

Ulysses and the Cyclops by Charles Lamb, adapted by Denys Thompson

This folktale links to the theme, "Minute to quiz it", in the *Learner's Book*.

Pre-reading activities

1. Look carefully at the title and the second picture in this story. Who is the hero of the story? Who is the monster?
2. Skim the story for the main facts. What happens in the story?

Coasting on all that night by unknown and out-of-the-way shores, they came by the daybreak to the land where the Cyclops live. The Cyclops are giant shepherds who neither sow nor plough, but the earth, untilled, produces for them wheat and barley and grapes. They live in caves on the steep heads of mountains. They have no ships or boats and no trade, nor do they wish to visit other shores; yet they have convenient places for harbours and for shipping. Here, Ulysses, with a chosen army of twelve followers, landed to explore what sort of men live there, whether friendly to strangers, or altogether wild and savage for, as yet, no dwellers had appeared in sight.



The first sign of life was when they came to a giant's cave, of a size that indicated the size of the owner. Ulysses, entering, longed to see the tenant and resolved to flatter him with a present of Greek wine. This was so strong that no one ever drank it without mixing twenty parts of water to one of wine, and whoever tasted it was able to raise his courage to the height of heroic deeds.

Taking with them a goatskin full of wine, they ventured into the far corners of the cave. Here, they spent a whole day examining the giant's kitchen, where the flesh of sheep and goats was scattered, his dairy where troughs and pails of goat's milk stood, and his pens where he kept his live animals. While they were observing these sights, they suddenly heard a deafening noise, like the falling of a house. It was the owner of the cave who had been away all day feeding his flock in the mountains, and now drove them home.

He threw down a pile of firewood, which he had been gathering to use at suppertime, and this caused the crash they heard. At the sight of the monster, the Greeks hid themselves in the remote parts of the cave. It was Polyphemus, the largest and fiercest of the Cyclops. He looked more like a huge rock than a man, and he had a mind as brutal as his body. He drove his flock inside, leaving the rams and he-goats outside. Then he took up a stone so huge that twenty oxen could not have pulled it, put it in the mouth of the cave and sat down to milk his ewes and goats. Lastly, he lit a fire and, looking round the cave with his great eye (for the Cyclops have only one eye, set in their forehead), he saw some of Ulysses' men in the firelight.

"What are you? Traders or wandering thieves?" he bellowed out in a voice that terrified them, it was so astonishing.

Only Ulysses had the courage to answer that they were Greeks who had lost their way returning from Troy and they now begged for his hospitality.

Then the Cyclops ordered them to tell him where their ship was and whether they had any companions. Ulysses cautiously replied that they had no companions, but were unfortunate men whose ship had been wrecked. The Cyclops did not answer, but seized two of the men, killed them and ate them greedily. The Cyclops are man-eaters

and, for this reason, few men approach their coast. Then he took a drink of goat's milk and lay down to sleep. Ulysses drew his sword and half resolved to thrust it with all his might into the sleeping monster. However, he knew that only Polyphemus himself could have removed that mass of stone which he had placed to guard the entrance. So Ulysses and his men were forced to spend the night in fear.

When day came and the Cyclops awoke, he kindled a fire and made his breakfast of two of his unfortunate prisoners. Then he milked his goats and, pushing aside the vast stone, let out his flock, shutting up his prisoners again.

But the Cyclops had no idea of the strength and cunning of Ulysses, who soon showed that his cleverness could defeat the strength of a brute. He chose a stake as big as a mast from among the wood the Cyclops had piled up for firing, and sharpened and hardened it in the fire. He chose four of his men and told them what to do with it.

In the evening, the Cyclops drove home his sheep and, for once, shut up the rams as well. He shut the stone of the cave and made his horrible supper. Then Ulysses took a bowl of Greek wine and jokingly dared the Cyclops to drink.

"Cyclops," he said, "take a bowl of wine from your guest; it may help to digest the man's flesh that you have eaten, and show what drink our ship held before it went down. All I ask in return, if you find it good, is that we are allowed to leave safely. You must have few visitors if you follow this custom of eating your guests."

The brute took the bowl, drank and enjoyed the wine. He asked for more and asked Ulysses to tell him his name, so that he could present a gift to the man who had given him such fine liquor. Ulysses cunningly replied, "My name is Noman; my relatives and friends in my own country called me Noman."

