

15. **Cyclopes** (si klō' pēz') *n.*
plural form of Cyclops (sī
kläps'), race of giants with
one eye in the middle of
the forehead.

Reading Skill
Historical and Cultural Context Based
on Odysseus' criticism of
the Cyclopes, what kind
of society do you think
the Greeks valued?

16. **prodigious** (prō dij' əs)
adj. enormous.

Reading Skill
Historical and Cultural Context What does this
passage reveal about
ancient Greek attitudes
toward the importance
of community?

17. **Apollo** (ə päl' ō) god of
music, poetry, prophecy,
and medicine.

18. **talents** units of money in
ancient Greece.

The Cyclops

110 In the next land we found were Cyclopes,¹⁵
giants, louts, without a law to bless them.
In ignorance leaving the fruitage of the earth in mystery
to the immortal gods, they neither plow
nor sow by hand, nor till the ground, though grain—
wild wheat and barley—grows untended, and
115 wine-grapes, in clusters, ripen in heaven's rains.
Cyclopes have no muster and no meeting,
no consultation or old tribal ways,
but each one dwells in his own mountain cave
dealing out rough justice to wife and child,
120 indifferent to what the others do. . . .

As we rowed on, and nearer to the mainland,
at one end of the bay, we saw a cavern
yawning above the water, screened with laurel,
and many rams and goats about the place
125 inside a sheepfold—made from slabs of stone
earthfast between tall trunks of pine and rugged
towering oak trees.

11 A prodigious¹⁶ man
slept in this cave alone, and took his flocks
to graze afield—remote from all companions,
knowing none but savage ways, a brute
so huge, he seemed no man at all of those
who eat good wheaten bread; but he seemed rather
a shaggy mountain reared in solitude.
135 We beached there, and I told the crew
to stand by and keep watch over the ship:
as for myself I took my twelve best fighters
and went ahead. I had a goatskin full
of that sweet liquor that Euanthes' son,
Maron, had given me. He kept Apollo's¹⁷
140 holy grove at Ismarus; for kindness
we showed him there, and showed his wife and child,
he gave me seven shining golden talents¹⁸
perfectly formed, a solid silver winebowl,
and then this liquor—twelve two-handled jars
145 of brandy, pure and fiery. Not a slave
in Maron's household knew this drink; only
he, his wife and the storeroom mistress knew;

and they would put one cupful—ruby-colored,
honey-smooth—in twenty more of water,
but still the sweet scent hovered like a fume
150 over the winebowl. No man turned away
when cups of this came round.

I brought along, and victuals¹⁹ in a bag,
for in my bones I knew some towering brute
would be upon us soon—all outward power,
155 a wild man, ignorant of civility.

We climbed, then, briskly to the cave. But Cyclops
had gone afield, to pasture his fat sheep,
so we looked round at everything inside:
160 a drying rack that sagged with cheeses, pens
crowded with lambs and kids,²⁰ each in its class:
firstlings apart from middlings, and the 'dewdrops,'
or newborn lambkins, penned apart from both.
And vessels full of whey²¹ were brimming there—
165 bowls of earthenware and pails for milking.
My men came pressing round me, pleading:

'Why not
take these cheeses, get them stowed, come back,
throw open all the pens, and make a run for it?
We'll drive the kids and lambs aboard. We say
170 put out again on good salt water!'

Ah,
12 how sound that was! Yet I refused. I wished
to see the cave man, what he had to offer—
no pretty sight, it turned out, for my friends.
We lit a fire, burnt an offering,
175 and took some cheese to eat; then sat in silence
around the embers, waiting. When he came
he had a load of dry boughs²² on his shoulder
to stoke his fire at suppertime. He dumped it
with a great crash into that hollow cave,
180 and we all scattered fast to the far wall.
Then over the broad cavern floor he ushered
the ewes he meant to milk. He left his rams
and he-goats in the yard outside, and swung
high overhead a slab of solid rock

19. **victuals** (vit' əlz) *n.* food or other provisions.

20. **kids** young goats.

21. **whey** (hwā) *n.* thin, watery part of milk separated from the thicker curds.

Literary Analysis

Epic Hero What character flaw does the hero Odysseus reveal by refusing to leave the cave?

22. **boughs** (bouz) *n.* tree branches.

13 Reading Check

Where is Cyclops when Odysseus and his men enter the cave?

