”

Ulysses took a step forward. “We are Greeks, men from

Ithaca," he told the giant. "We come as friends. And we wish to leave as friends."

The Cyclops said nothing. Again his eye moved up and down the row of men.

"Come, Cyclops, let's not quarrel," said Ulysses. "True, you are bigger than we are. But the gods look down on us both."

The Cyclops seemed to burst with anger. "The gods!" he raged. "Do you think we Cyclopes fear the gods? No, we are *above* the gods! If I want to kill you, Zeus himself can do nothing to stop me."

The monster was now looking at the largest of Ulysses' men. Before the Greeks knew what was happening, he had grabbed the man and smashed his head against the wall. Then he killed another man. He cut the bodies in pieces and ate them quickly, bones and all. The Greeks cried like babies and prayed for the help of Zeus.

For a short time, at least, they were to be saved. The big meal soon made the monster sleepy. He yawned a few times and lay down on the bed. Before long he was asleep. When he started to snore, Ulysses walked toward him on tiptoe. The king pulled out his sword and placed its tip over the Cyclops' heart.

Suddenly Ulysses stopped. If he killed the giant, how could the Greeks get out of the cave? The rock that covered the doorway was too big to be moved by human hands.

Ulysses sat down sadly on the other side of the cave. There seemed to be no way out. They were trapped in a cave with a man-eating monster!

Things got no better. When the Cyclops woke up, he ate two more of the Greeks. Still Ulysses could think of no way to escape. Then he remembered—the monster had not yet



discovered the wine! But six men had been eaten before the clever Ulysses was ready with his plan.

Ulysses went up to the Cyclops as soon as the sixth man had been swallowed. "Cyclops," he said, "after your meal, wouldn't you like a drink of this wine. You have treated us badly, but we still want you to have the wine."

"Wine?" said the Cyclops. "If you brought me wine, you are truly my friends."

The monster reached his hair-covered hand out for the jug. He jerked out the cork and poured a large drink down his throat. He licked his lips with a loud *smack*.

"This is very good wine," the giant said. "It makes me feel kindly toward my friends. What is your name, friend?"

"My name is No-man," Ulysses lied.

"Well, I like you, No-man," replied the Cyclops. "I will treat you as a friend. I will eat you last."

As soon as the giant was again asleep, Ulysses put his plan into action. "The monster is going to lose his one eye," he whispered. First the sharp end of a long pole was put in the fire. When the point was red-hot, Ulysses took it from the fire. He carried it toward the sleeping Cyclops.

Before long a loud cry came from the Cyclops' cave. "Ow! Oo! Oh!" cried the blinded monster. The noise could be heard all over the land. Other Cyclopes came on the run and gathered outside.

"What's the matter?" they shouted. "Is an enemy in there? Is anyone hurting you?"

"No-man is in here!" the monster called back. "No-man is hurting me."

The other Cyclopes looked at each other. "If no man is in there, our friend must be all right," they agreed. Then they shrugged and walked back to their own caves.

Inside the cave, the blind Cyclops ran around trying to catch the Greeks. His big feet were burned as he ran through the fire. He crashed into the sheep pens, then tripped over the sheep that ran about the floor. Finally he bumped into a wall and bounced back flat on the ground. He lay there a long time.

When the Cyclops sat up, he blinked his one blind eye and rubbed his head. Then he slowly got to his feet. He felt his way along the walls until he reached the mouth of the cave. With one hand, he pushed the huge rock out of the way.

"Look!" the men cried. "He's going to lock us in here!"

But the monster had no such idea. It was now morning, and the Cyclops wanted to let his animals out to eat. He sat down in the mouth of the cave and stretched out his arms.

Before long one of the sheep lifted its nose and smelled the grass outside. The animal tried to get past the Cyclops. When the monster was sure it was a sheep and not a man, he let it go by.

Ulysses watched with interest. Then, without a word, he caught the largest sheep in the cave. He led it almost to where the blind Cyclops was seated. As soon as the sheep had smelled the grass outside, Ulysses crawled under the animal. He grabbed the fleece on the sheep's neck and gripped its body between his knees. Very slowly, he raised himself off the ground.

