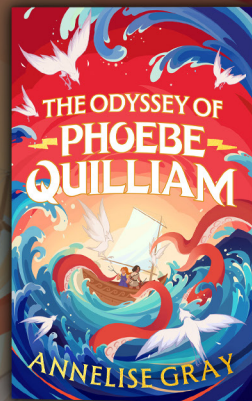


ANNELISE GRAY THE ODYSSEY OF PHOEBE QUILLIAM

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The Odyssey of Phoebe Quilliam

Readers' Notes

Pre-Reading

Discuss: Look at the cover of the book. What does it depict? What do you think the book might be about? What does the word 'odyssey' mean to you? When might the book be set? Give evidence to explain your answers.

Activity: Before you read the story, conduct some research into Greek mythology. What is a myth? Why were they so important to the Ancient Greeks? Who were the Greek gods and goddesses? What were some of the scariest monsters in Greek mythology?

You may want to use these resources to help you:

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/teach/class-clips-video/articles/zykxhgw>

https://www.ducksters.com/history/ancient_greece/monsters_and_creatures_of_greek_mythology.php

Activity: Look up Homer's 'Odyssey.' What was this? Find a short version of the Odyssey and read what it's about. You may wish to use the 'further reading' section at the end of these notes, or look at these links:

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/articles/ztsj2v4#z2v26g8>

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PglAFdKSJ_M

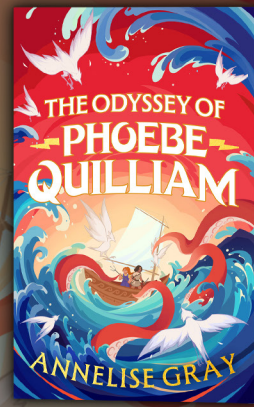
Discuss: Why do contemporary authors use *The Odyssey* as the basis for a modern story?

Opening

'My name is Phoebe Quilliam and this is the story of how I defeated a monster and found my way home, with help from a golden sail, an invisible horse, a kite-flying king, a bewildered fisherman and a boy who could see dolphins swimming in the clouds.' (Page 1)

Discuss: Are there any other books that start with the character announcing their name and introducing themselves? What is the effect of doing this? Do you like it? Why does Gray give away the story in the first sentence? What impression of Phoebe and her story does this give?

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'It all starts with a boy. A boy called Telemachus.' (Page 15)

Discuss: When Phoebe's Nan tells her the story of the Odyssey, she starts with this sentence. How does it echo the first sentence of the book? Why has Gray done this?

Activity: Choose one of the expanded noun phrases from the first sentence of the book and sketch an impression of it.

Activity: Write a list of the things you encounter on a journey you do regularly (maybe your trip home from school, or from visiting friends or family). Which of the items are 'helpful' and which are 'obstacles.' For example, a zebra-crossing might be helpful, a shop selling treats might be an obstacle to you getting home quickly.

'It might seem strange to tell you the ending before I've told you the beginning. Believe me, I'm the last person to spoil a story.' (Page 1)

Discuss: What is a spoiler?

'Besides, the ending's not the important part. You'll see.' (Page 9)

'It's everything before the ending that counts.' (Page 10)

Discuss: Does a story have an 'important part'? What do you think the most important part of a story is? Give examples from other stories you know or books you have read.

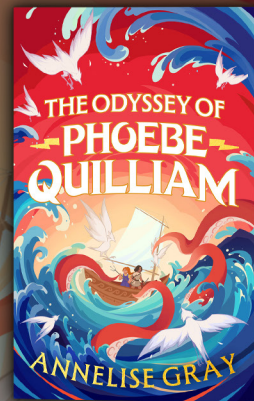
Activity: If you have willing partners, hold a debate arguing for the part of the story you think is most important.

Read the first chapter.

Activity: What have you learnt about Phoebe and Nan from the first chapter? Create a list of characteristics, including physical and personality traits. Give evidence for each point you make.

Activity: Now make a list of questions you have about the story at the end of the first chapter.

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Writing Style

Read pages 1-3 until 'Nan's right.'

Discuss: Look at the 'voice' of the narrative. Which tense is it in? Does it stay consistent?

Activity: Rewrite part of the passage in third person, past tense. Which do you prefer – Gray's version or yours? What effect do the different voices and tenses have on the narrative?

'Whipping the mix until it's like butter.' (Page 2)

'...her words give me that feeling you get when you're launching a kite and the wind lifts it.'
(Page 3)

'The black sand crunches like burned toast crumbs as we step ashore.' (Page 171)

Activity: Take one chapter from the book and sift through for figurative language such as similes, metaphors, personification, hyperbole. Can you put the examples in separate columns depending on what kind of figurative language they are? Now examine them – which works best and why? Do they suit the character, the setting, the action?

'The glass walls of the studio rattle loudly.' (Page 20)

'The sound of the waves washing through the pebbles seems to grow louder...' (Page 20)

'Over the studio, there's a thunder crack. The lights flicker and go out.' (page 33)

Discuss: What is pathetic fallacy? Why has Gray used it here? How are storms a large part of the story of the Odyssey?