23. **withy** (*with' ə*) *adj.* made from tough, flexible twigs.

24. **Agamemnon** (*ag' ə mem' nān'*) king who led the Greek army during the Trojan War.

Reading Skill

Historical and Cultural

Context What ancient Greek beliefs regarding the gods, military might, and respect for strangers does Odysseus express in his words to the Cyclops?

185 to close the cave. Two dozen four-wheeled wagons,
with heaving wagon teams, could not have stirred
the tonnage of that rock from where he wedged it
over the doorsill. Next he took his seat
and milked his bleating ewes. A practiced job
190 he made of it, giving each ewe her suckling;
thickened his milk, then, into curds and whey,
sieved out the curds to drip in withy²³ baskets,
and poured the whey to stand in bowls
cooling until he drank it for his supper.
195 When all these chores were done, he poked the fire,
heaping on brushwood. In the glare he saw us.

'Strangers,' he said, 'who are you? And where from?
What brings you here by seaways—a fair traffic?
Or are you wandering rogues, who cast your lives
200 like dice, and ravage other folk by sea?'

We felt a pressure on our hearts, in dread
of that deep rumble and that mighty man.
But all the same I spoke up in reply:

205 'We are from Troy, Achaeans, blown off course
by shifting gales on the Great South Sea;
homeward bound, but taking routes and ways
uncommon; so the will of Zeus would have it.

We served under Agamemnon,²⁴ son of Atreus—
the whole world knows what city
210 he laid waste, what armies he destroyed.

14 It was our luck to come here; here we stand,
beholden for your help, or any gifts
15 you give—as custom is to honor strangers.

215 We would entreat you, great Sir, have a care
for the gods' courtesy; Zeus will avenge
the unoffending guest.'

He answered this
from his brute chest, unmoved:

'You are a ninny,
or else you come from the other end of nowhere,
telling me, mind the gods! We Cyclopes
220 care not a whistle for your thundering Zeus
or all the gods in bliss; we have more force by far.

I would not let you go for fear of Zeus—
you or your friends—unless I had a whim²⁵ to.
Tell me, where was it, now, you left your ship—
around the point, or down the shore, I wonder?

225 He thought he'd find out, but I saw through this,
and answered with a ready lie:

'My ship?

16 Poseidon²⁶ Lord, who sets the earth a-tremble,
broke it up on the rocks at your land's end.
230 A wind from seaward served him, drove us there.
We are survivors, these good men and I.'

Neither reply nor pity came from him,
but in one stride he clutched at my companions
and caught two in his hands like squirming puppies
235 to beat their brains out, spattering the floor.
Then he dismembered them and made his meal,
gaping and crunching like a mountain lion—
everything: innards, flesh, and marrow bones.

We cried aloud, lifting our hands to Zeus,
240 powerless, looking on at this, appalled;
but Cyclops went on filling up his belly
with manflesh and great gulps of whey,
then lay down like a mast among his sheep.

My heart beat high now at the chance of action,
245 and drawing the sharp sword from my hip I went
along his flank to stab him where the midriff
holds the liver. I had touched the spot
when sudden fear stayed me: if I killed him
we perished there as well, for we could never
250 move his ponderous doorway slab aside.
So we were left to groan and wait for morning.

When the young Dawn with fingertips of rose
lit up the world, the Cyclops built a fire
and milked his handsome ewes, all in due order,
255 putting the sucklings to the mothers. Then,
his chores being all dispatched, he caught
another brace²⁷ of men to make his breakfast,
and whisked away his great door slab

25. **whim** (hwim) *n.* sudden thought or wish to do something.

26. **Poseidon** (pō sī dən) god of the sea, earthquakes, horses, and storms at sea.

Literary Analysis

Epic Hero In what way does Odysseus' response show that he is "formidable for guile"?

Literary Analysis

Epic Hero How do lines 244–250 show Odysseus' ability to think ahead?

Vocabulary

dispatched (di spacht')
v. finished quickly

27. **brace** (brās) *n.* pair.

18 Reading Check

What does Odysseus tell the Cyclops happened to his ship?

28. **cap a quiver** (kwiv' er) close a case holding arrows.
29. **din** (din) *n.* loud, continuous noise; uproar.
30. **Athena** (ə thē' nə) goddess of wisdom, skills, and warfare.
31. **felled green and left to season** chopped down and exposed to the weather to age the wood.
32. **lugger** (lug' er) *n.* small sailing vessel.

