Voices Beyond Odysseus

Compare two modern retellings of Homer's Odyssey.

ELA.9.R.3.3 "Compare and contrast the ways in which authors have adapted mythical, classical, or religious literary texts."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline one detail that each novelist keeps from Homer's epic. Circle each detail that shows how Atwood or Miller changes the focus, voice, or tone of the original story.

Two New Views of an Ancient Epic

1 More than two thousand years ago, Homer's epic poem The Odyssey followed the Greek hero Odysseus as he struggled to return home after the Trojan War. In the poem, Odysseus tells much of the story, and his clever escapes build his fame. His wife, Penelope, waits on Ithaca while powerful suitors press her to choose a new husband. The enchantress Circe first turns some of Odysseus's men into pigs, then helps him continue his journey. Later writers have used these characters and events, but they have shifted attention away from the celebrated hero.

2 In Margaret Atwood's 2005 novel The Penelopiad, Penelope speaks from the Underworld and retells her marriage and Odysseus's absence. This choice gives a quiet, watchful character control over the narrative. Penelope questions the heroic stories told about her husband and describes the risks she faced among the suitors. A chorus of twelve hanged maids interrupts her account with songs and dramatic scenes. Homer mentions these maids briefly near the epic's end. Atwood expands their presence and lets them accuse Odysseus and Penelope of failing to protect them. Her adaptation is ironic and suspicious of heroic glory.

3 Madeline Miller's 2018 novel Circe also moves a figure from the margins to the center, yet its method differs. Circe narrates her own life in a first-person voice, beginning long before Odysseus reaches her island and continuing after he leaves. Miller keeps familiar details, including Circe's transformation of sailors, but imagines Circe's childhood, exile, friendships, and choices. Instead of using a chorus to challenge one official story, the novel builds sympathy through Circe's private thoughts and long growth. Both authors revise Homer's hero-centered epic by giving women fuller voices. Atwood stresses competing accounts and injustice, while Miller traces one woman's independence across centuries.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How do Atwood and Miller differ in the character they place at the center of their adaptations?

2. What similar change do both authors make to Homer's hero-centered epic?

3. Contrast the storytelling method Atwood uses with the method Miller uses to reshape the source story.

4. How does each novelist expand material that Homer treats briefly or does not fully explore?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Choose a character or event from a myth, classical work, or religious literary text you know. In 4 to 5 sentences, describe two different adaptations, explaining one shared source element and two different author choices about point of view, focus, or tone.

ANSWER KEY

Voices Beyond Odysseus

GRADE 9 · ELA.9.R.3.3

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline one detail that each novelist keeps from Homer's epic. Circle each detail that shows how Atwood or Miller changes the focus, voice, or tone of the original story. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How do Atwood and Miller differ in the character they place at the center of their adaptations?	**Atwood centers Penelope and also gives the twelve maids a chorus, while Miller centers Circe.**
2	What similar change do both authors make to Homer's hero-centered epic?	**Both give women who receive less attention in Homer fuller voices and more central roles.**
3	Contrast the storytelling method Atwood uses with the method Miller uses to reshape the source story.	**Atwood uses Penelope's retelling and a chorus of maids to challenge the story, while Miller uses Circe's first-person narration and private thoughts to build sympathy.**
4	How does each novelist expand material that Homer treats briefly or does not fully explore?	**Atwood expands the maids' presence and their accusations. Miller imagines Circe's childhood, exile, friendships, and choices.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

A film adaptation of the Perseus myth could keep Medusa's power to turn people to stone and tell the adventure through Perseus's eyes. It could present him as a bold hero who wins fame. A novel adaptation could keep the same dangerous encounter but use Medusa's first-person voice. This version could focus on her isolation and make readers question whether the hero's victory is fully admirable.

Accept equivalent comparisons supported by the passage, including references to voice, focus, added material, or tone. For the open task, accept any accurate source text and two clearly contrasted adaptation choices.