

After Homer

Tracing how contemporary writers transform classical sources.

ELA.12.R.3.3 "Analyze the influence of classic literature on contemporary world texts."

NAME _____

DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline phrases that identify a classical element in each contemporary work, then circle words that show how each writer changes that element to address a newer concern.

Classics in New Waters

- ① Homer's ancient Greek epic *The Odyssey* follows Odysseus as he struggles to return home after the Trojan War. Its plot joins dangerous travel with questions about loyalty, identity, and the cost of war. At home, Penelope delays unwanted marriage proposals while their son Telemachus searches for news of his father. Later writers have borrowed more than its events. They reuse its voyage structure, its separated family, or its competing voices to examine their own societies. Influence, therefore, can appear in a character's name, a changed point of view, or a familiar conflict placed in a new setting.
- ② Saint Lucian poet Derek Walcott's *Omeros*, published in 1990, brings Homeric echoes to the Caribbean island of St. Lucia. The poem's fishermen include Achille, Hector, and Philoctete, names that recall Greek heroes. Yet Walcott does not simply repeat Homer's wars. Achille's story includes a dreamlike journey toward Africa, and the poem confronts the island's history of enslavement and colonial rule. By placing epic-scale suffering and rivalry among Caribbean people, Walcott claims that their lives deserve the scope once reserved for ancient heroes. The classical source supplies a framework, while the Caribbean setting changes its meaning.
- ③ Canadian writer Margaret Atwood shifts the same classical material in *The Penelopiad*, a 2005 retelling. Penelope narrates much of the book, and the twelve maids speak together in choral sections. In *The Odyssey*, Odysseus orders those maids executed after he returns. Atwood makes their deaths central, allowing them to accuse Odysseus and question Penelope's role. This new narration exposes a silence in the older epic: people with little power did not control its story. Like Walcott, Atwood uses a classic text as a starting point, but her revision focuses on gender, class, and whose testimony a culture believes.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE _____ Use the passage

1 Which details in Omeros signal its connection to classical Greek epic, and what Caribbean concerns reshape that influence?

2 How does Walcott change the scale and meaning of the classical epic tradition? Use one detail from the passage.

3 How does Atwood's use of Penelope and the twelve maids as narrators change the focus of the older epic?

4 What shared method do Walcott and Atwood use when drawing on classical literature, and how do their purposes differ?

3 YOUR TURN _____ Your own words

Write 120 to 150 words describing a contemporary world text you would create from a classic work. Name the classic, choose a new setting or genre, explain two deliberate changes, and state the current issue your adaptation would explore.

PART 1 • READ AND MARK

Underline phrases that identify a classical element in each contemporary work, then circle words that show how each writer changes that element to address a newer concern. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 • ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	Which details in Omeros signal its connection to classical Greek epic, and what Caribbean concerns reshape that influence?	The names Achilles, Hector, and Philoctete recall Greek heroes. Walcott reshapes the influence through St. Lucia's history of enslavement and colonial rule, along with Achilles's journey toward Africa.
2	How does Walcott change the scale and meaning of the classical epic tradition? Use one detail from the passage.	He gives Caribbean fishermen epic-scale importance, showing that their suffering and rivalry deserve the scope once reserved for ancient heroes.
3	How does Atwood's use of Penelope and the twelve maids as narrators change the focus of the older epic?	Their narration centers the maids' executions and lets people with less power accuse Odysseus and question Penelope, exposing voices the older epic did not let control the story.
4	What shared method do Walcott and Atwood use when drawing on classical literature, and how do their purposes differ?	Both use a classical text as a framework rather than simply repeating it. Walcott examines Caribbean history and colonialism, while Atwood examines gender, class, and whose testimony is believed.

PART 3 • YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

My contemporary novel, *Tidal Maker*, adapts Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* to a coastal Bangladeshi city threatened by rising seas. Instead of assembling a body from corpses, Dr. Rahman builds an artificial intelligence that predicts flood routes and controls emergency gates. Like Victor Frankenstein, she wants recognition and abandons responsibility when her creation acts in ways she cannot control. The AI's recorded messages replace the Creature's speeches, so readers hear a being asking who must protect people left outside the gates. The changed setting makes climate inequality, rather than nineteenth-century scientific ambition alone, the central issue. A rotating narration between Dr. Rahman, the AI, and displaced residents challenges the original novel's limited human viewpoints. It turns Shelley's warning about unchecked creation into a shared civic question.

Accept equivalent evidence-based explanations of how each contemporary work borrows and transforms classical material. For Part 3, look for a named classic, two specific adaptations, and a clear explanation of how the changes address a current issue.