Literary Analysis

Epic Hero What heroic qualities does Odysseus reveal as he plots against the Cyclops?

Literary Analysis

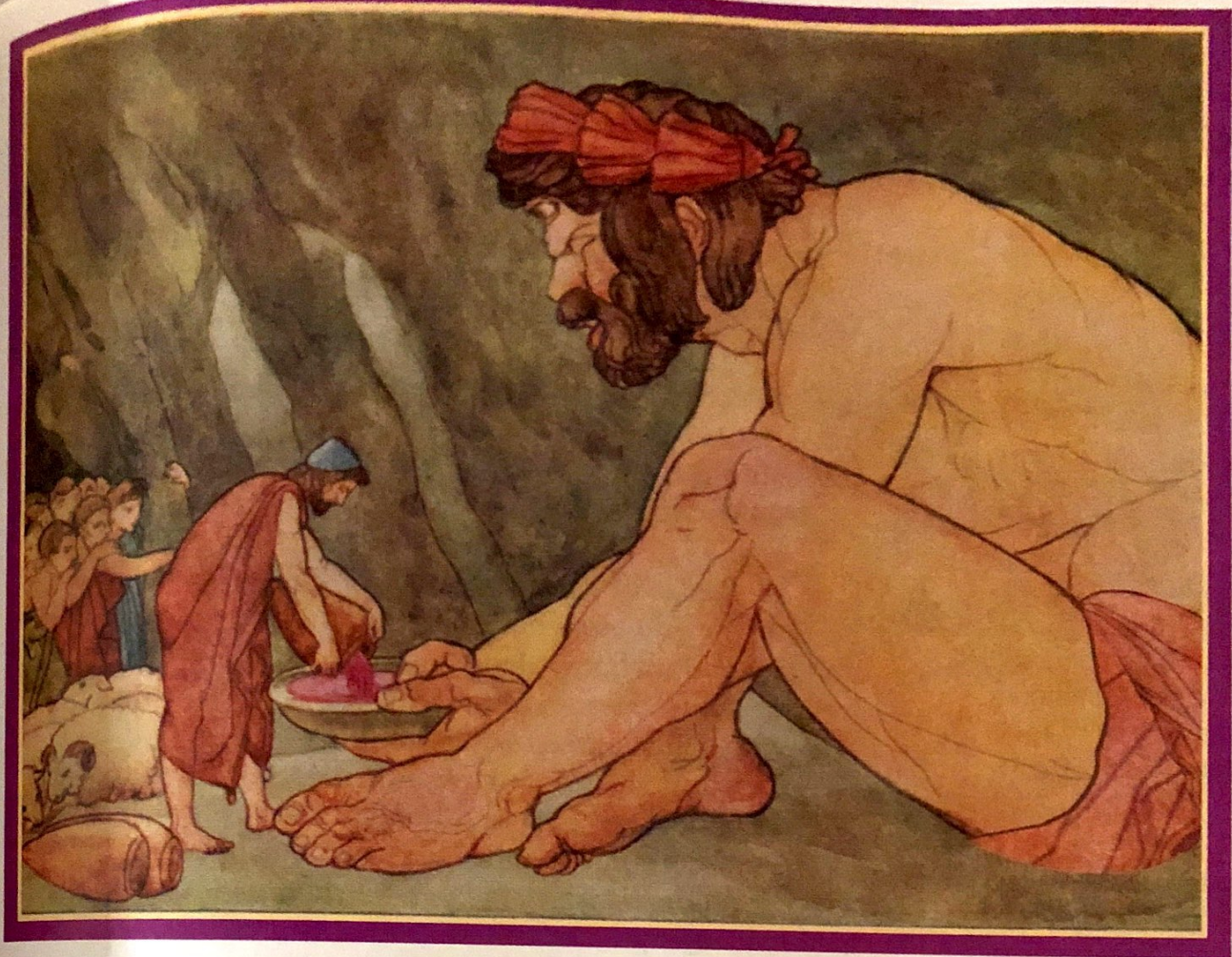
Epic Hero What plan do you think Odysseus has in mind by offering the Cyclops the wine?