"Then," said the Cyclops, "this is the kindness I will show you, Noman; I will eat you last of all your friends." He had only just said this when the fumes of the strong wine overcame him and he stumbled down onto the floor and sank into a deep sleep.

Ulysses watched his time while the monster lay senseless. The four men put the sharp end of the stake in the fire until it was heated red-hot and then drove it right into the eye of the drunken cannibal. Ulysses helped them with all his might.

When Polyphemus woke up, he roared with pain so loudly that the whole cave was filled with the sound of thunder. The men fled into corners and the giant cried out with a mighty voice for the other Cyclops who lived in the caves beyond the hills. They came from all parts to ask what the trouble was, and what had caused him to make such horrid noise in the night, which woke them from their sleep. He answered from inside the cave that Noman had hurt him, Noman had killed him, Noman was in the cave.

They replied, "If no man has hurt you, and no man is with you, then you are alone, and the evil that causes you pain is from the hand of heaven, from which none can defend or help you." So they left him and went on their way, thinking that some disease troubled him. He, blind and ready to burst with the anguish of the pain, went groaning up and down in the dark to find the doorway. When he found it, he removed the stone and, sitting at the entrance, felt the sheep as they went out to see if he could catch any man trying to escape. But Ulysses was not so stupid as to be caught that way. He made knots of the twigs of the osier tree on which the Cyclops slept and tied the fattest rams together, three in a row. Under the belly of the middle ram, he tied a man, himself last of all.

Now the sheep began to go out very fast, the males first, the females waiting to be milked. As the rams passed, Polyphemus felt their backs, never dreaming they carried his enemies under them; and they passed on till the last ram came, loaded with Ulysses. The Cyclops stopped that ram and felt him, and once had his hand in the hair of Ulysses, but he let him go.



When Ulysses felt himself free, he let go his hold and helped to free his friends. The rams they carried off to the ships where their companions, with tears in their eyes, greeted them as men who had escaped from death.

They set up their oars and set their sails. When they were as far from the shore as a voice would still carry, Ulysses cried out to the Cyclops, "Cyclops, you should not have misused your monstrous strength to eat your guests. Through me, Jove has rewarded you for your savage cruelty."

The Cyclops heard Ulysses. In his anger, he grasped a rock and hurled it with blind fury into the ocean, narrowly missing the ship in which Ulysses sat. It caused such a huge wave that the ship was nearly carried back to the shore.

"Cyclops," said Ulysses, "if anybody asks you who blinded you, say it was Ulysses, son of Laertes, king of Ithaca."

Then they set sail and went out to sea with a forward breeze.

Activities

A. Know the facts

Ulysses was the son of _____ who was king of _____.
The name of the monster Cyclops whom Ulysses encounters in the cave is _____. Ulysses tells the Cyclops that his own name is _____.

B. Understanding the folktale

Exposition: Mention two important facts from paragraph 1 which form part of the exposition.

Setting: Why do you think the folktale is set in such an isolated place?

Plot: Do you think Ulysses was clever or stupid to tell the giant a different name for himself? Explain your opinion.

Conflict: What is the main cause of conflict in this story?

Character: Write down two words from the story that describe Ulysses' character.

Dénouement/resolution: Do you think this folktale ends satisfactorily? Speak about this with your partner.

Grade 7 English Home Language
Solutions for all: Reader
Folklore/myth
Ulysses and the Cyclops p.3

1. Get the details about the story.

Ulysses was the son of ...1.1.... who was king of1.2.... The name of the Cyclops whom Ulysses encounters in the cave is ...1.3... (3)

2. Quote a phrase from par.1 that shows that the land of the Cyclops was isolated. (1)
3. Mention 2 things about the land of the Cyclops that would make it a profitable place to live in. (2)
4. What effect does the isolation of the land have on the story? (1)
5. Quote 3 words from the myth to describe Ulysses' character.
(p.4 par.5 and p.5 par. 3) (3)
6. "My name is Noman." Briefly explain Ulysses' reason for using this name. (3)
7. Although Ulysses and his men are in grave danger, he maintains his sense of humour. Quote a line from p.5 to prove this. (1)
8. Do you think this folktale/myth ends satisfactorily? Give your opinion. (2)
9. Which other myths or folktales do you know? (2)

Discuss:

Pretend that you are a young, brave hero/heroine. The king of Greece sends you on a dangerous quest, but he presents you with 3 choices.

Choice 1: Medusa Choice 2: Cyclops Choice 3: Trojan Horse.
Which would you choose and why?