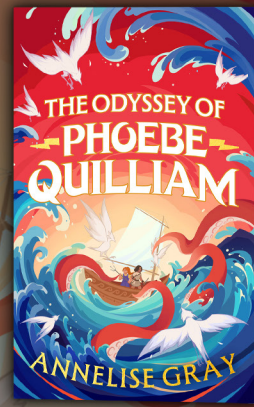
'It's hard to get rid of the feeling, though. I could swear I glimpsed someone floating among the crests of the indigo sea, arm raised as if they were waving to me.' (Page 20)

Discuss: How else does Gray build tension/atmosphere in the first part of the novel? Which literary devices does she use?

'What happened? A power cut?' (Page 34)

Read the entire passage on page 34 until 'knocks me over.'

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Activity: Perform a close reading of the text on this page, examining how the author gets inside the voice of Phoebe, explains what's happening and creates a visual image inside the reader's head. You may wish to read the text aloud. Which literary techniques and figurative language does she use? Look at the variety of sentence structures and lengths. Which emotion does she convey?

Characters

Phoebe

'It's wrong what I'm doing – I know that. To paint over another artist's picture without their permission... It's worse than anything. Worse than ruining all the endings of every story Nan ever told me.' (Page 32-33)

Discuss: Why, if she knows it's wrong, does Phoebe paint over her Nan's picture? What is the emotion behind her action?

Activity: Are there real-life incidents of artists painting over another artist's painting? Find an example and see if there is an explanation as to why they did it.

Activity: Does Phoebe generally do the right thing? Write a paragraph to explain your answer using evidence from the text to support your argument.

'I don't understand this,' I say shakily. 'Please, Hattie, I just want my mum. I want to go home.' (Page 50)

'My father was a sailor like yours and he...' (Page 65)

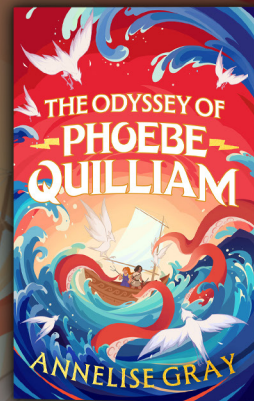
Discuss: Phoebe interacts with two children throughout the bulk of the novel. Is she sympathetic towards them for the troubles they have suffered? Is she empathetic? What is the difference between sympathy and empathy?

Activity: Give examples of when Phoebe acts sympathetically towards someone, and empathetically.

'The fire in my head spreads fast.' (page 32)

Discuss: Is Phoebe a tempestuous person? Is she quick to anger?

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'It screams again, shaking its head, but instead of feeling scared, I'm filled with the same rage that made me smash the jar in the studio.' (Page 97-98)

Discuss: Phoebe compares two incidents of rage that she experiences. What is the connection of the feeling of rage in each scene? Are both incidents of rage justified?

Discuss: How does Phoebe's anger express itself? Does she manage her anger? Is there a good way to express anger?

Activity: Think about what lies behind Phoebe's anger. Can you identify which other emotions lie underneath?

'I get to my feet. I'm almost shouting now, unable to control myself.' (Page 129)

Discuss: Why does Phoebe get angry with Odysseus?

Activity: Keep your own emotions diary for a week. Do you get angry? With whom or what? Can you work out the underlying cause of the anger – is there another emotion underneath?

'I think of how Nan would deal with the man, and it gives me courage.' (Page 143)

Discuss: Do you agree that Phoebe's Nan has the greatest influence over her during the action of the story? How is her influence shown?

Activity: Make a table with examples and explore whether you think Phoebe's Nan is a positive influence on her.

Leander

Leander first appears in Chapter Five.

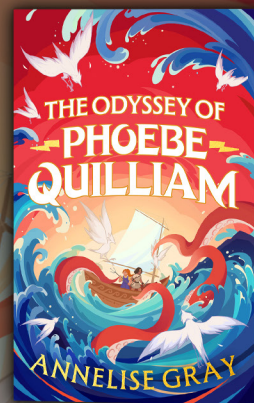
Discuss: What are your first impressions of him from this chapter?

'He's tall and strong but there's a childish sulkiness about his mouth, even though he's asleep.' (Page 45)

'His earlier sulkiness is gone. Proudly, he holds up the cloth so that the light of the fire dances behind it.' (Page 63)

'Even if the gods themselves were opposed to my quest, I would not abandon it.' (Page 64)

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Activity: Gray gives lots of clues about what's important to Leander, what motivates him. Create a 'Leander' word cloud to explore those things and see what stands out as most important.

Discuss: How does Leander change over the course of the novel? Does his mood change often? Why?

'I have never heard of such a place. And I do not know you – or what you are.' (Page 66)

Discuss: Why is Leander suspicious of Phoebe? Who or what might he think she is?

Activity: Do Phoebe's and Leander's different outlooks on life affect how they behave?

'What good would it do?' Odysseus shrugs. 'We are all at the mercy of the gods.' (Page 129)

Discuss: Think about the Ancient Greeks' sensibilities and views of fate, free will and the after-life, and compare with our modern day outlook. Then think about Phoebe and Leander. What impact does it have?

Activity: Read through the dialogue on Pages 66-67 between Phoebe and Leander. Why does he decide to take her with him on the journey? There may be more than one reason.

Activity: Imagine you are Leander – write down two lists – the pros and cons of whether to take Phoebe with him. Or write his first impressions of her as a diary entry, along with his decision on whether to take her with him.