The Greek soldiers held their breath as they watched their king. Ulysses held on tight. The sheep started to walk toward the Cyclops.

Soon the monster felt the sheep press against his leg. His huge, hairy hand passed over the animal's woolly back. Then the sheep passed outside. Ulysses was free!

One by one, the Greeks made their escape by hanging on

to the sheep. When all were safely out of the cave, they ran down to the boat. Soon they were once again on the blue sea.

Ulysses stood up in the back of the boat. He looked back at the land of the Cyclopes. "Blind Cyclops," he called across the water, "know now who has blinded you. I am the mighty Ulysses, King of Ithaca and conqueror of Troy."

The Cyclops was still seated in the mouth of the cave. He stood up and raged in a voice like thunder. Suddenly he picked up a great rock, as big as the top of a mountain. He threw it far out over the water.

But luck was still with Ulysses. The big rock just missed the Greek boat. Ulysses and his soldiers were soaked by the splash. The King of Ithaca and conqueror of Troy wisely decided to wait until they were farther away before he called again.

### The end of the road:

**ULYSSES RETURNS HOME** After many years of wandering, Ulysses finally reached Ithaca. He found his kingdom in bad order. Most people had come to believe that their king had drowned.

His wife, Queen Penelope [*pe NEL o pee*], had not yet remarried. But it was clear that she would soon choose a new king. More than a hundred men spent their time in Ulysses' palace. Each hoped Penelope would marry him. These suitors were eating Ulysses' food, drinking Ulysses' wine, and giving orders to Ulysses' old servants.

Worst of all, no one who saw Ulysses knew who he was. He had been a young man when he left for Troy. Now he

returned, twenty years later, looking older than his years. His face was browned by the sun and lined by the sea. His clothes were those of a beggar.

Ulysses decided to tell no one who he really was. For a while, at least, he would be a spy in his own kingdom. With his own eyes and ears he would see just who had remained loyal. He started out on foot for the royal palace. The green fields and groves of olive trees were just as he remembered them. But most of all, he liked meeting the people. They told him what had happened in Ithaca since the mighty Ulysses had been swallowed up by the sea.

At last the beggar-king reached the royal palace. Music and laughter drifted through the open windows. But he didn't go in at once. He stood looking at a thin dog that lay in the dust by the gate. This was his old dog, its body now stiff with age and weak from lack of food.

The dog raised its eyes and looked at Ulysses. Very slowly, its tail started to wag. It tried to drag itself toward Ulysses. But it couldn't. The dog seemed to know that now, with its master home, it could die in peace. And in another minute the old dog lay dead.

Ulysses made his way into the palace. For the first time, he saw the men who wished to take his place. They were feasting and drinking in the great dining hall. Not one of them really looked like a king. Excitement was in the air, for Penelope had said that she would soon choose her new husband.

Ulysses went from man to man, begging for food. He wanted to see which of the suitors were good, kind men. Some of them took pity on him. Others did not. "What!" they cried. "A new beggar? Don't we have enough beggars in the country now?"

"Do you want something, old man?" laughed one of the suitors. He picked up a small stool. "Here, then. Take this!"

The stool sailed across the room toward Ulysses. It hit him on the shoulder. But the king didn't fall. Instead, he moved away without a word. He knew that his time would come.

Ulysses had not long to wait. Penelope's plan for choosing one of the suitors was an interesting one. She entered the room holding Ulysses' old bow and a quiver of arrows. "This bow," she explained to the suitors, "belonged to my beloved king, the lost Ulysses. It has not been used since he bent it with his own strong hands. I will let each of you shoot an arrow. The man who shoots the straightest arrow will be the new king."

Right away all the suitors wanted to try their skill with the bow. They couldn't agree on who would go first. But finally one of them stepped forward to shoot the first arrow. He took the old bow in his hands. "What!" he said to himself. Something was wrong. He couldn't even bend the bow! After trying three times, he handed it to the next man in line.

One by one, the suitors learned that the bow of a great king was too much for them. They tried to bend it until their hands were sore. When the old beggar asked for a chance to shoot an arrow, all they could do was laugh.

Ulysses not only bent the bow, he sent an arrow flying straight toward the target. He had won back his own kingdom and his own wife!