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In the life of a child, the guidance of a parent or guardian is vital. During this critical stage, children learn about their world through the examples of others. In Homer's classic epic, The Odyssey, Telemachus achieves independence and competence through his determination, the experience he gathered during his journey, and guidance from Athene.

When first introduced, Telemachus took no action to free his household, but brooded over his difficult situation until guided to do otherwise, demonstrating his lack of leadership and initiative. "He was sitting moodily among the suitors, thinking about his brave father and how he would send them flying out of the house if he were to come to his own again and be honored as in days gone by. Thus brooding as he sat among them..." (Homer, 21). Rather than planning or taking action against the suitors, Telemachus instead sulked, wishing Odysseus would return to save his family. In disguise, Athene prompted Telemachus to step up to the challenge and not only confront the suitors, but to investigate his father's disappearance. "I would, however, urge you to set about trying to get rid of these suitors at once," (Homer, 25) Athene advised him, adding, "...let me prevail upon you to take the best ship you can get, with a crew of twenty men, and go in quest of your father who has been so long missing." (Homer, 25). In fact, the cunning goddess proceeded to gently chide Telemachus for his childish behavior, saying, "You are too old to plead infancy any longer...Show your mettle, then, and make yourself a name in story." (Homer, 25). Without this firm instruction, Odysseus's young son may never have set out on his

journey toward independence. Telemachus showed no initiative when first introduced, but only ceased his brooding with guidance and prompting from Athene.

Athene's sage instruction at every step set Telemachus on a path of purpose and responsibility, shifting his emotions and determination. After speaking sternly to the suitors per Athene's directions, Telemachus began swiftly and decisively preparing for his imminent voyage, filled with newfound confidence. "... and Telemachus lost no time in doing as the goddess told him." (Homer, 38). His mindset of helplessness disappeared after her encouragement, filling him with determination. Her specific leadership instilled him with the courage and mettle necessary to undertake his upcoming quest. He even assumed a place of leadership among the ship's crew, despite not being the ship's captain. "...and Telemachus said, 'Now my men, help me to get the stores on board...' ... With these words, he led the way, and the others followed after." With unwavering certainty, Athene told Telemachus, "...you must not be in the least shy or nervous." (Homer, 41). With Athene's guidance, Telemachus set off on a path of responsibility and purpose, taking charge of the issues plaguing his household with new determination.

As Telemachus grew in experience during his journey, his confidence and competence increased greatly. Although nervous initially, his newly acquired knowledge from meeting with Nestor and Menelaus emboldened him, in conjunction with Athene's support. "Telemachus answered [Nestor] boldly, for Athene had given him courage to ask about his father and get himself a good name." (Homer, 45). In reply to Menelaus, the second man he questioned, Telemachus gave a truthful and confident answer, due to the experience he gained from meeting with Nestor. "'I have come, sir,' replied Telemachus, 'to see if you can tell me anything about my father. I am being eaten out of house and home. My fair estate is being wasted, and my house is

full of miscreants...” He even found the independence to set his own boundaries whilst conversing with Menelaus, holding his own against a man much older than himself. “”Son of Atreus,’ replied Telemachus, ‘do not press me to stay longer...my crew whom I have left at Pylos are already impatient, and you are detaining me from them...” (Homer, 72). He demonstrated that, after observing and learning from his journey thus far, he could confidently take the lead without Athene’s direct instruction. The experience Telemachus acquired during his quest encouraged, emboldened, and taught him, allowing him to stand confident in the face of intimidating circumstances.

Through his resolve, his gathered experience, and guidance from Athene, Telemachus grew in independence and competence in Homer’s epic, The Odyssey. Despite his late start to maturity and lack of a role-model, he went on to become a man of great feats. With the example of others playing such an important role in the development of a child, it begs the question, how much does their example shape a child’s character?