

Ready Readers:
High School Literature
Volume I



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OUR STORY

In 2003, Missy Andrews took a dare. A friend challenged her to show the parents in their homeschool co-op how to teach literature without a college degree, and she accepted. The method she devised became famous as *Teaching the Classics*, the teacher-training seminar that now equips parents and teachers all over the world to pass on the art of reading to their students.

Missy and her husband Adam founded CenterForLit shortly thereafter and began sharing the simple principles of *Teaching the Classics* with parents and teachers at conventions and speaking engagements nationwide. CenterForLit now offers curriculum materials, online classes, live teacher-training, and parent-teacher support networks, all dedicated to helping readers understand and revel in the beauty of classic books.

The world's great literature contains the wisdom of the ages – a treasure worth seeking. To readers who lack the proper tools, however, that treasure often remains locked away and hidden from sight.

Our mission is to supply you, the treasure seeker, with the right maps and keys.

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INTRODUCTION



The *Ready Readers* series is intended to assist the teacher or parent in conducting meaningful discussions of literature in the classroom or home school. Questions and answers follow the pattern presented in *Teaching the Classics*, the CenterForLit's two-day literature seminar. Though the concepts underlying this approach to literary analysis are explained in detail in that seminar, the following brief summary presents the basic principles upon which this guide is based.

The *Teaching the Classics* approach to literary analysis and interpretation is built around **three unique ideas** which, when combined, produce a powerful instrument for understanding and teaching literature:

First: All works of fiction share the same basic elements — Context, Structure, and Style. A literature lesson that helps the student identify these elements in a story prepares him for meaningful discussion of the story's themes.

Context encompasses all of the details of time and place surrounding the writing of a story, including the personal life of the author as well as historical events that shaped the author's world.

Structure includes the essential building blocks that make up a story, and that all stories have in common: Conflict, Plot (which includes *exposition, rising action, climax, denouement, and conclusion*), Setting, Characters, and Theme.

Style refers to the literary devices used by authors to create the mood and atmosphere of their stories. Recognition of some basic literary devices (alliteration, simile, personification, metaphor, etc.) enables a reader not only to understand the author's themes more readily, but also to appreciate his craftsmanship more fully.

Second: Because it is approachable and engaging, children's literature is the best genre to employ in teaching the foundational principles of literary analysis. Children's books present these building blocks in clear, memorable language, and are thus treasure mines of opportunities for the astute teacher — allowing him to present Context, Structure and Style with ease to children and adults alike. Having learned to recognize these basic elements in the simple text of a classic children's story, a student is well prepared to analyze complex works suitable for his own age and level of intellectual development.

Third: The best classroom technique for teaching literary analysis and interpretation is the Socratic Method. Named after the ancient gadfly who first popularized this style of teaching, the Socratic method employs the art of questioning, rather than lecturing, to accomplish education. Based upon the conviction that the process of discovery constitutes the better part of learning, our program uses well-placed questions to teach students *how* to think, rather than dictating to them *what* to think.

The *Teaching the Classics* seminar syllabus supplies a thorough list of Socratic questions for teachers to use in class discussion. The questions are general enough to be used with any book, but focused enough to lead the student into meaningful contemplation of the themes of even the most difficult stories. Questions on the list are arranged in order of difficulty: from grammar-level questions which ask for the mere fact of a story, to rhetoric-level questions which require discussion of ideologies and transcendent themes. Properly employed, this list can help teachers engage their classes in important discussions of ideas, and can also provide a rich resource for essay and other writing assignments! Used in conjunction with a good writing program, *Teaching the Classics* produces **deep thinkers** at any age.

The questions used in this guide have been taken directly from the Socratic list, and will therefore be familiar to the seminar alumnus.

More information about *Teaching the Classics* may be found at www.centerforlit.com.

Happy reading!



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A NOTE ON REFERENCES



The reference numbers in parentheses following each Socratic question refer to the complete Socratic List, which is included in the course syllabus of the Center for Literary Education's flagship seminar, *Teaching the Classics: A Socratic Method for Literary Education*.

