

Who Holds the Thread?

Analyze how a contemporary retelling transforms a classical motif.

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 Read the source notes and three selections. Underline language about making or undoing fabric. Circle words that show who controls the account. Compare specific choices; do not assume that a character's judgment is the author's.

Penelope: A Motif Across Centuries

- ① **A. Homer, *The Odyssey*, Book II.** Samuel Butler's 1900 prose translation of the ancient Greek epic. Antinous, a suitor who wants Penelope to remarry, describes her delaying tactic to her son. A web here means woven cloth. After she promises to finish a burial cloth before marrying, he says: 'This was what she said, and we assented; whereon we could see her working on her great web all day long, but at night she would unpick the stitches again by torchlight. She fooled us in this way for three years and we never found her out' [excerpt ends].
- ② **B. *The Odyssey*, Book XIX, same translation.** Penelope later speaks to a stranger who is actually her disguised husband. Ulysses is this translation's name for Odysseus. She says: 'They want me to marry again at once, and I have to invent stratagems in order to deceive them.' Later in the same speech: 'This was what I said, and they assented; whereon I used to keep working at my great web all day long, but at night I would unpick the stitches again by torch light.' Stratagems are carefully planned ways to achieve an aim.
- ③ **C. Margaret Atwood, *The Penelopiad* (2005), chapter 1.** In the Canadian writer's contemporary retelling, Penelope speaks from the afterlife about accounts of her life and prepares to tell her version. These three brief selections appear in this order; bracketed marks indicate omissions: 'I owe it to myself. [...] So I'll spin a thread of my own. [...] Patient, they used to call me.' Compare the language with A and B. Source texts: Homer, <https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/1727>; Atwood, publisher's chapter excerpt, <https://groveatlantic.com/book/the-penelopiad/>.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE _____ Use the passage

- 1** How does Antinous's position shape his account of Penelope's work in A? Distinguish what happens from his judgment of it.

- 2** Compare B with A. What changes when Penelope explains the same action herself? Use a detail from each selection.

- 3** How does C transform the classical fabric-making motif? Explain what Penelope makes in the older selections and what she intends to make in the contemporary text.

- 4** A reader claims that Atwood is the first to let Penelope speak. What evidence here challenges that claim, and what narrower claim about Atwood's transformation can you support?

In 120 to 150 words, argue how Atwood both inherits and changes the classical portrayal of Penelope. Analyze the fabric-making motif and narrative perspective, use evidence from A, B and C, and qualify one claim that these short selections cannot establish.

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

PART 1 • READ AND MARK

Read the source notes and three selections. Underline language about making or undoing fabric. Circle words that show who controls the account. Compare specific choices; do not assume that a character's judgment is the author's. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 • ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How does Antinous's position shape his account of Penelope's work in A? Distinguish what happens from his judgment of it.	Penelope works by day and undoes the cloth at night. As a disappointed suitor, Antinous frames her delay as a trick against his group. His complaint does not establish the epic's final moral judgment.
2	Compare B with A. What changes when Penelope explains the same action herself? Use a detail from each selection.	A emphasizes the suitors being deceived. B identifies pressure to remarry and Penelope's deliberate strategy to resist it. The action remains the same, but her account supplies a motive that complicates Antinous's complaint.
3	How does C transform the classical fabric-making motif? Explain what Penelope makes in the older selections and what she intends to make in the contemporary text.	In the older selections she makes and unmakes cloth to postpone remarriage. In C, fabric-making becomes a metaphor for composing her own account. Atwood carries forward deliberate creation and delay while shifting their object toward control of a personal story.
4	A reader claims that Atwood is the first to let Penelope speak. What evidence here challenges that claim, and what narrower claim about Atwood's transformation can you support?	B already gives Penelope direct speech explaining her strategy. A narrower claim is that C makes her preparation to narrate her life itself a focus and turns the familiar craft into an image of narrative control. These short selections cannot establish every difference between the complete works.

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Atwood inherits Penelope's association with patient, deliberate making but changes what that craft can accomplish. In A, Antinous reports her daily weaving and nightly undoing as a deception of the suitors. His frustrated position shapes that judgment. In B, Penelope explains that pressure to remarry requires a strategy, so the epic already lets her defend her actions. Atwood therefore does not simply give a previously silent character speech. In C, the familiar craft becomes a metaphor for creating her own account of her life. Her remembered reputation for patience connects the contemporary voice to the classical delay, while her personal obligation suggests a new purpose for it. These selections support a shift toward narrative control, but they cannot prove that every part of either work presents Penelope in the same way.

Accept supported comparisons of motif, perspective and agency, including alternatives to the sample. A is Antinous's speech, not a neutral author verdict; B prevents the false claim that Homer never lets Penelope speak. C consists of three non-contiguous short quotations, with omissions marked; its surrounding chapter concerns storytelling. Do not infer an author's entire purpose or a whole culture from these selections. Butler's prose translation represents an epic written in verse; this task concerns literary influence, not analysis of Greek meter. Sources and precise book/chapter locators are supplied on student pages.