*The Odyssey* by Homer & “Ulysses” by Alfred Lord Tennyson

Follow the annotation instructions as you read “Ulysses.”

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)

**About the text: Born in 1809, Tennyson was and remains one of Britain’s most celebrated poets. From 1850-1892, he was Poet Laureate of the United Kingdom. Although his poetry, may have been influenced by Romantic writers such as Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Tennyson’s meter, moral outlook and subject matter mark him as a Victorian. In this case, he draws on the Victorian interest in the past to write about the epic hero Ulysses (the Roman name for the Greek Odysseus.**

* **Who is the “idle king”?**
* **Who is the “aged wife?”**
* **How does the “idle king” feel?**

It little profits that an idle king,

By this still hearth, among these barren crags,

Match'd with an aged wife, I mete and dole

Unequal laws unto a savage race,

That hoard, and sleep, and feed, and know not me.

* **Who is the speaker?**
* **What does the speaker referring to when he says, “I have enjoy’d/Greatly, have suffer’d greatly”?**
* **‘**In Greek mythology, the Hydes were nymphs that brought rain. **Paraphrase** this section.

I cannot rest from travel: I will drink

Life to the lees: All times I have enjoy'd

Greatly, have suffer'd greatly, both with those

That loved me, and alone, on shore, and when

Thro' scudding drifts the rainy Hyades

Vext the dim sea: I am become a name;

* **Explain what the speaker means when he says, “Much have I seen and known; cities of men/And manners, climates, councils, governments,/Myself not least, but honour’d of them all;” -**
* **Explain lines 16-17….**

For always roaming with a hungry heart

Much have I seen and known; cities of men

And manners, climates, councils, governments,

Myself not least, but honour'd of them all;

And drunk delight of battle with my peers,

Far on the ringing plains of windy Troy.

I am a part of all that I have met;

* **What is the metaphor in the first two lines of this section? What does it mean?**

Yet all experience is an arch wherethro'

Gleams that untravell'd world whose margin fades

For ever and forever when I move.

* **What is the metaphor in this section? What does it mean?**
* **What do lines 24 -27 reveal about the speaker and the speaker’s intentions?**

How dull it is to pause, to make an end,

To rust unburnish'd, not to shine in use!

As tho' to breathe were life! Life piled on life

Were all too little, and of one to me

Little remains: but every hour is saved

From that eternal silence, something more,

A bringer of new things; and vile it were

* **Explain lines 29 – 32.**
* **How does the speaker feel here? How do you know?**

For some three suns to store and hoard myself,

And this gray spirit yearning in desire

To follow knowledge like a sinking star,

Beyond the utmost bound of human thought.

* **What is the difference between the speaker and Telemachus? How does the speaker feel about Telemachus? How do you know?**

         This is my son, mine own Telemachus,

To whom I leave the sceptre and the isle,—

Well-loved of me, discerning to fulfil

This labour, by slow prudence to make mild

A rugged people, and thro' soft degrees

Subdue them to the useful and the good.

Most blameless is he, centred in the sphere

Of common duties, decent not to fail

In offices of tenderness, and pay

Meet adoration to my household gods,

When I am gone. He works his work, I mine.

* **\*Free hearts and free foreheads would be men w/o allegiance. How does the speaker feel here? Why?**

         There lies the port; the vessel puffs her sail:

There gloom the dark, broad seas. My mariners,

Souls that have toil'd, and wrought, and thought with me—

That ever with a frolic welcome took

The thunder and the sunshine, and opposed

Free hearts, free foreheads—you and I are old;

Old age hath yet his honour and his toil;

Death closes all: but something ere the end,

* **Explain lines 49 – 51.**

Some work of noble note, may yet be done,

Not unbecoming men that strove with Gods.

* **What does the speaker want to do? Why?**

The lights begin to twinkle from the rocks:

The long day wanes: the slow moon climbs: the deep

Moans round with many voices. Come, my friends,

'T is not too late to seek a newer world.

* **What decision has the speaker made? What might the “sounding furrows” be and why does the speaker feel the need to “smite” them?**

Push off, and sitting well in order smite

The sounding furrows; for my purpose holds

To sail beyond the sunset, and the baths

Of all the western stars, until I die.

* **What is the speaker’s attitude in these lines? What does the speaker mean when he says “that which we are, we are”?**

It may be that the gulfs will wash us down:

It may be we shall touch the Happy Isles,

And see the great Achilles, whom we knew.

Tho' much is taken, much abides; and tho'

We are not now that strength which in old days

Moved earth and heaven, that which we are, we are;

* **What conclusion does the speaker come to and why?**

One equal temper of heroic hearts,

Made weak by time and fate, but strong in will

To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield.

**USE DETAILS AND EVIDENCE FROM THE POEM TO ANSWER THE QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION LISTED BELOW:**

1. “In Tennyson: His Art and Relation to Modern Life (1895), Stopford A. Brooke describes the scene in ‘Ulysses’ as being:

**on the shore of Ithaca, at the port. The time is evening. The moon is rising and the sea is gloomed by the shadows of the coming night.** There is no description of the landscape, but enough is given to make us feel the time and the place. (124)

* Why has Tennyson chosen this time and this place for the poem’s setting? What aspects of the setting are described (refer to specific line #s)? How does the setting contribute to the poem’s dominant tone and mood?”

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1. “Whereas Tennyson’s persona in ‘Ulysses’ may be said to represent ‘the life of infinite search,’ Tennyson’s **Telemachus acts as a foil to the** persona by standing for ‘the life of conscientious absorption in duty’ (Chiasson 169). Is Ulysses’ attitude towards his son one of grudging admiration or thinly disguised contempt?” Explain your choice with details and evidence from the poem.

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1. “Charles Tennyson in his biography of the poet Alfred Tennyson (1949) contends that in ‘Ulysses’ Tennyson ‘expressed his realization of the need for going forward and braving the battle of life, in spite of the crushing blow of Arthur’s [A. Henry Hallam’s] death’ (Chiasson 165). **What goals does Ulysses specifically mention that might symbolize ‘the battle of life’?”**

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1. “Make the case that Tennyson’s Ulysses is an egotist who places his own desires and feelings above the common good (remember, Ulysses/Odysseus is a king).

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