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Final Draft of Penelope's journey essay

The Queen's Crisis

Imagine your beloved husband has just died in battle, leaving you alone to care for your infant son. Your home is being mercilessly overwhelmed by lustful, self-centered men who want to marry you in your husband's absence but have no respect for you or your property. They refuse to leave and greedily eat up your wealth without regret and they even plot to kill your son as he grows older. This was reality for Penelope, but it is this reality that sets her apart from other women and places her in a unique position of great influence and authority.

In most works of Greek mythology, the women are portrayed as lesser, helpless individuals who need guidance to make wise decisions. But in *The Odyssey*, the situation is quite different for many of the female characters. Instead of being painted as inferior, foolish beings, the epic often portrays women as cunning and lustful seductresses who make decisions for themselves and were proven to be some of the most dangerous and powerful characters in the story. For example, Calypso, the nymph, imprisons a king on her secluded island for years and forces him to be her slave and Scylla, the sea monster, devours multiple sailors within minutes and is known for her deadly ruthlessness. But Penelope differs, however, from both these portrayals.

Penelope is the wife of king Odysseus, the long-lost ruler of Troy who was supposedly killed during the Trojan War. She has a position of nobility and the title of queen, yet she possesses none of the power and authority some of the other female characters in the epic have, even though they aren't royalty. Unlike the nymphs and demigods who can rely on their magical gifts and godlike powers, Penelope has no support, no control, and no power; she appears helpless to stop the evil consuming her home despite her position as queen. This forces her to use her own intelligence and cunning to outsmart her ill-minded suitors instead of giving into their lustful cries like some of the more powerful female characters would. Penelope demonstrates her cunning when she is able to postpone her forced second marriage for three years by telling her suitors she would choose one of them to marry after she was finished weaving a funeral shroud. She then proceeds to destroy her work in secret every night and start over the next day. "Young men, my suitors, now that king Odysseus is no more, go slowly, keen as you are to marry me, until I can finish this web . . ." (Homer, 395) "So by day I'd weave at my great and growing web – by night, by the light of torches set beside me, I would unravel all I'd done." (Homer, 395) This gives her some sense of control, but also forces her to take on an overprotective and ultimately damaging mindset towards her son Telemachus.

This overprotectiveness, despite the temporary comfort it brings, stops Penelope from being able to encourage Telemachus to find Odysseus. Feeling an overwhelming need to protect her son only prolongs his journey to adulthood and plants an attitude of helplessness in herself and in him. Penelope must learn to let go and allow Telemachus to protect himself for both to move forward with their lives and improve their situations. In confronting her flaws, Penelope exhibits an inner strength and becomes a character of redemption.

Penelope not only redeems herself, her son, her home, and her marriage but also the view of women in the ancient world. She exhibits sincerity, cunning intellect, and a powerful, resilient hope that carries her through the discouragement and misery of her situation. It is her undying resiliency that lives on through the pages of Homer's *The Odyssey*, all the way from the ancient world to the modern world of today. It is a message about the power women have to conquer the circumstances and those that oppress them, not with might, but with intellect and steadfast morals.