

ADVENTURES IN ANCIENT GREECE



By
The Literacy Company

THE ODYSSEY

This story is from the famous poem, *The Odyssey*, by the Ancient Greek poet, Homer. It tells the adventures of the hero Odysseus. He is trying to get home to his wife, Penelope, after winning the Trojan war (thanks to his cunning Trojan Horse plan). Unfortunately for him, he has angered the sea-god, Poseidon, who puts many challenges in his way.



Circe The Enchantress

We arrived at the island after a difficult time with the Cyclops and dropped anchor in the beautiful bay with its crystal waters and sandy beach. There was no-one around so I sent a group off to find food while I made repairs to the ship.

After a while, I began to feel worried. It was two days since I last saw my crew. The island seemed deserted and I was getting nervous about what had happened to them. I took ten of the strongest remaining sailors and set off to find my missing men.

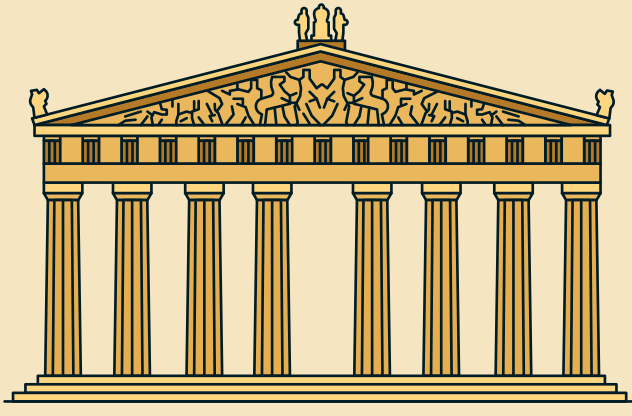
A short walk uphill brought us to a shadowy wood where I spotted a note nailed to one of the gnarled tree trunks.

*Odysseus,
Beware the enchantress, Circe.
Those who accept her gifts will never return.
Only the bark of this magical tree can protect you.
From a well-wisher*

We collected some bark and with our courage fading with the light, we went deeper into the heart of the island.

Before long, we saw curls of smoke and a village appeared in the distance with a forbidding fortress towering over it. We soon found ourselves in the eerily quiet main street where the sights, sounds and smells that met us were somehow strange. Even the animals in their pens looked different but no-one knew why. Suspicious faces watched from behind shuttered windows. What was this place?

Suddenly, a carriage pulled by four enormous, wild-eyed horses appeared in a large cloud of dust. A woman stepped out of it - tall, elegant and terrifying at the same time. It was the Enchantress Circe. In a voice as smooth as liquid silk, she welcomed us to the island. We were mesmerised. One by one, we followed her to the castle.



In the vast banqueting hall, a mouth-watering meal was laid on the table. "Eat!", Circe invited, waving her arms towards roasted meats, fresh vegetables, fruit and decorated cakes that were a feast for the senses. The crew rushed towards the table and the enchantress' eyes glinted as they hungrily attacked the food.

I watched Circe carefully as she turned towards me. Her smile froze, however, as I slowly opened my fist. There, in the middle of my palm, was a piece of the magic bark that every one of the sailors had chewed before they entered the castle. "What have you done with my men?" I demanded. Circe knew when she was beaten.

"I was told you were full of tricks," she sighed, "I turned your men into the pigs in the village pens. You walked right past and didn't even know them! I'll let you go because you gave me such sport. There'll be more fun when the next ship passes."

When we returned to the ship, I gave thanks to the gods on Mount Olympus. I was glad to see the rest of the crew waiting. They were all back to their human shape, apart from the youngest, whose short, curly tail was a very unusual souvenir of the adventure.

Odysseus and the Sirens

Circe gave one final piece of advice to Odysseus before he left the island. She warned him about the Sirens. These were monstrous creatures, with the heads of women and bodies of birds, who lured sailors to their deaths on the rocks. All who heard their voices would not be able to resist their song and would be drawn towards the rocks and shipwrecked. Circe told Odysseus that the only way to get past the Sirens was for them all to put beeswax in their ears and row as fast as they could. Here Odysseus tells us his tale...