When citing a work of literature, each guide's author will refer to either the chapter in which he found the quote, or the page number of the edition whose ISBN number is listed in the Quick Card preceding the teacher guide. This is true with two exceptions:

- **Homeric notation:** A citation for a Homeric poem includes a Roman numeral followed by a series of Arabic numbers, i.e. (XII. 112-113). The Roman numeral refers to the book of the poem where the quotation is found. In the example citation the author is referring to Book 12. The Arabic numbers reflect the lines of poetry quoted from that particular book. In most editions, these can be found along the side of the page. In the example, the author is quoting lines 112 and 113.
- **Shakespearean notation:** A citation for a Shakespearean play displays three sets of Arabic numbers, i.e. (4.2.15-20). The first number refers to the act of the play that the author is quoting from. In the example citation, the author is working with Act 4. The second number in the citation refers to the scene within that act where the quotation is located. In the example, that would be Scene 2 of Act 4. Finally, the last series of numbers refer to the lines of poetry or prose the author is quoting. Most editions will include line numbers down the side of the page. In the example, the author is quoting lines 15 through 20.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS



Growing up in Michigan, Sam Johnson was homeschooled K-12. He received his Bachelor of Arts from Hillsdale College with a double major in English and Greek, and a minor in music. He married his wife Jessica one month later, and is now pursuing a doctorate in theology at the University of Notre Dame. He hopes to pastor full time in the years afterwards.



Missy Andrews is co-founder of CenterForLit and a homeschooling mother of six. She graduated summa cum laude from Hillsdale College in 1991 with a BA in English Literature and Christian Studies. Missy and her husband Adam teach in their local homeschool co-op and conduct online literature classes for students around the world. She is currently pursuing her Master of Arts degree.



Emily Andrews earned her Bachelor of Arts degree from Hillsdale College with a double major in English and history. The autumn following graduation she married her husband Ian, and became a member of the CenterForLit administrative staff. She hopes to one day pursue further education in Shakespeare Studies, and keep her nose in a book for the rest of her days.



The Odyssey of Homer:

Questions for Socratic Discussion
by Sam Johnson



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QUICK CARD



Reference	<i>The Odyssey of Homer</i> . Trans. Richmond Lattimore. ISBN: 978-0061244186												
Plot	After ten years of fighting at Troy, Odysseus finally sets sail for home. Along the way he encounters many trials and dangers that take another ten years of his life. He returns to his kingdom only to find that his wife is plagued by suitors who are trying to usurp his position.												
Setting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mythical Greece • Ithaka, kingdom of Odysseus • In the years following the Battle of Troy 												
Characters	<table style="width: 100%; border: none;"> <tr> <td style="width: 33%;">Odysseus</td> <td style="width: 33%;">The god Poseidon</td> <td style="width: 33%;">Various monsters</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Telemachos</td> <td>The messenger Hermes</td> <td>Greek pantheon</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Penelope</td> <td>The suitors</td> <td>The shepherd</td> </tr> <tr> <td>The goddess Athene</td> <td>Circe, Kalypso, Nausikaa</td> <td></td> </tr> </table>	Odysseus	The god Poseidon	Various monsters	Telemachos	The messenger Hermes	Greek pantheon	Penelope	The suitors	The shepherd	The goddess Athene	Circe, Kalypso, Nausikaa	
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Telemachos	The messenger Hermes	Greek pantheon											
Penelope	The suitors	The shepherd											
The goddess Athene	Circe, Kalypso, Nausikaa												
Conflict	<p>Man vs. Man Man vs. the gods Man vs. Fate Man vs. Himself</p>												
Theme	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The greatest journey is the journey home. • A strong marriage is the root of the home and the bedrock of society. • Intellect subdues force and strength. • Hospitality to strangers = a just heart and a godly mind. 												
Literary Devices	<p>Stock Epithets Extended Simile Personification Irony Allusion</p>												

QUESTIONS ABOUT STRUCTURE: SETTING



In what country or region does the story happen? Does the story happen in one spot, or does the action unfold across a wide area? (1a, c)

