

Chasing Odysseus

by S.D. Gentill



quest..EPIC..the Odyssey
..the Hero's journey..
TRANSFORMATION
..appropriation...myth..

Rationale

This teaching unit based on *Chasing Odysseus* by S.D.Gentill has been developed with the needs and interests of Junior English students in mind.

Whilst the unit of work has scope for a more traditional critical study of *Chasing Odysseus* as a core text, it offers a variety of comparative activities and student-centred composition tasks. The teaching and learning activities are varied and allow flexible delivery to English students. The teacher is able to focus on particular skills – such as writing, discussion or analysis - or content – such as plot, theme and characterisation - specific to *Chasing Odysseus*.

Significantly, the unit of work also provides scope to introduce students to literary concepts such the epic, the hero's journey, and textual representations of heroes. The preliminary activities, in particular, strive to identify and then build on students' existing knowledge and appreciation of Greek mythology.

The teaching and learning experiences premised on the novel *Chasing Odysseus* aim to:

- encourage students to identify and articulate connections between their own knowledge of Greek myths and legends, *Chasing Odysseus* and other presentations of the epic or appropriations from the epic;
- familiarise students with the conventions of the epic and clarify a framework that can be applied to the hero's journey in *Chasing Odysseus* and apply this model to other texts;
- critically consider representations of the hero, as a central character, within the context of *Chasing Odysseus* and mythology derived from different cultural and historical contexts;
- Compare and contrast the representation of the epic and mythology provided in and through Gentill's *Chasing Odysseus* and other representations of Greek mythology.

Week 1

Focus: Familiarise students with the gods central to Greek legends and mythology.

Activity A Preliminary Viewing (Option: Independent / Pair / Group work)

- Students access (via You Tube) and view one (1) or two (2) episodes of the popular contemporary Canadian television cartoon *Class of the Titans*.
- The central characters in this cartoon are based on the gods in Homer's *The Odyssey*. Their names may have been modified or modernised.

Note: There are some fifty two (52) episodes from which to choose!

Each has an approximate viewing time of twenty three (23) minutes.

Episodes that are highly recommended for Activity A include:

Episode 6 (Season1) – *The Trojan Horse*

Episode 15 (Season1) – *The Odie-sey*

Episode 19 (Season 1) – *The Road to Hades*

Students use a simple table to record the names of the cartoon's central characters. Student view the text critically and identify the characters' attributes or qualities. Students also note the "original" Greek god on whom they are based.

Example:

Character	Attributes or Qualities	Original Greek god/Hero
<i>Odie</i>	Intelligent Resourceful Calm Wise	<i>Odysseus</i>

Post Viewing Class discussion

Why would a popular modern day animation draw on the gods of Greek legends?

Suggest what opportunities and problems would arise from this foundation?

Week 1

Focus: Familiarise students with Greek Legends and Mythology.

Activity B Internet Research & Mini Presentations (Option: Independent / Pair)



Students utilise the internet to research all three (3) or one (1) of the following topics:

- (a) The Odyssey
- (b) The Iliad
- (c) Homer
- (d) Ulysses

If students have been assigned only one (1) research topic it will be necessary to allow time for brief presentations and discussion of common and perhaps conflicting findings.

Optional research of translator of the original text:

- (a) George Chapman

Week 2

Focus: Familiarise students with Greek Legends and Mythology

Activity C Internet Research & Mini Presentations (Option: Independent / Pair)

- Students research one (1) or two (2) the Greek gods or goddesses on the list provided.
- Students collect a variety of different images of the god or goddess being researched.
- Students deliver power point presentations at the culmination of their research.

Teacher-developed criteria to be applied for informal or formal assessment purposes (i.e. focus may be on written format, oral delivery, power point deliver, responses to class-generated questions, bibliography format, etc)

Greek Gods	Greek Goddesses	Heroes	Monsters
			
Pan Hermes Apollo Hades Poseidon Zeus Hephaistos Ares Helios (Titan)	Hera Athena Aphrodite Artemis Persephone Demeter Nemesis Circe Eos (Titan)	Achilles Pentheselia Odysseus Paris Menelaus Agamemnon	Polyphemus Scylla Charybdis Harpies

Week 2

Focus: Familiarise students with Greek Legends and Mythology

Activity D Research & Composing (Independent)



- Students research the Battle or Siege of Troy. (Either internet or regular books)
- Students plan and compose a modern day newspaper report based on one (1) event associated with the Siege of Troy as represented in Greek Legend.
- Students ensure that the newspaper report is accurate and informative, but also adheres to the textual and language conventions of a newspaper report (i.e. addresses who, what, where, when, why)
- Students ensure that the newspaper report includes quotations taken from appropriate parties, appropriate visual depictions or graphics and captions, headline, by-line, etc

Week 2

Focus: Introduce students to literary concepts.