'But it is the code of my people to offer help to strangers.' (Page 66)

Discuss: Is it the modern way to offer help to strangers? What do you think of this code?

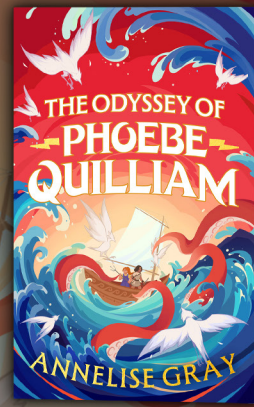
'I offer to help but he's determined to manage his boat on his own.' (Page 68)

'We face her together – him with his knife, me with the spear.' (page 187)

Discuss: At what point in the story do Phoebe and Leander start working together? Are they most successful when they work together? Give an example and explain why.

Activity: Create a poster to explore how working in a team is beneficial. You may wish to research data on successful teams and what makes them successful.

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'There is no way out, and stop thinking you're the only hero in this story.' (Page 188)

Discuss: Does Leander think he's the only hero? Can there be more than one hero in a story?

Hattie

'She's around my age and has curly brown hair and mischievous eyes.' (Page 45)

'And I realised she wasn't rude. Just lonely, like me.' (Page 52)

Activity: Hattie isn't in the novel that much but she steers much of the action. Which Greek goddess do you imagine her most to be like? Draw a picture of her as this Greek goddess. Label her powers and attributes.

Odysseus

'So, this is him. Odysseus the Wanderer, the king famous for his cunning, who outwitted the Cyclops and whose idea it was to build the great wooden horse which tricked the Trojans.' (Page 122)

Discuss: Phoebe builds up an image of what Odysseus should be like, so how does that compare to the man they actually meet in Chapter 15?

Activity: Odysseus has been missing a long time – create a 'Wanted' poster based on the original Odyssey story that you researched at the beginning of the novel. How are you describing the missing man?

Activity: Odysseus has been depicted in many famous sculptures and paintings over the years. Choose one that you think fits best and print it out and write a paragraph explaining your choice.

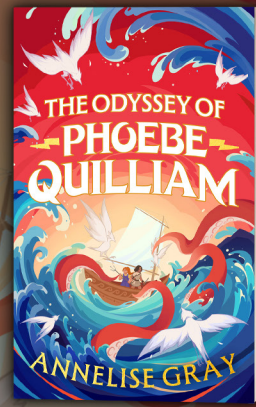
Read the tale Odysseus tells of his journey in Chapter 15.

Activity: Which words are hard to understand? Make a list of any unknown vocabulary and look up the meanings. Write down the definitions and see if you can think of any synonyms for the words.

Discuss: How does he make it vivid? Why does Odysseus feel that he failed his men? What could he have done differently?

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Research the story again (look again at the resources above).

Discuss: Which was the worst danger that Odysseus faced?

Activity: If you are in a classroom, form teams, and take a danger each. Create the danger/ challenge visually out of junk recycling, and then prepare to argue your case for being the most treacherous challenge (with a presentation). As a class, vote for the most dangerous challenge.

Activity: Retell the story from Calos's point of view.

Discuss: Do you think Calos would have viewed Odysseus as a good leader? What makes a good leader? Create a job application form for Odysseus, explaining his resilience and aptitude for overcoming challenges.

Setting

'I've chosen a Friday, shortly before teatime, in a seaside town called St Samuel's in Cornwall.' (Page 1)

Chapter Two begins a year following Chapter One.

Discuss: Why do you think the author did this?

Activity: Where is Cornwall? Find Cornwall on a UK map. How long would it take you to get there from where you live? Look up a picture of Cornwall. What does it look like? Why do you think the author has set her novel here?

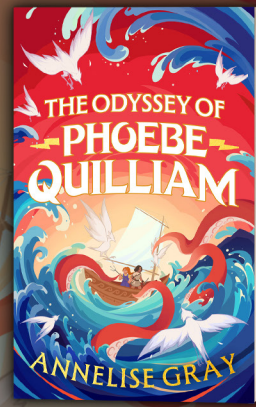
'A loose tunic, belted at his waist, no shoes on his brown feet.' (Page 45)

'Is this...' I look at my surroundings, afraid to finish. 'Am I...dead?' (Page 47)

Discuss: Why does Phoebe think she might be dead in Chapter Six?

'Behind her, the boat's white sail flaps gently in the wind. The movement wakens a memory. I stare at the black hull. Ivory Black.' (Page 48)

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Discuss: What do you think has happened to Phoebe here? Has she gone into an actual time-frame or into a memory or into a painting? Is it the time of Odysseus or the time of her grandmother's childhood? Or has the concept of time vanished?

Activity: Explore your answers by creating a mind map of possibilities.

'I should find it too strange to believe. That I'm actually in the same world as Odysseus. Now, though, anything seems possible.' (Page 62)
'That's amazing,' I marvel. 'The stars in your world. They're the same as the stars in mine.' (Page 151)

Discuss: What are the similarities and differences in the physical world that Phoebe and Leander inhabit despite the time in which they live being so different?

Activity: Write a comparison piece picking out some key differences and similarities. What is your conclusion?

'It seems strange that you know so much and yet so little.' (Page 76)

Discuss: Do you think Phoebe knows 'so much' or 'so little'? Explain what Leander means by this. Phoebe has been dropped into the story of Odysseus, yet knowing the outcome. Which story would you want to be dropped into, even though you know the outcome? How do you think the characters would react to you?

