



**General Certificate of Education
June 2012**

Classical Civilisation 2020

CIV2B: Homer *Odyssey*

Report on the Examination

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CIV2B Homer *Odyssey*

General Comments

Once again it was a pleasure to read the vast majority of students' work. Most essays reflected a good level of understanding, a keen empathy for the chief characters and a genuine attempt to get to grips with the topics examined. There were few really poor papers. For Section 1, slightly more students chose Option B, but the minority choosing Option A scored better overall. This was true of the short questions but was particularly evident in the 10 mark alternatives where the Option A mean mark was almost a full mark higher than in Option B. The 20 mark essays by contrast provided an almost identical average, although here more students reached the highest marks on Option B than on Option A. In Section Two, nearly twice as many students chose Option C than Option D. Average performance was very similar on both with a mean mark approaching 18 out of 30, but substantially more students reached Level 4 on Option D and slightly more reached Level 5. Sometimes an apparently 'harder' topic, such as fate, has a clearer core of knowledge than a wider subject, like the travels, where the vast range of information available can lead to problems of balance or timing. A point made in the CIV2A report holds good for CIV2B also: the use of technical terms is to be applauded as long as it is not at the expense of clear explanation and development; on occasion such terminology is used in isolation without the student making clear what they are trying to say. Also students who fail to see that phrases such as 'to what extent ..?' are encouraging a degree of argument and analysis of the title often suffer by telling the story or referring to only one side of the argument.

Section One

Option A

In Question 01, most students showed a good grasp of Athene's assistance to Odysseus; a few wrongly saw this as the occasion when Athene made him more handsome, but 88% gained at least two of the three marks available. Question 02 produced a range of sporting activities with the javelin being the most popular alternative to the correct majority response of 'discus'. Question 03 offered a passage full of descriptive detail and most students took full advantage. The best answers did not merely repeat examples of gold and silver objects, but went further by analysing the effectiveness of the 'sun and moon' simile, suggesting reasons for the divine involvement in the decor or contrasting the delicate weaving (often mentioned as the 'women's contribution') with the more ostentatious objects which predominate. Most students now understand that extensive close reference to the passage is the best approach to these questions, although a significant minority still managed to produce lengthy answers which lacked even a single quotation. The essay on Nausicaa and Arete (Question 04) produced few really poor answers but rather too many one-sided accounts lacking in specific detail. Students should not be afraid to make a case for the lack of importance of characters, but many played safe by delivering a narrative account of what Nausicaa did, followed by a short paragraph on Arete, then a conclusion stating that both were absolutely vital to the *Odyssey*: this often failed to convince. There were, however, some excellent answers going beyond the purely narrative and examining the cases both for and against their importance, often bringing in their symbolic importance to *xenia* and other key themes of the poem.

Option B

Again, for Question 05 a number of students referred to instances from elsewhere in the poem (most popularly the recognition of the scar), but some 83% gained at least two marks. As with Option A, the passage in Question 07 featured a wide range of suitable material for students to use and most led into their answers with such phrases as 'her knees began to tremble' and

'busting into tears' to make the more obvious points about Penelope's relief. The metaphor of her heart melting was often seen as contrasting with the years of hardness she had endured. More adventurous students went further by examining the light shed on her character by her comments regarding the gods, or how the comparison with Helen concluded a theme explored throughout the poem. There were a number of answers which were a joy to read. Performance on Question 08 was again rather mixed. It would have been pleasing to have read more essays which took a balanced approach. A few students made a case for Penelope's lack of importance without referring to the other point of view; more took the opposite route. The better answers attempted to reach a judgement between these opposing approaches. These were the students who gained Level 4 or 5. Penelope may be a background figure for portions of the poem but she does make a number of appearances early on and in the latter books. Sometimes these were dealt with in a cursory manner, yet followed by a conclusion that Penelope was 'very important indeed'. Points which were profitably developed by a few included her relationship with Telemachus, her feelings towards the suitors and the importance of Book 23 to the poem as a whole.

Section Two

Option C

Rather more students chose this option, perhaps not surprisingly given the enthusiasm felt for the events of Books 9-12: this worked against a few however who were unable to resist the temptation to dwell on the Cyclops story and relate it over a number of paragraphs before realising that the title invited a much rounder appreciation of these books. A number of excellent answers discussed Book 11 in some detail, arguing both for and against its contribution to the student's enjoyment; many however hardly mentioned this book (or indeed the more typical Book 12), making it difficult to discuss the contribution the four books as a body make to key themes such as divine involvement or Odysseus' character development. One or two answers were over-focused on Calypso who barely appears in these books. That said, there were many more competent summaries, looking at plot, thematic importance and the various ways in which these books bring 'a sense of magic' to the *Odyssey*. Again, it was rare to find a dissenting voice concerning the levels of enjoyment gained, but some subtle attempts to suggest these books waste time, distract us from moving forward and, indeed, may be 'a pack of lies' from what we see of Odysseus elsewhere in the poem, were given full credit.

Option D

Just under 40% of students chose to answer Question 10, on fate and the gods with its focus on the victory over the suitors. Reference was often made to earlier events (for example Odysseus being shipwrecked in Book 5) which was fine as long as this was kept brief and tied in to the eventual overcoming of the suitors; a significant minority however lost sight of the suitors and produced a lengthy and largely irrelevant account of the first half of the *Odyssey*. There were on the other hand some excellent efforts which looked in detail at links between fate, Zeus and the other gods, rather than treating the three as separate topics. These then assessed how much the divine assistance contributed to what Odysseus and his limited number of human helpers achieved, before debating how far the suitors had brought their fates upon themselves. Even when students' discussions here proved inconclusive on the relative importance of each of the factors, it was more common to see regular analysis than in Question 09. The weaker answers tended to follow the bullet points and so provide a fair range of discussion over a number of areas. The very best Level 5 essays were a delight to read with their constant focus on the key issue of why the suitors suffered the fates they did (not necessarily death in the case of every one, as the most astute noted).

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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