



## **Odyssey 6.85-331: Resources for further study and discussion**

### **Themes and Characters**

#### **Wild Odysseus, Civilised Phaeacia**

On his latest voyage at the end of book 5, Odysseus was storm-tossed, alone, and in a sorry state. The narrator tells us that Athena was bringing him to the island of Scherie where the Phaeacians live, but it is clear from his remarks that he does not know where he has landed. Book 6 opens with a quick description of Odysseus sleeping before moving the focus to Nausicaa and the palace.

When the A-level passage opens, we know that Odysseus is in a reedy river-bed and the presumption is that he is very close to where the girls are playing. This is a key moment in the poem: Odysseus is finally safe, but he doesn't know it and the narrator makes careful use of suspense and irony to heighten our sympathy with Odysseus and reinforce the notion of his finally being in a place of safety.

#### **Understanding the text**

- Read the description of the water-basins (lines 85-98), Nausicaa's instructions to her attendants (199-210) and Nausicaa's descriptions of Phaeacia (255-272, 291-303).
  - How does the poet conjure up an image of Phaeacia as a land of plenty and a safe place for Odysseus to have landed?
  - What impression are we given of the Phaeacian people, from their behaviour towards Odysseus and the things Nausicaa says about them?
  
- Read the description of the laundry-party, their beach picnic, and the ball-game (lines 85-118); then read his entrance and the lion simile (lines 127-148). Finally, read the description of Odysseus washing (lines 223-235) and Nausicaa's reaction (239-246).
  - How does the narrator create tension in the build-up to the entrance of Odysseus? How do lines 110-118 add to the tension?
  - What is Odysseus's reaction when Nausicaa orders her attendants to wash him?
  - How effective is the lion simile in describing Odysseus's situation?
  - How does the narrator highlight the contrast between Odysseus and the Phaeacian girls?
  - How does Athena help in transforming Odysseus from a washed-up piece of flotsam to a dashing stranger, and what is the effect on Nausicaa?



- Read the description of Odysseus waking (lines 119-126), his speech to Nausicaa (lines 149-185)
  - What does Odysseus think when he first wakes?
  - How does Odysseus pitch his speech to Nausicaa to make the best possible impression?

**Broader questions**

- How would the washing-party and Odysseus's entrance be portrayed in a film version of this scene? What choices would a director have to make?
- What do Odysseus's interactions with the Phaeacian girls tell us about gender relations in Homeric Greece?
- Is Phaeacia a utopian fairyland? What can we tell about Greek society from the description of this place and its values?