'I explain about pockets, to his obvious fascination.' (Page 105)

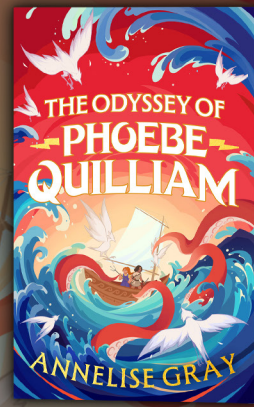
Discuss: What is an anachronism? Are there others that Phoebe brings to her Odyssey?

Research: When were pockets first invented?

Activity: Make a list of items from your house that would be an 'anachronism' in the time of the Ancient Greeks. Now make a list of items from your house that were used in the time of the Ancient Greeks.

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Themes

Greek Mythology

'The wrath of Poseidon the Earth-Shaker, Lord of the Sea, and Zeus the Cloud-Gatherer, King of the Gods.' (Page 16)

Discuss: The adjectives next to the name of the Greek gods are called epithets. Why do you think the Greek writers used them when naming the gods or heroes of Greek mythology?

Activity: Make a list of Greek gods and typical epithets used for them.

Re-read Chapter 13.

Discuss: How does Gray evoke a sense of calm and reassurance with King Aeolus?

Activity: Choose an encompassing adjective or epithet for each of the characters in the novel, from Nan and Hattie to Leukon and Calos. What makes you choose that word?

'You know – the story of Icarus, whose father built the maze for the Minotaur?' (Page 51)
'The Golden Fleece?' I can't believe my ears. 'From the flying ram that Jason and the Argonauts went to get?' (Page 63)

Activity: If you are looking at the text as a class, separate into groups and each take a different Greek mythological story that has been referenced in the text. Research the story, write it in your own words, and then present it to the rest of the class. Will you perform it as a show, create a 3D sculpture, or a 2D poster to show the story, or write a comic strip to distribute?

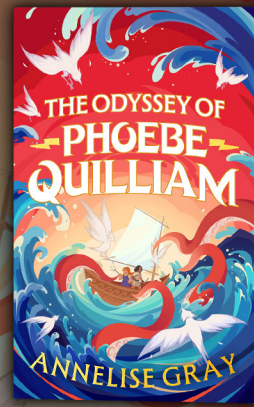
Discuss: Do you think it is important to have a general knowledge of Greek mythology?

Monsters

'A terrible creature, the Morpheia' (Page 17)
'I've given her the body of a spider and the head and tail of a mermaid, with spiralling tentacles for hair.' (Page 27)
'She can change her shape if she wants. But she can't leave the tower. That's her curse.' (Page 54)

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Activity: Make a compendium of ancient Greek mythological monsters.

Activity: Create your own mythological monster inspired by the compendium. What does your monster look like? You may want to create a 3D model of it using junk material, or sketch or paint it.

'The giant leers horribly through the rain, his nostrils stained with blood.' (Page 40)
'They [Klepts] have white-feathered bodies and large clawed feet but they're tall and carry themselves like humans. The strangest and most terrible thing about them, though, is their faces. They look as if they've been sculpted from plaster, but they're smooth and blank with no eyes. Just a sharp curving beak.' (Page 49)
'A craggy, wild-haired giant with a bleeding scar in the middle of his forehead where once there had been an eye.' (Page 80)
'Save for the Morpheia, the Laestrygonians must be the worst creatures in existence. Without soul, without compassion.' (Page 108)

Discuss: Which is the most frightening monster in the story?

Activity: Create top trumps for the monsters in the story.

Discuss: Why do you think the Ancient Greeks created monsters in their stories? What was their purpose? Why were so many monsters hybrids of real creatures or had attributes drawn from real animals?

Journeys

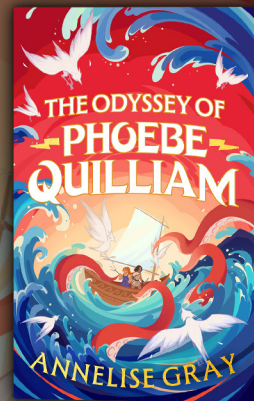
'Hope your road is a long one.' (Page 14)

Discuss: Why is this inscription from Phoebe's parents' wedding rings relevant to the story, and why is it sad?

Activity: Look at the poem from which the quotation comes: *Ithaka* by CP Cavafy. <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/51296/ithaka-56d22eef917ec>

Activity: Make a list of the vocabulary in the poem that you find challenging. Can you find definitions or explanations for these words?

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Discuss: In a group or class, discuss what you think the message of the poem is. Do you agree with the message? Do you like the poem?

Activity: Write your own poem about a journey.

'Please, let me wake up, I beg silently. Please, I want to go home. I just want to go home.'
(Page 41)

'I need to know that you'll make sure I'm buried properly. So that my soul is accepted into the underworld and doesn't wander, homeless, for eternity.' (Page 171)

Discuss: The story of the Odyssey is about coming home. In the story, the Lotus-Eaters think they're home. In *The Odyssey of Phoebe Quilliam*, Phoebe wants her Nan to be at home. What does home mean to you? Why did the Ancient Greeks believe that it was important not to be homeless at death?