The height, depth, breadth, and intricacies of the questions that make up the meat and matter of this epic poem – questions of the human condition, divine interaction, love, death, justice, family, steadfastness, longing, faithfulness, identity, etc. – are seen just as expansively reflected in the topography of the *Odyssey*. Book I begins at the summit of Mount Olympus amidst the illustrious gods. Book XXIV plunges the reader into the shady depths of Hades’ house. The broad ocean, enchanted islands, whirlpools, and pastoral landscapes make up the setting in between. Yet even on this immense scale, the most endearing familiarities of home life are not lost on Homer’s subtlety. Odysseus himself from the very first lines of the poem is marked out as a man of “far journeys” who suffered on the wide sea and saw many cities. His lot was to travel from the ravaged plains of Ilium (and even the splintery insides of the wooden horse!) across the broad sea, hopping mythical islands to various cities and peoples all before setting foot on his homeland of Ithaka once again. In fact, a vital part of the birth of a hero in the Greek mythic tradition is that he *must* go on such a wide-ranging journey in order to be tested and proven by an equally wide number of challenges, and in order that his name might spread throughout Greece and beyond.

Is there anything symbolic or allegorical about the place where the story happens? (1i)

The sheer volume of locations that Homer includes in his work can be mind-boggling, let alone the bizarre Greek names, which may seem to simply meld into one another after reading only a few books of the text. Yet remember that each location is carefully selected by the author in order to illustrate important elements about that particular part of the story, and each helps to illuminate the main themes of the work as a whole. For example, in naming Circe’s island “Aiaia,” Homer evokes sorrow and mourning by way of an Ancient Greek onomatopoeia similar to our English word “woe.” The island’s very name alerts readers to be wary of this place as one in which mourning plays a central role, which indeed proves true. Not only is Odysseus’ entire journey almost lost by Circe’s wiles while on the island (which therefore brings about mourning), but he and his companions also cease to weep as they ought for their homes during their stay on Aiaia and grow forgetful of their calling to journey on. Even the strange, vowels-only name of Circe’s island begins to draw out the multi-faceted riches of Homer’s art!

Teaching your student that even the place names, as frustrating as they may be, can be a rewarding and even vital aspect of literary analysis is one of the most effective ways of displaying the art and fruitfulness of close reading.

Among what kinds of people is the story set? How do they live? (1h)

In the *Odyssey*, it is also extremely important to make note of the degree to which each location of Odysseus's travels is civilized. Upon arrival at every new location, Odysseus asks himself some form of this question: "Ah me, what are the people whose land I have come to this time, / and are they violent and savage, and without justice, / or hospitable to strangers, with a godly mind?" (for example VI.119-121). This is the question that we ourselves as readers must ask again and again of each new people group/character we encounter in the manifold locales of the *Odyssey*, since hospitality, the mark of "justice" and a "godly mind," is an overarching theme in this work.

How long a period of time does the story cover? (2b)

Odysseus' wandering, from the time he leaves home until his final return, takes twenty years. The story of the *Odyssey* spans the second decade, with the large majority of his story being related through narration in the last number of weeks after Odysseus is set free by Kalypso.

Does the story happen in a particular year, era, or age of the world? What ideas were prevalent during the period of the story? (2d,f)

Most scholars will place the events of Homer's epics around the beginning of the 12th-century BC. Another epic poet, Hesiod, who wrote his epic poem *Works and Days* about a generation after Homer, describes these earlier men as a race of demigods, noble and with might that far exceeded any following generations. This was the Age of Heroes, and its myths often bridge the gap between utter fiction and true history, with lines blurred where one category ends and another begins. Thus the extremities of heroic capabilities abound in the *Odyssey* far beyond the realm of possibility in our own age, and yet the imaginary freely intermingles with what we would easily identify with in our own lives even to this day.

What does this mean for our literary analysis, though? Hesiod writes of the heroic race of men: "when Death's veil had covered them over, / Zeus granted them a life apart from other men" (Hes. W. 188-189). This "apartness" is something to which the readers of the heroic myths must pay special attention. The divergence from "normal" standards of human existence not only sets the hero apart from the rest of mankind, but because of this alteration and exaggeration is more readily able to teach those who study it. When something is larger, more expansive, it allows space for more thorough exploration and education. The themes drawn out by the life of a hero are easier to see because both he