260 to let his sheep go through—but he, behind,
 reset the stone as one would cap a quiver.²⁸
 There was a din²⁹ of whistling as the Cyclops
 rounded his flock to higher ground, then stillness.
 And now I pondered how to hurt him worst,
 if but Athena³⁰ granted what I prayed for.
 265 Here are the means I thought would serve my turn:

a club, or staff, lay there along the fold—
 an olive tree, felled green and left to season³¹
 for Cyclops' hand. And it was like a mast
 a lugger³² of twenty oars, broad in the beam—
 270 a deep-sea-going craft—might carry:
 so long, so big around, it seemed. Now I
 chopped out a six foot section of this pole
 and set it down before my men, who scraped it;
 and when they had it smooth, I hewed again
 275 to make a stake with pointed end. I held this
 in the fire's heart and turned it, toughening it,
 then hid it, well back in the cavern, under
 one of the dung piles in profusion there.
 Now came the time to toss for it: who ventured
 280 along with me? whose hand could bear to thrust
 and grind that spike in Cyclops' eye, when mild
 sleep had mastered him? As luck would have it,
 the men I would have chosen won the toss—
 four strong men, and I made five as captain.

285 At evening came the shepherd with his flock,
 his woolly flock. The rams as well, this time,
 entered the cave: by some shepherding whim—
 or a god's bidding—none were left outside.
 He hefted his great boulder into place
 290 and sat him down to milk the bleating ewes
 in proper order, put the lambs to suck,
 and swiftly ran through all his evening chores.
 Then he caught two more men and feasted on them.
 My moment was at hand, and I went forward
 295 holding an ivy bowl of my dark drink,
 looking up, saying:

20 ↓ 'Cyclops, try some wine.
 Here's liquor to wash down your scraps of men.
 Taste it, and see the kind of drink we carried



300
 20 under our planks. I meant it for an offering
 if you would help us home. But you are mad,
 unbearable, a bloody monster! After this,
 will any other traveler come to see you?’

He seized and drained the bowl, and it went down
 so fiery and smooth he called for more:

305
 22 ‘Give me another, thank you kindly. Tell me,
 how are you called? I’ll make a gift will please you.
 Even Cyclopes know the wine grapes grow
 out of grassland and loam in heaven’s rain,
 but here’s a bit of nectar and ambrosia!’³³

310
 Three bowls I brought him, and he poured them down.
 I saw the fuddle and flush come over him,
 then I sang out in cordial tones:

21 ▲ **Critical Viewing**
 What traits does this
 image of the Cyclops
 illustrate? [Interpret]

33. **nectar** (nek’ ter) and
ambrosia (am brō’ zhe)
 drink and food of the
 gods.

23 **Reading
 Check**

What does Odysseus
 plan to do with the
 stake that he and his
 men make?

'Cyclops,

you ask my honorable name? Remember
the gift you promised me, and I shall tell you.
315 My name is Nohbdy: mother, father, and friends,
everyone calls me Nohbdy.'

And he said:

'Nohbdy's my meat, then, after I eat his friends.
Others come first. There's a noble gift, now.'

Even as he spoke, he reeled and tumbled backward,
320 his great head lolling to one side; and sleep
took him like any creature. Drunk, hiccuping,
he dribbled streams of liquor and bits of men.

Reading Skill
Historical and Cultural
Context What cultural
values are represented in
Odysseus' reference to
"the gods" in line 323?

24 | Now, by the gods, I drove my big hand spike
deep in the embers, charring it again,
325 and cheered my men along with battle talk
to keep their courage up: no quitting now.
The pike of olive, green though it had been,
reddened and glowed as if about to catch.
I drew it from the coals and my four fellows
330 gave me a hand, lugging it near the Cyclops
as more than natural force nerved them; straight
forward they sprinted, lifted it, and rammed it
deep in his crater eye, and leaned on it
turning it as a shipwright turns a drill
335 in planking, having men below to swing
the two-handled strap that spins it in the groove.
So with our brand we bored³⁴ that great eye socket
while blood ran out around the red-hot bar.
Eyelid and lash were seared; the pierced ball
340 hissed broiling, and the roots popped.

34. bored (bôrd) v. made a
hole in.

In a smithy
one sees a white-hot axehead or an adze
plunged and wrung in a cold tub, screeching steam—
the way they make soft iron hale and hard—:
just so that eyeball hissed around the spike.
345 The Cyclops bellowed and the rock roared round him,
and we fell back in fear. Clawing his face
he tugged the bloody spike out of his eye,
threw it away, and his wild hands went groping;