Activity: Create a Zone of Relevance diagram for the topic of 'home' in the novel. Which words and phrases relate to home? Where in the novel do Leander and Phoebe feel furthest from home?

'Ah, but not just any map.' Nan was using her storytelling voice again. 'That is the map that shows you how to reach the lair of the dreaded Morpheia.' (Page 17)
'The land of the Lotus Eaters. The Sirens' Cliff. The Fortress of Aeolus – King of the Winds. The Island of the Cyclops.' (Page 18)

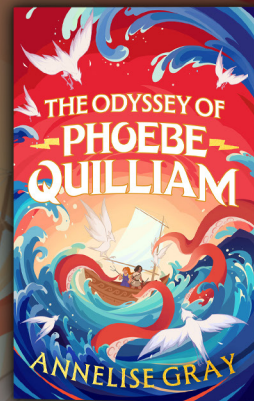
Discuss: What is a lair? Why do so many stories revolve around a map? Can you think of any books that begin with a map printed inside?

Activity: Draw your own mythological story map – making up your own monsters, caves, fortresses, seas, mountains and islands. Which descriptive words can you use to name things? Are there more welcoming places or more obstacles on your map for a wandering journeyman?

'First, you have to find her island, close to the high cliffs where savage six-headed Scylla dwells alongside Charybdis, the swallower of ships... Once you're past the Kelpts, you'll enter the Morpheia's lair.' (Page 57)

Discuss: What is Phoebe's odyssey in the book? Why is Hattie chosen to reveal it to her?

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The Sea

'We are taught to fear and respect the dangers of the sea, especially savage Scylla and dread Charybdis.' (Page 66)

'Before long, the shore is out of sight and we're alone, a speck of hull and sail in an endless blue sea. Curled next to the mast, in a gap between the boat's ribs, I'm nervous, afraid of the dark water beneath us. I think of the dangers that Odysseus and his men encountered too.' (Page 69)

'The Black Sails took my mother and sold her to the captain of a passing ship, headed for the slave markets in a distant land.' (Page 72)

Discuss: Who are Scylla and Charybdis?

Discuss: Why was the sea so important to Ancient Greeks?

Activity: Research the different reasons why seafaring was important to ancient Greece. Create a PowerPoint to show your answers.

Activity: Have you ever been on a boat or to the seaside? Are children still taught to fear and respect the dangers of the sea? Describe our modern attitude towards the sea. What safety measures do we have in place in coastal areas or on boats/ships?

'Far below, the sea boils and broths.' (Page 92)

'Looking at the sea, yawning endlessly in every direction, I know I'm only trying to give myself hope.' (Page 96)

'...the sound of the waves slapping the boat's hull is eerie.' (Page 96)

'The only sound is water, cradling the boat.' (Page 139)

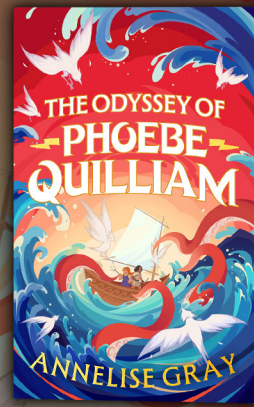
Activity: How does Gray portray the sea in the novel? Is it something to treasure or to fear? Make two columns and show examples in each.

'I try to keep my mind busy by identifying the different parts of the boat.' (Page 69)

Activity: Draw a simple boat from Ancient Greece and label the different parts. What kind of boat is Phoebe describing on pages 69-70.

Research: Look up ancient shipbuilding. How did the Ancient Greeks build their ships?

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Activity: Create a poster to show how Ancient Greeks built ships.

'I look at the stars in the night and study the position of the sun' (Page 70)

'How do you think we sailors navigate?' He points. 'There is the Bear. There is Orion.' (Page 151)

'That's where King Aeolus lives. Ruler of the Winds.' (Page 99)

'He helped Odysseus – he gave his ships shelter after they escaped from the Cyclops.' (Page 99)

Research: How did the Ancient Greeks navigate the seas? Look up celestial navigation. What is a star map?

Activity: Create a leaflet for a new sailor to explain what celestial navigation is and how navigation has developed over time.

Discuss: Why was the wind so important to the Ancient Greeks? See if you can find out what the ancient Greeks knew about wind patterns.

Magic/Portal

'Careful with that, my darling. Strange magic there.' (Page 17)

Read Chapter Five.

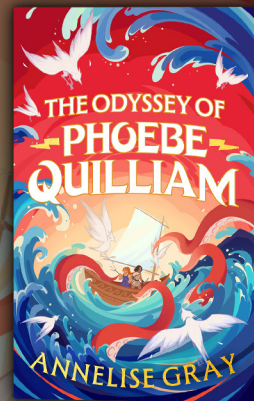
Discuss: How does the author show the reader that Phoebe has landed in a different 'world' or timeframe?

Activity: Reading through the chapter, make a note of all the moments in which the senses are invoked. Where does Phoebe hear, see, smell, taste or feel things? How does this add to the reader's experience of the shift in time/place?

Discuss: Which emotions is Phoebe experiencing in this chapter?

Activity: Recreate the chapter as a comic strip. Where are you using onomatopoeia? Where are you zooming in and out?

