Retelling the Return

Compare an ancient epic with a modern adaptation.

8.T.PM.1.a "Read and compare and contrast myths and stories (fictional or historical) that modern writers have adapted into their own works. (I)"

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline details that both The Odyssey and The Penelopiad share. Circle details Atwood changes or adds, then write 1 beside the sentence that explains why the change matters.

Penelope's Different Story

1. Many readers know Penelope from Homer's ancient Greek epic, The Odyssey. While her husband, Odysseus, spends years trying to return from the Trojan War, Penelope remains in Ithaca. Suitors crowd her home and pressure her to choose a new husband. She delays them by saying she must finish weaving a burial cloth, then secretly unweaves it at night. In the epic, this clever trick shows her loyalty to Odysseus and helps preserve his household until he returns.

2. In Margaret Atwood's 2005 novel The Penelopiad, the old story is adapted from Penelope's point of view. Penelope narrates much of the book after death, looking back at events in Ithaca. Atwood also gives a chorus-like voice to twelve maids. In The Odyssey, these maids are executed after Odysseus returns because they are said to have supported the suitors. Atwood's maids question that judgment and describe their fear, making readers consider power and fairness closely.

3. Both works keep important people and events from the ancient myth: Penelope waits in Ithaca, the suitors threaten her home, and Odysseus eventually returns. Yet Atwood changes the focus. Homer's epic mainly follows Odysseus's dangerous journey and presents Penelope as a faithful wife. The Penelopiad lets Penelope explain her own choices and lets the maids speak for themselves. By shifting the narrator, Atwood does not simply repeat the myth. She invites readers to notice voices that the earlier epic gives little space.

READ THE OLDER FABLE AND THIS NEW CLASSROOM ADAPTATION

Work and provenance	Text to read
The Hare and the Tortoise; Aesop, translated by V. S. Vernon Jones. Public-domain text, Project Gutenberg ebook 11339. Source: gutenberg.org/ebooks/11339	A Hare was one day making fun of a Tortoise for being so slow upon his feet. "Wait a bit," said the Tortoise; "I'll run a race with you, and I'll wager that I win." "Oh, well," replied the Hare, who was much amused at the idea, "let's try and see"; and it was soon agreed that the fox should set a course for them, and be the judge. When the time came both started off together, but the Hare was soon so far ahead that he thought he might as well have a rest: so down he lay and fell fast asleep. Meanwhile the Tortoise kept plodding on, and in time reached the goal. At last the Hare woke up with a start, and dashed on at his fastest, but only to find that the Tortoise had already won the race. Slow and steady wins the race.
The Paper Bridges; contemporary adaptation written for this worksheet	Leo and Tess agreed to build paper bridges for the classroom test. Leo finished quickly and teased Tess for checking each fold. While Tess worked steadily, Leo set his bridge aside and played a game. At testing time, Tess's bridge held the required book, but Leo's loose folds collapsed. Leo asked how she had made it strong. Tess showed him her careful checks, and they rebuilt his bridge together. Leo thanked her instead of boasting.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. What three important details do The Odyssey and The Penelopiad keep from the ancient story?

2. How does the main point of view in The Penelopiad differ from the focus of Homer's epic?

3. Compare the role of the twelve maids in the two works. What does Atwood add to their portrayal?

4. How does changing the narrator affect the message of Atwood's adaptation? Use one detail from the passage.

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Actually read both supplied works: “The Hare and the Tortoise” and its classroom adaptation “The Paper Bridges.” In three sentences, name an element kept from the older story, name an element changed, and explain how that change affects the modern story’s focus. Include a specific detail from each work. You may instead use an accessible older story and modern adaptation if you actually read both with teacher support and name them. The Penelope summary above is a comparison scaffold, not a substitute for reading the paired works.

ANSWER KEY

Retelling the Return

GRADE 8 · 8.T.PM.1.a

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline details that both The Odyssey and The Penelopiad share. Circle details Atwood changes or adds, then write 1 beside the sentence that explains why the change matters. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	What three important details do The Odyssey and The Penelopiad keep from the ancient story?	**Penelope waits in Ithaca, the suitors threaten her home, and Odysseus returns.**
2	How does the main point of view in The Penelopiad differ from the focus of Homer's epic?	**The Penelopiad is largely narrated by Penelope, while Homer's epic mainly follows Odysseus's journey.**
3	Compare the role of the twelve maids in the two works. What does Atwood add to their portrayal?	**In The Odyssey, the maids are executed after being accused of supporting the suitors. Atwood gives them a voice, and they question the judgment and describe their fear.**
4	How does changing the narrator affect the message of Atwood's adaptation? Use one detail from the passage.	**It draws attention to voices given little space in the earlier epic, such as Penelope's choices and the maids' experiences.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

The Paper Bridges keeps the older fable’s contrast between a confident, distracted competitor and a steady worker: Leo plays a game while Tess checks folds, as the Hare sleeps while the Tortoise keeps moving. It changes the race into a classroom bridge test and adds Tess helping Leo rebuild after his failure. That added cooperation shifts the focus from winning alone toward learning from steady work and accepting help.

Accept accurate comparisons that identify a retained element, a changed element, and a reasonable explanation of the change's effect. Students may use a different myth or older story and adaptation if their details are accurate. For Part 3, check that both named works were actually read and that three sentences identify a supported retained element, changed element and effect using details from each. The supplied older fable is verified public-domain translation text, including its stated moral; the new classroom story is openly identified as a contemporary worksheet adaptation. No claim is made that the Atwood work was reproduced or that recalling a pair alone completes this reading task.