*THE ODYSSEY* & E”SIREN SONG” ASSIGNMENT

Read and annotate the poem.

Some of the things you may want to mark as you notice them are:

• Use an **S for Symbols**: A symbol is a literal thing that also stands for something else, like a flag, or a cross, or fire. Symbols help to discover new layers of meaning.

• Use an **I for Imagery:** Imagery includes words that appeal to one or more of the five senses. Close attention to imagery is important in understanding an author’s message and attitude toward a subject.

• Use an **F for Figurative Language:** Figurative language includes things like similes, metaphors, and personification. Figurative language often reveals deeper layers of meaning.

• Use a **T for Tone:** Tone is the overall mood of a piece of literature. Tone can carry as much meaning to the story as the plot does.

• Use a **Th – Theme:** In literature, a theme is a broad idea in a story, or a message or lesson conveyed by a work. This message is usually about life, society or human nature. Themes explore timeless and universal ideas. Most themes are implied rather than explicitly stated.

• Plot elements (setting, mood, conflict, etc.)

• Diction (effective or unusual word choice)

**Siren Song** BY [MARGARET ATWOOD](https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/margaret-atwood)

**This is the one song everyone**

**would like to learn: the song**

**that is irresistible:**

**the song that forces men**

**to leap overboard in squadrons**

**even though they see the beached skulls**

**the song nobody knows**

**because anyone who has heard it**

**is dead, and the others can't remember.**

**Shall I tell you the secret**

**and if I do, will you get me**

**out of this bird suit?**

**I don't enjoy it here**

**squatting on this island**

**looking picturesque and mythical**

**with these two feathery maniacs,**

**I don't enjoy singing**

**this trio, fatal and valuable.**

**I will tell the secret to you,**

**to you, only to you.**

**Come closer. This song**

**is a cry for help: Help me!**

**Only you, only you can,**

**you are unique**

**at last. Alas**

**it is a boring song**

**but it works every time.**

Margaret Atwood, “Siren Song” from *Selected Poems 1965-1975.* Copyright © 1974, 1976 by Margaret Atwood. Reprinted with the permission of the author and Houghton Mifflin Company.

Source: *The Poetry Anthology 1912-2002* (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2002)

After carefully reading and annotating “Siren Song,” answer the questions below using complete sentences and textual evidence from the poem to support your responses.

1. Based on your reading and understanding of Book XII of Homer’s *Odyssey*, explain the allusion in the title ,”Siren Song.” Who are the sirens and what is their song?

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1. How does the speaker describe her song?

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1. **Enjambment: Enjambment is when the grammatical sentence in a poem does not end with the line break.** Explain the effect of enjambment in “Siren Song.” How does it make the reader feel? Why?

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1. How does the speaker explain the myth of the Sirens in the second and third stanzas (lines 4-9)? Quote and EXPLAIN some important phrases.

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1. What promise does the speaker make in the fourth stanza? What does she ask for in return (lines 10-12)?

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1. How does the Siren portray herself in stanzas four and five (lines 10-15)? Quote and explain some important phrases. Discuss the **connotations** of the words that Atwood has chosen here.

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1. How does she portray the other sirens? Quote and explain some important phrases. Discuss the **connotations** of the words that Atwood has chosen here.

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1. What promise does the speaker make to the reader in lines 19-21?

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1. What does she say about how the Sirens lure men to their deaths? What is the secret of their deadly song?

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1. How does the direct address in the second person (when the speaker says “you”) affect a reader of this poem?

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1. How does the speaker reveal that this poem has in fact been the Siren’s song?

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1. What point does this poem make about women and women’s role?

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1. What point does the poem make about the human condition in general?

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**Now, read the descriptions of the Sirens from *The Odyssey*:**

1. “‘First you will come to the Sirens, who bewitch everyone who comes near them. If any man draws near in his innocence and listens to their voice, he never sees home again, never again will wife and little children run to greet him with joy; but the Sirens bewitch him with their melodious song’” (150).
2. “‘There in a meadow they sit, and all round is a great heap of bones, mouldering bodies, and withering skin’” (150).
3. “First, [Circe] bids us keep away from the Sirens with their wonderful voices and their flowery meadow” (153).
4. “…the Sirens saw us coming and raised their melodious song” (153).
5. “So they sang in lovely tones” (153).

How are the Sirens in Atwood’s poem and the Sirens in *The Odyssey* alike? How are they different? Refer to specific details from the poem and the excerpts to support your response.

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