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'The painting! Nan's painting! I did something to it – I added the boat and everything changed and I couldn't work out where I was, and...' (Page 48)

Activity: Phoebe ends up in the painting. Find a painting online that you like. Now write a story about going through the painting into its world. What problem would you have to solve on that side of the world before you could come back to your real life outside the painting? Remember to describe the painting once you have gone through the portal so that the image comes to life.

'But my winds tell me also of an island to which the beasts return, the home of their mistress, over whose magic the gods themselves have no power.' (Page 107)

Discuss: Thinking about what you know about the Ancient Greeks, how odd would it be for them to recognise a magic over which the gods themselves had no power?

Discuss: Where do we see magic today? Is it human, divine, something else?

'Hope is a powerful form of magic' (Page 113)

'Hope is a powerful form of magic. It is never wise to underestimate it.' (Page 209)

Discuss: What does Aoelus mean by this?

Activity: Make a mind map to explore what can be meant by the word 'magic.'

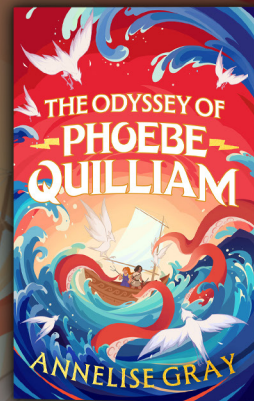
'Leander, I don't have any special powers. Please don't think I can stop anything bad happening to us, because I can't.' (Page 135)

'I do not know what you are, in truth. But you are not ordinary.' (Page 135)

Discuss: Phoebe is not divine, but she does save Leander's life twice. Who are our modern-day superheroes?

Activity: Draw a picture of yourself as a superhero. Now add captions explaining when you have done something heroic.

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Art

'Draw every day, Phoebe... 'It's the best way to learn. Animals, faces, flowers.' (Page 11)
'Ultramarine Violet' 'Cobalt Turquoise' 'Cinnabar Green.' (Page 32)
'Don't draw the object. Draw the feeling.' (Page 114)

Discuss: What does Cass mean by 'draw the feeling'?

Activity: Try to follow Cass's advice. Take one week, and draw a different object each day, concentrating on how the object makes you feel. Do you notice an improvement in your drawing? Which colours will you use to colour in your sketches?

'By the shape of it, I can tell it's my sketchbook, still wedged inside my pocket.' (Page 44)
'An antique silver hand mirror with a handle shaped like a seahorse's tail.' (Page 57)
'My mother described it to me once – it [the knife] passed down from my grandfather, another great shipwright.' (Page 72)
'It's a red kite, made out of cloth and wood, with a long trailing tail.' (Page 98)

Discuss: What is the role of objects in the novel? Are objects more precious if they have a history or heritage attached to them? Why does Phoebe keep her sketchbook close?

Discuss: *'Everything's beautiful if you look at it with enough curiosity.'* (Page 149) Do you agree?

Activity: Pick something that you initially feel is ugly or unattractive to look at – perhaps a piece of fruit that is going mouldy. Now see if you can find some positive adjectives to use about it. Create a story around your item. With this in mind, create a painting of your item. Can you make it look beautiful?

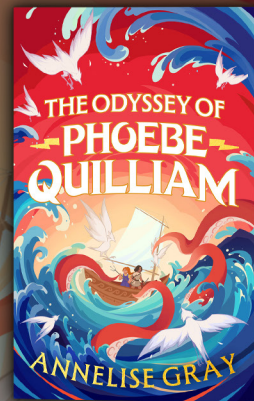
Memory/Dementia

'I think I still remember his laugh, though whether it's my memory or imagination, I'm not sure.' (Page 8)

Discuss: What is memory? Why is it so important in the novel? Do you sometimes get confused between what's a memory and what's your imagination?

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Activity: Research how memory works. Which different types of memory are there?
<https://kids.britannica.com/kids/article/memory/390806>

Activity: Play the working memory game. Place a pile of 20 objects on a tray in front of you and look at it for 1 minute. Then cover it up and try to recall all the objects.

Activity: Recall a memory of an experience from long term memory. Turn it into a free verse poem, starting 'I remember...'

'I have always disdained the memories of children,' (Page 185)

Discuss: Why does the Morpheia disdain children's memories? Do you think they might have more or less value or clarity than adult memories?

Activity: Design a leaflet to give methods for how people can improve their memory. What techniques do you have for committing something to memory? Write your own ideas, and then do some research to see what other people suggest.

'Can you imagine what the world would be like if we didn't have photographs?' I ask. 'How would we remember what people looked like?' (Page 219)

Activity: So much of what we do today is recorded in photographic images. Have a look at the last ten photos on your or your parents' phones. Which memories do they record?

Discuss: Is it important to have photographs or images of people we love?

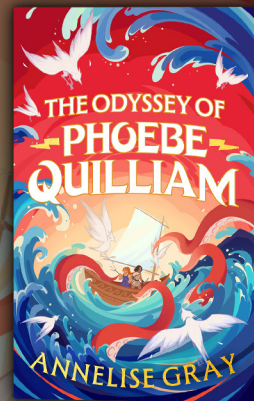
'Look at this picture of your nan.' Mum shows me a black and white snap she's found in a folder.' (Page 219)

Discuss: Is it important to have photographs of our ancestors? Do you have any old black and white photographs in your family? Which people do they show? What were they doing?

