Paper 1: Analysis with PowerPoint

Your first paper will be presented to me in class as a PowerPoint between September 25 and October 22. It will not be written out (you will also turn the presentation in on Blackboard). You should address one of the following questions by stating a thesis that serves as an answer to the prompt, then finding several examples from throughout the Odyssey, then explaining how they support your thesis.

Prompts:

1. The Odyssey begins in the middle of a long chronological arc, and continues to play with ideas of past, present, and future throughout. However, the actual narrative limit of the epic, from the first council of the gods in book 1 through Athena’s intervention to bring an end to the violence and the end of the epic, only takes about 40 days. What does this temporal framework – with a large swath of time compressed into a finite number of days – add to the epic, or take away from it? Analyze the idea of time in the Odyssey and argue for its significance for the making of myth.
2. Odysseus and Telemachus have several run-ins with powerful women in this story. These include Athena and other goddesses, several demigods and temptresses, some monsters, Helen of Troy, Penelope, Euriklea, Nausikaa and her mother, and the maids. Which are good and which are bad, or are the portrayals more complex than that? What do these encounters tell us about Odysseus and his culture? Do they ultimately bolster or undermine our image of Odysseus as a hero? And finally, why do you think Homer uses so many female characters in his epic?
3. Talk about the importance of song and storytelling (as well as lying). In addition to the poem itself, we have poems and stories by bards, which sometimes seem to be irrelevant digressions, as well as the storytelling (and lying) of Odysseus himself? How do these things help organize the story? Why are the stories, lies, and digressions provided, and how do they fit into the story of a “man of twists and turns” (Polytropos)? How do they fit into a story in which none of the place names are verifiable or real?
4. Discuss some variations on the question of hospitality in this story. Who observes it correctly? Who abuses it? What do the choices of who is a good / bad host or guest tell us about Homer’s values and those of his audience? What do they tell us about Odysseus? Do they make us see him as more or less heroic?
5. The Odyssey relates several “nostoi” or homecoming stories, among them the story of Agamemnon (relayed by many people), Menelaus, and Odysseus himself. What do these stories tell us about the notion of home? How is home contrasted with places that are not home? Most importantly, what aspects of Odysseus’s homecoming are bittersweet, odd, or different than he expects, and why do you think Homer included these odd or bittersweet moments?
6. Though Odysseus is the hero of this epic, he is not a young hero at the height of his powers, but a man in middle age. We frequently see him powerless, a “king of sorrows,” subject to humiliation, dependent on the kindness (or subject to the abuse) of gods, friends, enemies, and even his own servants. We also see him behave rashly, arrogantly, dishonestly, and even cruelly. We see the effect of his actions on friends, families, and those who are kind to him. Why do you think Homer frequently depicts Odysseus in this complex way? What does it tell us about the nature of heroism?

Thesis: Your thesis statement should answer a question that is central to the prompt above. It should be an argument and not a fact (that is, I should be able to argue against your statement, and you should be able to find support for it).

Here’s an example of a good thesis (note that is can be more than one sentence. It is good because it tells us the subject and explores a reason why the author uses the strategies he does to tell his story. It also tell us how the paper will be organized (first half—lies of Odysseus; second half, digressions and stories of bards). Some people focus on just one technique; others analyze as many as three or four.

*Homer uses the lies of Odysseus as well as the digressions and stories told by bards to undermine the heroic portrayal of Odysseus that he makes elsewhere. He does this to make us question whether military feats alone make a person heroic.*

Here are some thesis sentences that don’t work as well:

*Homer uses the storytelling of the bards to let us know how he feels about Odysseus.* [this thesis doesn’t tell us how Homer feels about Odysseus; it also doesn’t say why he uses bards and storytelling].

*Homer uses chronology in The Odyssey to show us that the entire story takes only 40 days.* [That’s a fact, not an argument.]

*Homer uses the storytelling of the bards to show us that Odysseus was a great hero.* [That’s an argument, yes, but it’s pretty obvious and not very surprising.]

How should my presentation be organized?

* I’d start by finding quotes that are related to your thesis. I’d find as many as I could, put them on note cards (be sure to write down the book and line number where you found them) and then look for patterns. Then try to organize your quotes in groups of two, three, or four different points or ideas. Finally, create an outline for your presentation. *[Note that you may have to look at parts of the Odyssey we didn’t read in class. The Spark Notes summaries we read might help you figure out where to look.] http://www.sparknotes.com/lit/odyssey/summary.html*
* The presentation itself should start with some background on the prompt you chose, followed by a thesis. Make sure the thesis is something you can write out but also explain in your own words (because I’ll ask you questions about it).
* The main part of your presentation should be organized by parts of your argument (for example, in the good thesis above, I suggested that I would organize my presentation into two halves—lies Odysseus tells and stories and digressions by bards.)
* Each part should contain at least two quotes and a discussion of how those quotes relate to your thesis. You may have to set up the quotes (explain where you took them from) before you explain how they support your thesis. I may stop you and ask you to explain that in more detail.
* Above all, your presentation should not contain a summary of the text. Assume I have read it.

How long should it be?

* I’m striving for 15-20 minutes total; half of that time should be your presentation. 8-10 slides minimum; 15-20 maximum.

How will it be graded?

* First, on the quality of your thesis.
* Then, on the specificity of your examples, and your ability to connect them to your thesis (in your own words).
* Overall, I’m looking for evidence that you’ve thought about the text a lot and read it carefully.
* Finally, your PowerPoint should be clean and free of grammar errors. Get help with the writing center if you need it.