The following commentaries provide a foundation for student discussion and subsequent text-based analysis based on *Chasing Odysseus*. The activities and resources herewith provide a flexible frame work to introduce Junior English students to literary concepts - including the epic, the hero and the hero's journey – that will complement their study of *Chasing Odysseus*.

CONCEPT 1: THE EPIC

An extended narrative poem, usually simple in construction, but grand in scope, exalted in style and heroic in theme, often giving expression to the ideals of a nation or race.

Students critically consider and apply the following conventions to their own reading of S.D.Gentill's *Chasing Odysseus*.

Students locate textual evidence from *Chasing Odysseus* of the following conventions.

Conventions of the Epic

- The hero is a figure of great national or even cosmic importance, usually the ideal man of his culture. He often has superhuman or divine traits. He has an imposing physical stature and is greater in all ways than the common man.
- The setting is vast in scope. It covers great geographical distances, perhaps even visiting the underworld, other worlds, other times.
- The action consists of deeds of valour or superhuman courage (especially in battle).
- Supernatural forces interest themselves in the action and intervene at times. The intervention of the gods is called "machinery."
- The style of writing is elevated, even ceremonial.



CONCEPT 2: WHAT CONSTITUTES A HERO?

J.Campbell in his text *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1956) has presented this succinct assessment of the challenges and accomplishments of a hero:

...a hero ventures forth from the world of the common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won; the hero comes back from his mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man.

Routine Discussion Task

Students – with teacher guidance and sign posting – can apply the framework of Campbell’s assessment to the novel *Chasing Odysseus* and other texts that may be examined in the context of this unit of work.

Different types of Heroes

Students may also wish to consider the different types of heroes suggested by Christopher Vogler in *The Writer’s Journey* (1999). Vogler’s placement of heroes into seven (7) categories can be utilised by students when studying *Chasing Odysseus* and the text’s characters. In summary, the seven (7) categories are thus:

Willing, active gung-ho heroes

- Committed to the adventure
- Without doubts
- Always bravely going ahead
- Self-motivated

Unwilling heroes

- Full of doubts
- Hesitant
- Passive
- Needing to be motivated or pushed into the adventure by an outside force
- Usually change at some point and become committed to the adventure

Anti-heroes

- Specialised kind of hero
- May be outlaws or villains from the point of view of mainstream society
- Audience is in sympathy with them
- They may will in the end over society's corruption
- Rebels

Tragic heroes

- Flawed heroes
- Never overcome their inner demons
- Brought down and destroyed by inner demons
- May be charming
- Their flaw wins or prevails in the end

Group-oriented heroes

- Are part of a society at the beginning
- Journey takes them to an unknown land far from their home
- A separation occurs from the group – and the hero has a lone adventure in the wilderness away from the group which they eventually rejoin

Loner heroes

- Story begins with hero separated from or apart from society
- Natural habitat is the wilderness
- Natural state is solitude
- Journey is one of re-entry into the mainstream society or group, an adventure within the society or group, then a return to the isolation

Catalytic heroes

- Central figures who act heroically
- Limited evidence of change within the character
- Main function is to bring about of effect change in other characters

CONCEPT 3: THE QUEST or HERO'S JOURNEY

The conventions of the quest or hero's journey are also outlined by J.Campbell in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1956).

Students critically consider and apply the following conventions to their own reading of S.D.Gentill's *Chasing Odysseus*.

Conventions of a Hero's Quest

1. The hero is flawed and has to face many difficult challenges to reach his goal. He becomes enlightened in the process. Note the deliberate use of the pronoun "his". A modern subversion has been the female heroine; however, in Ancient China *Mulan* was a well known heroine.
2. The hero must face many challenges before achieving the end goal or he will not appreciate the value of that goal.
3. The challenges are numerous and range from difficulties, enemies, and temptations through to life-threatening situations.
4. The hero experiences a catharsis and emerges from the quest a changes and enlightened individual.
5. The hero usually has the support of a guide or mentor.
6. The hero faces the darkest fear or flaw during the quest.