Activity: Imagine a world without photographs. What were the benefits/disadvantages of artists recording an image rather than photographs? What or who would you commission an artist to paint if you only had money for one painting?

'Mostly, I simply want to breathe in the smell – that sweet linseed scent that says 'Nan' to me' (Page 30)

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'You smelled something that reminded you of home and I did too.' (Page 142)

Discuss: How important is the sense of smell for memories? Can a certain scent make you think of a particular person or event?

'Saying the wrong words for things.' (Page 4)

'It can be incredibly hard for their families and friends, but it's often kinder – to them and to yourselves – to pretend to enter that world with them.' (Page 23)

'How can she know what RNLI stands for but she still can't think of my name or Mum's.' (Page 26)

'Anger at the illness taking away Nan's memory, stealing the person I love.' (Page 31)

Discuss: How does Cass's dementia make Phoebe feel?

Activity: Make a factfile about dementia for a relative of a patient with the disease. How can you make your factfile factual but also compassionate and reassuring?

This resource may help you:

<https://www.alzheimersresearchuk.org/kids/juniors/what-is-dementia/>

'It can be incredibly hard for their families and friends, but it's often kinder – to them and to yourselves – to pretend to enter that world with them.' (Page 23)

'I wonder if the reason they keep their distance from this place is the flaw in the Lotus Eaters' memories. They believe they're home, yet it's a lie. Isn't it?' (Page 151)

Discuss: How is being a Lotus Eater like having dementia?

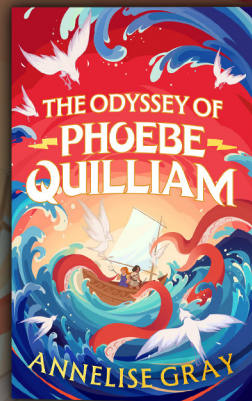
Discuss: Do you agree with the carer at Cass's nursing home that it's best to go along with the pretence? Is this what Phoebe and Leander did with the Lotus Eaters?

'As soon as I try not to think, the opposite happens. Hard though I try to block it out, a memory swims into my head, of the last time and place that I felt perfectly happy and safe. Nan watching me paint. Reassuring me how well I'm doing.' (Page 97)

'I forget the Morpheia, I forget about getting home. I forget everything except being here, in this beautiful place.' (Page 120)

Discuss: Can memories be reassuring?

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Activity: Can you think of a memory of when you felt perfectly happy?

Activity: If you are in a class, create a memory board together, like a collage, using snippets of materials and images to represent everybody's happy memories, and put it on display.

'Only in knowing that we will one day forget, and must rely on others to remember what we have done and who we have been, does life have its meaning.' (Page 112)

Discuss: What does King Aeolus mean? Do you agree with this?

Activity: Ask a member of your family or people you live with to tell you about a memory of you from some years ago. Do you remember the event differently from them? Make a video of them talking about it, and see if you can find photographic evidence, or even video evidence. Does the event look the same?

Appearance and Reality

'Like Nan, though, I've become good at hiding what's usually going on.' (Page 14)

'From the outside, it doesn't look too bad.' (Page 21)

'You keep a great deal inside, don't you, Phoebe? But you cannot hide from me.' (Page 183)

Discuss: What are the things that are hidden in the story, but revealed by the end?

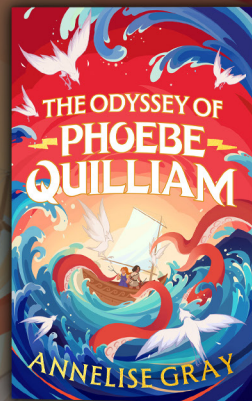
Activity: Draw a character graph for Phoebe about her true self. When is she lying to herself and others and at what point does she face reality? Your graph will be full of ups and downs as Phoebe goes on her quest.

'The rest of her has transformed into a huge spider with a cavernous jaw full of fangs.'
(Page 186)

'...and in a single liquid movement becomes a giant snake, lashing and spitting.' (Page 187)

Research: Why has Gray called this monster the Morpheia? Which Greek word does it stem from and what does it mean? Who is the Greek god with the most similar name?

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Discuss: The Morpheia can change shape and appearance. When a spider, she uses her web to lash out. If you could morph into a different creature, what would you be and why?

'If you keep your wits about you, though, and make her look in the mirror, it will force her to reveal her true self.' (Page 57)

Discuss: What happens when Phoebe and Leander defeat the Morpheia? Whose true selves are revealed? Is this a satisfactory outcome to Phoebe's quest?

'It's as if the creature is wearing a thin cloth mask and beneath it, pressing against the material, I can make out the shape of an eye. A single eye.' (Page 98)

'What if the Morpheia's power has grown so great, the Mirror of Nemesis doesn't work like Hattie and Nan imagined it would?' (Page 118)

'Eyes are the window to the soul. Capture them and you capture the person. It's as though Nan's beside me, peering over my shoulder.' (Page 188)

Discuss: Where else in stories are eyes or mirrors key to the plot? Can you think of any other stories you have read in which these items are the key to characters understanding themselves?

Activity: Hold a class brainstorm on stories you have read that contain these items, and are central to the story. One example might be *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*.

'By the power of the gods, I never thought to see my own face as others see it. What a rare and precious gift.' (Page 115)

Discuss: Does looking in a mirror reveal one's true self? Does looking at an artist's impression of you reveal your true self?

