



BW 2/25

Subject: English Language Arts

State: Tennessee

Student Name: _____

Teacher Name: _____

School Name: _____

Read the passage. Then, answer the questions.

Odysseus

by Geraldine McCaughrean

¹ Warily he kept watch for the Island of the Sirens. There! Was that birdsong or human voices drifting toward him? Either way, a sweet sound to hear at sea. He kneaded the wax; the heat of the morning sun had made it soft. He stopped up the ears of his men, one by one, and all the while the music grew louder.

² Too quiet, too low, I must get closer, he thought, and stood with his hand to his ear on the dipping prow. It was Polites who roped him round and round and tied the rope ends to the mast.

³ "What are you doing?" said Odysseus irritably, mouthing the words at deaf Polites.

⁴ "Only what you would have commanded me if it had not slipped your mind, my lord. I heard Circe's advice."

Come, my sisters, come and see

How the world-encircled sea

And slow tide of purple time

Have brought, at last, the one sublime

Fast vessel we

Have longed to see—

The Odyssey...

⁵ "Circe lied. She said the island was bare and barren. But it's covered over in flowers—orchids and lilies and bougainvilleas "

See how his head is crowned with curls;

See how his sail, all unfurled

Hangs empty out of pity—

For though some call us pretty,

Loneliness

Tortures us,

Odysseus...

⁶ "Everyone lied! They said the Sirens were harpies, with the bodies of vultures and the heads of women. But they're lovely! Lovelier than the orchids or the lilies or the bougainvilleas... lovelier than Ithaca. How would my crabbed, aging wife look alongside them—their shoulders so white, their eyes so imploring. Poor ladies! What manner of man would I be to spurn them? Polites, untie me!"

Ah! When the world pronounced your name,

Why did they not speak of the flames

Of glory that round you wreath?

The gods forbid that you should leave.

What happiness

Remains unless

You swim to us,

Odysseus?

⁷ "Polites! Can't you see? Circe lied to us. Let me go this instant! I command you!"

⁸ But Polites's shoulders were hunched over his oar: he could not hear, and if he looked up, his eyes did not linger on Odysseus's twisted mouth. "Polites! You'd better do as I say or I'll kill you afterward for defying me! Untie me!"

⁹ But Polites turned his head away so as not to look into Odysseus's face on every backward pull of the oar.

¹⁰ "You other men! Listen! The man who frees me can have Polites's rank! Any of you—look at me! Whoever frees me can have Ithaca. Take it. How can I rule Ithaca when I'm needed here? Don't you hear what they're saying? They've waited centuries just for me! Men! Look up! TAKE THE WAX OUT OF YOUR EARS! Cut me free, I beg you. Look! The distance isn't so far. I could swim across! You go on if you must: take the boat; I shan't need it. But cut me free and let me swim. Look, the distance is getting wider. For the love of all the gods—have pity on me! Someone! What are you? Pieces of rock? Does it please you to see the hero of Troy reduced to tears? Don't you know what pity is?"

¹¹ Then Polites leaped up from his thwart and, with his eyes turned away from Odysseus's face, he fetched another coil of rope and wound it round and round and round both man and mast, from ankle to throat, from throat to ankle. All the while, Odysseus begged, pleaded, and sobbed, pulled grotesque, piteous faces, plunging from rage to craven tears as the weather alternated between lightning and drizzling rain.

¹² When he had done, Polites sat down on the heaving deck. Only one gap in the coils of rope allowed the king's right hand to reach and claw at him. Polites took the hand in his and held it, though Odysseus's furious

grip squeezed like a wine press. Deafly he watched the silent mouth contort, and he watched the veins beat in his captain's temples in time with the strokes of the plunging oars.

¹³ At last the grip relaxed. Odysseus's head fell forward on his chest, and large tears splashed down onto Polites's hair. Over the starboard quarter, the Island of the Sirens dipped out of sight below the brimming horizon. Polites took the wax out of his ears, fetched a knife, and cut free Odysseus, whose body was ringed round with the marks of the hempen rope. In a small and faltering voice he asked, "What did you see, Polites?"

¹⁴ "Three hideous vultures with horny talons and the heads of women. An acre of jagged rocks where nothing grew except white trees of bone that used to be good men. What did you see, my lord?"

¹⁵ But the question was never answered, for a headwind brought a fine gray spume and the sound of distant roaring.

¹⁶ "Unstop the men's ears, Polites, and let the tillerman take an oar. I'll steer, myself."

¹⁷ "Why? What is it, my lord?"

¹⁸ "If Circe and Tiresias spoke the truth, we are about to see the greatest terrors of the undiscovered world."

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1 Part A

In paragraph 14 of the passage from “Odysseus,” how does the author's choice of words contribute to the meaning of the passage?

- (A) by emphasizing the extreme dangers that Odysseus and his crew have avoided
- (B) by foreshadowing the obstacles that Odysseus and his crew will later face
- (C) by suggesting that Polites is angered by Odysseus's words and actions
- (D) by implying that Polites is questioning Odysseus's judgment

2 Part B

Which **two** phrases from paragraph 14 **most** strongly support the answer in Part A?

(A) "hideous vultures"

(B) "An acre"

(C) "jagged rocks"

(D) "nothing grew"

(E) "good men"

(F) "my lord"

3 Part A

Based on the passage, which words characterize Polites as he reacts to Odysseus's struggle to escape?

- (A) upset and resentful
- (B) loyal and sympathetic
- (C) nervous and anxious
- (D) surprised and intrigued

4 Part B

Which evidence from the passage **best** supports the answer in Part A?

- (A) "It was Polites who roped him round and round and tied the rope ends to the mast" (paragraph 2)
- (B) "When he had done, Polites sat down on the heaving deck." (paragraph 12)
- (C) "Polites took the hand in his and held it, though Odysseus's furious grip squeezed like a wine press." (paragraph 12)
- (D) "Odysseus's head fell forward on his chest, and large tears splashed down onto Polites's hair." (paragraph 13)