Alternatively, students may consider and apply "The Hero's Journey Model" and narrative structure scaffold provided in Appendices 4 and 6 of *The Hero's Journey* teaching unit.

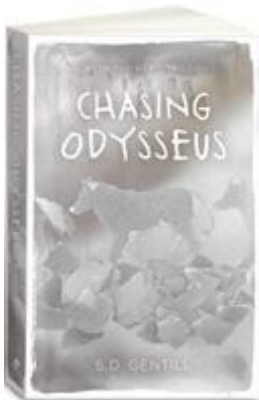
These resources can be accessed via

<http://www.curriculumsupport.education.nsw.gov.au/secondary/english/assets/pdf/hero.pdf>

Week 3

Focus: Novel Study

Activity E Whole-class Reading



As a whole class read the novel's Prologue.

Discussion:

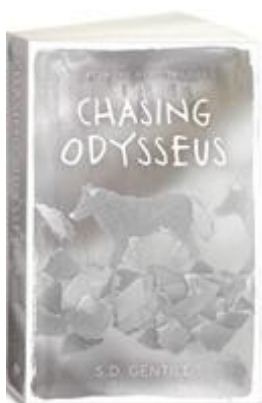
What does this section of the text convey to the reader about the characters of Agelaus and Pentheselia (Penny)?

How does section of the text implicitly suggest much to the reader about the text's context?

Weeks **3-6**

Focus: **Novel Study**

Activity F Reflective Reading Journal



Students read and reflect on the novel's characters and the events that unfold. A reflective journal should be utilised by students so that they can document and comment on the various Books and adventures within the novel.

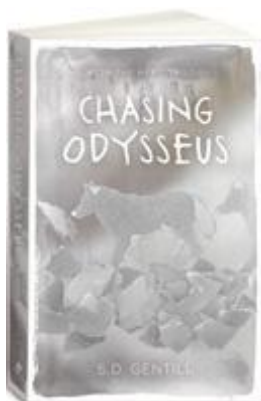
It is recommended that students collect and record their responses to the text's central characters: Hero, Machaon, Lycon and Cadmus.

or

Alternatively, the teacher may set specific tutorial questions and statements for discussion and base these on specific events in the Books. (Samples are provided herewith)

Weeks 3-6

Focus: Novel Study



Activity F Sample Tutorial Topics

Books I – VIII

Book IV

1. Book IV begins with a sense of cautious jubilation. Discuss how this mood changes through the course of this chapter. How does Gentill use this technique to bring the reader closer to the experience of the Herdsmen?
2. Assess how the different manifestations of loyalty and fealty are explored in Book IV.
3. Discuss the manifestations of betrayal explored in Book IV.

Book VI

1. In Book VI Hero believes “....Pan did not seem to understand that he was a god”. What does she mean by this?
2. Are the sons of Agelaus irreligious? Discuss.
3. Does the difference in the way Hero and her brothers approach piety have parallels in modern approaches to religion? Discuss.

Books IX – XVII

1. Throughout the novel Gentill uses alternate perspectives to reinterpret events. Discuss how this technique is used in Book XVII. What is the fundamental difference of perspective between Agelaus and Achilles? How does this affect each in Hades?
2. Does Hades - as it is described in Book XVII - incorporate a concept of punishment and reward?

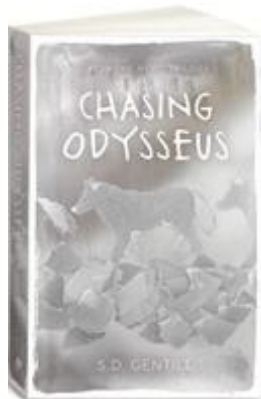
Books XVIII – XXVI

1. Hero is a character of fierce emotions, “fear and fury” but also compassion and piety. Discuss how these elements conflict with and complement each other in her actions in Book XXII.
2. The events of Book XXII are a catalyst for significant realisations, changes in perspective for both Hero and the sons of Agelaus. Discuss.



Weeks 7-8

Focus: Novel Assignment



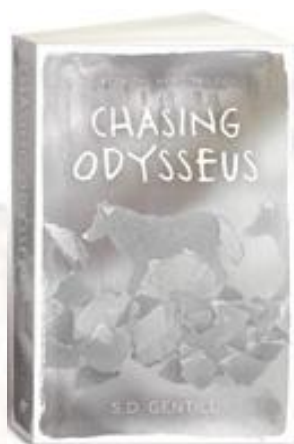
Assignment Suggestions

- Option 1 - Book Review**
- Option 2 - Character Focus**
- Option 3 - Timeline Representation**
- Option 4 - Analysis of Author's Style**
- Extension - Writing**

Week 9-10

Focus: Students evaluate and compare the prose fiction and film media representations of the gods and Homer's mythology.