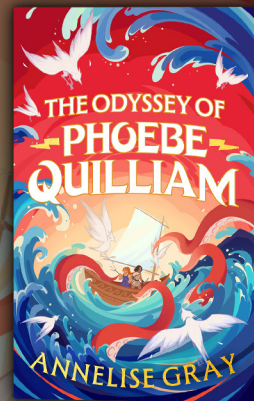
Activity: Look at yourself in the mirror. Now take a selfie. Compare the two. Which feels 'truer' or are they equal? Does anything surprise you about your own face?

'It's as though I'm watching a struggle between two bodies, hidden behind a curtain.' (Page 133)

'It feels as if I'm seeing actors out of costume.' (Page 192)

Discuss: Where else in the novel are things presented as hidden or masked?

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Activity: Write about an incident in which you had to 'mask' your true self or true feelings. Did you reveal things about yourself at the end? For example, a non-uniform day at school might let you express your true self.

Mental Wellbeing

'Rubbish, a sly voice murmurs in my ear. She can't even concentrate on her own art any more, let alone yours. *I try to block it out. But it keeps needling.*' (Page 12)
'No matter how hard I've tried to silence it, that mean little voice won't leave me alone. It's your fault, you know. You could have helped. You should have recognised how sick she was and said something.' (Page 14)
'You chose not to say anything, though.' (Page 31)

Discuss: How does Phoebe's inner voice change over the course of the novel?

Activity: Do you ever have a 'mean' voice in your ear. What strategies do you use to overcome it? Make a list of sentences for Phoebe or for you to say back to it that will quieten it, such as 'I hear you but I deserve to be happy'.

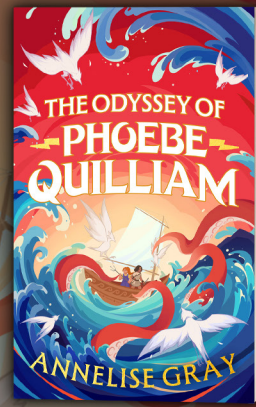
'Empty your head, *I tell myself.* Don't give it [a Klept] anything that might convince it there's something here for the Morpheia.' (Page 97)
'I know you. I know your pain and your guilt. You cannot hide from me.' (Page 98)
'...to put the fear back in its box' (Page 114)
'This is what she does, trying to get in people's heads.' (Page 173)

Discuss: How does Phoebe overcome her fears by the end of the novel?

Activity: How do you overcome fears? Create a poster with strategies for overcoming difficulties or anxiety. Strategies might include calm breathing, seeking help from an adult etc.

'An idea comes to me. It's crazy but I don't know what else to do and Leander's running out of time.' (Page 88)
'This is the way you stop it, Phoebe. This is the way to save him.' (Page 177)
'There's a whittled edge to her tone. Sharp, like cracking ice. I remember where I've heard it before. The many times it taunted me, spitefully telling me that Nan's illness was my fault.' (Page 184)

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Discuss: Compare the scenes with the Cyclops (Pages 88-91) and the Morpheia (Pages 186-190). Which strategies does Phoebe use to try to persuade her adversaries to stand down? In which scene is she bravest?

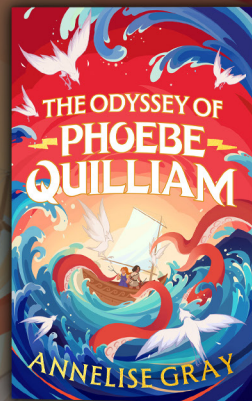
Activity: Separate the page into two columns and compare the two scenes.

Activity: Now write up one of the incidents as a news report. Who are you interviewing as a witness or person of interest? How are you reporting it? Remember to include who, what, where and when in your introductory paragraph.

'She told me that grief is like a river. You can't ever hope to stop it or outrun it. You have to channel it, somehow. Find somewhere for it to go, so that you don't drown in it – so that it doesn't suck you under.' (Page 221)

Discuss: What or who is Phoebe grieving for? Does Phoebe channel her grief by the end of the novel? How?

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Further Reading

Retellings of The Odyssey

The Wanderings of Odysseus by Rosemary Sutcliff

The Odyssey by Geraldine McCaughrean

Homer's Iliad and Odyssey by Gillian Cross

Odyssey by Stephen Fry

Ithaka by Adele Geras

The Adventures of Odysseus by Hugh Lupton

The Iliad and the Odyssey Retold and Illustrated by Marcia Williams

The Odyssey: A Graphic Novel by Gareth Hinds

Other Reading

Who Let the Gods Out by Maz Evans

Percy Jackson and the Lightning Thief by Rick Riordan

Hercules: the Diary of a (Sort of) Hero by Tom Vaughan

Hannah Messenger and the Gods of Hockwold by Bryony Pearce

Netta Becker and the Timeline Game by Jennifer Claessen

Mark of the Cyclops: An Ancient Greek Mystery by Saviour Pirotta

Leo and the Gorgon's Curse by Joe Todd-Stanton

The Stories Grandma Forgot (and How I Found Them) by Nadine Aisha Jassat

Ice Cream Boy by Lindsay Littleton

The Memory Book by Louise Gooding

Circus Maximus: Race to the Death by Annelise Gray