There was no way to get home without passing the Sirens so I set sail nervously. After a few days, we saw yet another island of sloping green meadows and tree-topped hills.



On the shore, we saw the Sirens combing their long hair. The crew were drawn towards the island like a magnet but I remembered Circe's warning. I knew that if I didn't take charge our ship would soon be smashed on rocks as sharp as spears.

I'd heard that anyone who can resist the Siren's song will be wiser and cleverer and I knew there was one way I could hear the famous song and still survive. I told the crew to tie me to the mast and not untie me whatever happened, until we were safe. When I was firmly tied, and my men had stuffed the beeswax in their ears, they rowed the ship alongside the island.

It was time to protect ourselves as best we could...and hope.

Before long, the magical song of the Sirens floated towards me over the water:

*Come closer
Odysseus, bravest of heroes,
we sing to make you wise
we sing to soothe away sorrow
we sing to bring you peace
Come closer*

When I heard the words and music, my heart leapt. I longed to plunge into the waves and swim to the island. Struggling madly against the ropes that held me, I shouted at my men to release me but they rowed even harder and wouldn't look me in the eye. To me, bewitched by the song, the Sirens were as beautiful as Helen of Troy, but to the crew, hearing nothing, the creatures seemed like hungry monsters with vicious, crooked claws. The ship sped forwards over the waves and soon the song of the Sirens was an echo of an echo. Only then did the men stop and unplug their ears.

When the danger was past, the captain untied me and we went on our journey. We have given offerings once more to the gods for allowing us to pass by. Thanks to Circe's warning, we have avoided another catastrophe. It has been a long and dangerous journey and I believe I will face many more trials and temptations before I reach home. I expect my dear Penelope has given up hope by now but I will never stop trying.



A DAY IN THE LIFE OF AN ANCIENT GREEK

ANCIENT GREECE AND MODERN GREECE - WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE?

Step back 2,500 years to a time when Greece was one of the most important places in the world. It was not one country like it is today, but many small city states like Athens and Sparta. They didn't really get on and spent a lot of time fighting each other.

Ancient Greeks lived in mainland Greece and the Greek islands just as they do today, but also in other places scattered around the Mediterranean Sea. There were Greeks ruling Italy, Sicily, Turkey, North Africa, and as far away as France! They were excellent sailors who went to sea to trade and find new lands. Taking their ideas with them, they started a way of life similar to the one we have today.

Athens 326 BC - Alex's Day

Alex lives in Athens with his family. They have their own business where his father makes and decorates the clay pots that every Greek citizen uses for everything, including storing food and wine. This is what life was like for a boy in Ancient Greece.



6am

It's an early start for me before the day gets too hot. I might be named after our energetic leader, Alexander the Great, but I'm definitely not too keen on getting up early. I always tidy the workshop before father appears and check the pots in the kiln. Our slave, Markos, brought me some fruit and honey (it was oranges but I was hoping for figs) with bread dipped in wine for breakfast.

8am

After my morning jobs, I set off for school. My sister walked with me and our dog, Ajax, followed us. We stopped on the way to play marbles with some friends. I was looking forward to hearing a bit more of Homer's poem about Odysseus and the Cyclops, then we usually do a grammar lesson, not my favourite!

12 noon

Melissa is usually home when I get back. Like most of the girls whose family are rich enough to send them to school, she has just a few lessons with her tutor before she returns to help our mother weaving or making the perfume that goes into some of father's pots. We had bread, olives and cheese for lunch as usual.

3pm

This afternoon I slept until it cooled down a bit then made a ball for my baby brother with some old tied-up rags. He really loved it and I played with him until father called me to come and paint some of the wine jars he'd made for his customers. I'm getting quite good at drawing the shapes of the Sirens and Odysseus' ship on the clay. I feel very proud of myself.

8pm

We were all together for dinner today. Only very rich citizens have meat, unless it's a special day, but Markos brought us barley porridge with some fish he'd caught this morning. I wish I'd gone with him, I might have caught an octopus, father loves eating them. Luckily for me, it was figs for pudding with honey cake.

10pm

Mother has taken my tunic and sandals to give them a clean (the workshop was dusty today) and I'm in bed with the baby sound asleep next to me and Ajax at my feet. What a busy day! Kalinixta.