Chasing Odysseus (prose fiction) and *Troy* (film- 2004)



Activity G (Option: Comparative Study - Independent / Pair)

The novel *Chasing Odysseus* by S.D.Gentill and the 2004 film *Troy* are both premised on the legend of the Siege of Troy. Each text through its medium (film or prose fiction) provides a particular representation of Homer's *Iliad* and *The Odyssey*.

This activity requires students to view the film critically and to then compare and contrast it with the novel. Students are encouraged to utilise a Venn Diagram to graphically organise and classify their observations.

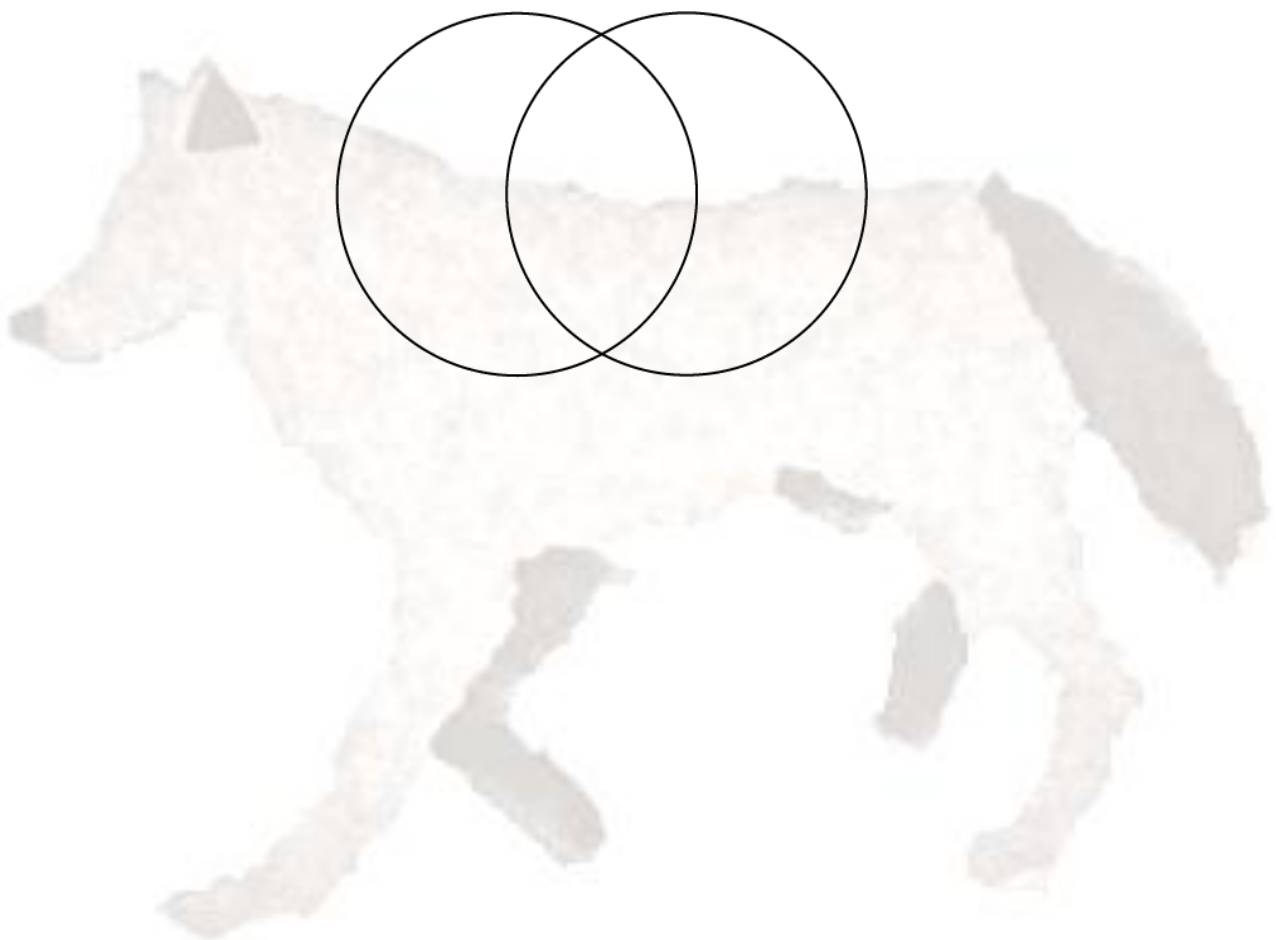
For example, students may wish to refer to the two (2) texts' depictions of, or references to, Odysseus, Paris, Helen, Achilles, Priam, Hector and Agamemnon.

