



Lesson Plan: Odysseus Avoids a Disaster

OVERVIEW

Odysseus' journey home to Ithaca took ten years. He encountered many harrowing situations and challenges along the way. One of the dramatic encounters along the way was an experience with the Sirens, a small group of minor vengeful goddesses. Since he was forewarned, he had a plan. This is the story that Dana Wilson illuminates musically in *Odysseus and the Sirens*.

LEARNING GOAL

Students will get acquainted with the story to support and enhance their performance, interpretation, and enjoyment of Dana Wilson's music by:

- defining and personalizing the terms 'temptation' and 'tempting situations'
- reading Circe's warning to Odysseus about the danger posed by the Sirens
- viewing a Prezi of the story that uses text and graphics to illustrate multiple details of the story

MATERIALS

- Prezi included with the BandQuest® curriculum based on the graphic storybook *Odysseus: Escaping Poseidon's Curse* (2008). Minneapolis: Graphic Universe Series, Lerner Publications ([click here to open](#)).
- Writing materials

PROCESS

1. Define the word *temptation* by asking students to consider the word and do a quick write around these questions.
 - Have you ever been tempted? What tempted you? Did you resist? How? (Students will not be required to share.)
 - Share the first from your life with a "not too serious" temptation: chocolate, late night TV, romance novels, teasing students, etc.) Then ask for a few student volunteers with no pressure.
2. Explain why you asked students to define the term, relating it to the piece. Some of Odysseus' challenges were temptations. Some he avoided; others he did not. Along the way, the goddesses Athena and Circe helped him resist temptation with warnings. Read aloud Circe's forewarning about a challenging temptation Odysseus would encounter on the next leg of his journey:

Connections to the National Core Anchor Standards in the Arts

Connect #11

Relate musical ideas and works with varied context to deepen understanding.

Demonstrate understanding of relationships between music and the other arts, other disciplines, varied contexts and daily life.

Temptation (noun)

- A desire to do something, especially something wrong or unwise. "*he resisted the temptation to eat the whole bag of M&Ms*"
- Something or a course of action that attracts or tempts someone.
- Synonyms: desire, urge, itch, impulse

...you will come to the Sirens who enchant all who come near them. If anyone unwarily draws in too close and hears the singing of the Sirens, his wife and children will never welcome him home again, for they sit in a green field and warble him to death with the sweetness of their song.

*There is a great heap of dead men's bones lying all around, with the flesh still rotting off them. Therefore pass these Sirens by, and stop your men's ears with wax that none of them may hear; but if you like you can listen yourself, for you may get the men to bind you as you stand upright on a cross-piece half way up the mast, and they must lash the rope's ends to the mast itself, that you may have the pleasure of listening. If you beg and pray the men to unloose you, then they must bind you faster. (See Samuel Butler's translation of *The Odyssey*, Book XII, online via MIT.)*

- Take time for students to share any prior knowledge and recollections of this story. Ask questions to make sure they understand the events and the strategy for escaping the curse.
3. View the Prezi of *Odysseus and the Sirens*. Direct students to notice the details. After viewing, respond to these question:
 - What did you notice in this version? Describe some of the details.
 - What questions do you have about the story? What do you wonder about?
 - Can you connect this myth or story to life in the 21st century? Are there serious, life-threatening dangers and temptations today? What are some examples?
 4. As you continue to rehearse the piece, draw students into the music by folding details of the story into their interpretations and understanding of the piece. Challenge them to think of the music as a fantastic film score to a story whose details are being revealed.



Oil-on-canvas painting of
"Ulysses and the Sirens," John
William Waterhouse (1849-
1917)

ASSESSMENT

After performing the piece, engage students in a qualitative assessment of the impact of knowing the story. Ask them to respond in writing to these questions: "How did thinking about and knowing the story make a difference in how you played and performed *Ulysses and the Sirens*?" and "Why do you think it made the difference?"

EXTENSIONS

- Visual Art Extension: Illustrate a **single key moment** from the story of "Odysseus and the Sirens" using art materials of your choice. Write an extended caption for your image. Follow up by viewing the above painting by John William Waterhouse

- Margaret Atwood's Poem, "Siren Song" provides a contemporary counterpoint to the Sirens of Odysseus' story. Not to mention the feminine point of view plus humor. A small group of students might prepare and perform a reading of the poem, a readers' theater approach. Find the poem [here](#).
- View contemporary film versions of the myth. For example, watch the mermaid episode from [Pirates of the Caribbean](#) or a scene from [Oh Brother, Where Art Thou?](#). Compare the films to Homer's story using a VENN diagram. There is also the X-Men character named [Siryn](#), whose power is a colossal scream.
Preview the clips before showing to determine if they are suitable for your school.

Suggested Resources For more on Odysseus and the Sirens:

- Bos, Carole "Odysseus and the Sirens" AwesomeStories.com. Jan 18, 2016. Jun 27, 2017.
<https://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/155136>
- A summary of the Sirens in Greek Mythology at
<https://www.greekmythology.com/Myths/Creatures/Sirens/sirens.html>