



Unit 19

Odysseus and Polyphemus

Odysseus is a famous hero in the myths of Ancient Greece. A myth is a story which is not based on historical fact and often features gods, goddesses and fantastic creatures. This story tells what happens when Odysseus and his crew take shelter in the cave of the Cyclops, Polyphemus.

The Cyclopes were giants. Each had only one enormous eye in the middle of his forehead. They lived in wild, faraway places where there were no laws. Each Cyclops lived alone, tending his sheep and goats. One was named Polyphemus, and he was the son of Poseidon, god of the sea.

Long ago a man named Odysseus was sailing home from war. He and his crew went ashore on Polyphemus' island, where they made themselves comfortable in the giant's cave.

When Polyphemus returned that evening with his flocks, he was furious to see strangers in his home. He closed the entrance to the cave with a gigantic rock only he was strong enough to move. Then he killed and ate some of the unlucky sailors.

Odysseus didn't try to take revenge that night, but while Polyphemus slept he stayed awake, waiting. When he heard the giant snoring loudly, he poked a red-hot stick into



his one enormous eye and blinded him.

In the morning Odysseus and his remaining crew clung to the woolly bellies of the giant's rams. The animals left the cave as Polyphemus counted them one by one by patting their backs. The blinded Polyphemus couldn't see that Odysseus and the sailors were safely hidden beneath his long-haired beasts.

Odysseus paid a high price for his cleverness. He hadn't known that Polyphemus was the son of Poseidon, and now the god of the sea was angry with him. He punished Odysseus by making it impossible for him to return to his home on the small, rocky island of Ithaca.

*from The One-eyed Giant and Other Monsters
from the Greek Myths by Anne Rockwell*