Students may wish to consider the texts' representations of battles and conflict or the physical environment in which the two stories occur.

The overlapping section of the Venn Diagram allows the student to identify common features.

VENN DIAGRAM

(thorough explanations of the basic Venn Diagram can be accessed via the internet)



Focus: Students evaluate and compare the protagonists of *Chasing Odysseus* to Odysseus in Homer's *The Odyssey* and heroes as depicted in any two of the following:

- **The Ballad of Mulan**
- **The Epic of Gilgamesh**
- **JK Rowling's *Harry Potter* series**
- **Tolkein's *The Hobbit***
- **Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre***
- **Toni Morrison's *Beloved***
- **Emily Bronte's *Wuthering Heights***
- ***Indiana Jones and the Raiders of the Lost Ark* (film)**
- ***Star Wars* (film)**
- ***The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen* (film)**
- ***The Mummy* (film)**



Activity H (Option: Comparative Study - Independent / Pair)

This activity requires students to read other texts or view films critically and to then compare and contrast the characteristics of the heroes in these texts/films with the protagonists of the novel. Students are encouraged to utilise a Venn Diagram to graphically organise and classify their observations.

Week 10

Focus: Extension

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

1. Students locate and record quotations from *Chasing Odysseus* that illustrate attributes of particular characters. Students compare these to how these characters are represented in the film *Troy*.

Students integrate their findings into a polished powerpoint presentation and substantiate their arguments with evidence derived from both texts.

2. Formal Essay

Account for the enduring popularity of Greek Mythology and Legends. In your argument refer to S.D. Gentill's *Chasing Odysseus* and suggest how this text appeals to contemporary readers yet retains the integrity of Homer's original epic. Word Limit: 2,000 words.

3. Creative Writing

Develop an original series of characters and gods that could complement the characters and events depicted in *The Odyssey* by Homer. Include detailed dossiers that capture the characters' qualities and possible flaws. Include sketches, family tree diagrams, weaponry, jewellery, etc. This may be presented in print form or through an ICT medium.

Compose an engaging chapter in which your own characters are brought to life. Word Limit: 2,000 words.

Suggested resources to complement the learning activities based on the *Chasing Odysseus* Junior English unit.

Week 1 Activity A Focus: Familiarise students with the gods central to Greek legends and mythology.

youtube.com

Week 1 Activity B Focus: Familiarise students with the gods central to Greek legends and mythology.

<http://www.learner.org/courses/worldlit/odyssey/>

<http://www.mythweb.com/odyssey/>. Accessed April 2011 - This site enables students to read the abridged version of the full text and Homer's Iliad and

<http://library.thinkquest.org/19300/data/homer.htm>. Accessed April 2011 - students can access information about Homer and his epics and listen to an audio reading of the epics. It also recommends other related texts.

Odyssey Game – Choose your Character, <http://www.users.globalnet.co.uk/~loxias/odchoice.htm>. Accessed April 2011 - Interactive game based on *The Odyssey*.

Study Guide for Homer's Odyssey, <http://www.temple.edu/classics/odysseyho.html>. Accessed April 2011 via redirection - complete text and related notes.

www.wikipedia.org/ Accessed April 2011. Students can refine search with specific names and titles.

Week 2 Activity C Focus: Familiarise students with the gods central to Greek legends and mythology.

<http://www.theoi.com>. Accessed April 2011 – students can access comprehensive site exploring mythology in classical literature and art.

Week 2 Activity D Focus: Familiarise students with the gods central to Greek legends and mythology.

<http://www.theoi.com>. Accessed April 2011 – students can access comprehensive site exploring mythology in classical literature and art.

www.wikipedia.org/ Accessed April 2011. Students can refine search with specific names and titles.

www.wikipedia.org/ Accessed April 2011. Students can refine search with specific names and titles.

http://ancienthistory.about.com/cs/troyillum/a/trojanwar_3.htm Accessed April 2011. Students can access the sequence of events linked to the Trojan War.