Directions:

1. Read and annotate the following article.

2. Show evidence of a close reading. Mark the text with questions and comments.

3. Write a one-page reflection on your own sheet of paper. Don’t forget an MLA heading!

**An Odyssey**

Marcia Worth-Baker - NYTimes

''GRANT me, Pallas Athena, the wisdom to lead students safely through the ruins of Troy and home to Ithaca,'' I muttered before reciting the invocation to the Muse that begins ''The Odyssey.'' The works of Homer are required reading for students in the Gifted Language Arts Program at the school where I teach. The academic abilities that brought them to my classroom insure that my students will understand ''who ate and otherwise killed who,'' according to Katy's synopsis of ''The Iliad'' and ''The Odyssey.''

These students don't need me to teach the facts of the war at Troy and Odysseus' trip home; the Cliff's Notes that many of them hide unsuccessfully in their binders will explain clearly who are mortals and who are deities. What my bright students need to learn is good leadership.

Schools are patrolled by small armies of students; the leaders of these are my students. When their classmates threaten to mutiny, the children I teach reveal that their will to lead is unmatched by their skill. For example, when Katy's leadership is challenged, she rants. Or Brian withdraws from the group altogether and disparages those who remain.

With my students in mind, I wonder how Odysseus maintained his leadership all the way home to Ithaca without a mutiny of his men. They had been conscripts in the war, eager to go home without the detours and dangers Odysseus courts.

''Imagine you're Odysseus, standing on the shore of Cyclops's island,'' I told my students. ''The ship is ready but you need your men to sail it home. They have seen you scorn Poseidon and dally with Circe for a full year. Now you must convince them that you are the leader they can trust with their lives. If you can persuade your classmates to join you at the front of the room, you will have succeeded.'' The students thought, wrote, and consulted Homer. Then Dean began.

''I am your king,'' said Dean in his most stentorian manner. ''You must follow me to Ithaca. I will arrest you if you do not follow the king's orders.'' The students shook their heads decisively. No one was willing to sign on to Dean's ship.

David's promises were almost enough to lure a crew. ''If you come with me,'' he told the class as suavely as a three-star maitre'd, ''I will divide my share of the Trojan gold with you. I will also do most of the rowing. When we get back to Ithaca you can come over for dinner at the palace anytime you want.'' ''I'm there!'' exclaimed Stephen, but he was David's only oarsman. The ship remained grounded on the island's shore.

Finally, Jennifer rose to speak. She spoke softly to her classmates. ''Look, I know that I haven't been the greatest leader so far, but I'm going to learn from my mistakes. If we meet another monster like Cyclops, I'll try to talk to him as an equal instead of going for violence. Then maybe the gods will help us get home.''

''I'm also going to ask for help from Athena and Zeus,'' she said, as if making a concession. ''I will also listen to what all of you say about which way we should try to go home.''

Ashley had stopped doodling. ''I know that you want to see your families. I want to get back to Penelope and Telemachus,'' Jennifer said. ''So, I promise that we'll sail straight home with Athena's guidance.''

Jennifer leaned against the chalkboard. She watched her classmates rise from their seats to join her at the front of the classroom. Her ship was filled; she led her crew home to Ithaca.

Especially during the hard part of ''The Iliad,'' Katy often asked, ''Why do we have to read Homer?'' I replied -- probably unhelpfully -- by quoting Xenophon, who wrote in his ''Symposium'' that ''My father, wanting me to be a good man, had me read the works of Homer.'' I like to think that Xenophon's father knew that students learn large lessons in small increments. The children who sit before me saw in Homer's hero that one person can be both powerful and foolish, equally full of influence and errors. When my students learn to see this in themselves, they will become -- at last -- good leaders.

**Reflection Prompt:**

**Do you agree that students can learn positive leadership qualities from Odysseus? Why or why not? Does Jennifer’s speech to her classmates strike you as something Odysseus would really say? Has our hero learned this sort of humility? Explain.**