

ULYSSES – ALFRED LORD TENNYSON
(A DRAMATIC MONOLOGUE)

1. Complete the summary of the poem, choosing words from the list given below.

Lines 1 to 32

Ulysses is (1) unwilling to discharge his duties as a (2) king, as he longs for (3) adventure. He is filled with an (4) unquenchable thirst for (5) travel and wishes to live life to the (6) fullest. He has travelled far and wide gaining (7) knowledge of various places, cultures, men and (8) matters. He recalls with delight his experience at the battle of Troy. Enriched by his (9) experience he longs for more and his quest seems endless. Like metal which would (10) rust if unused, life without adventure is meaningless. According to him living is not merely (11) breathing to stay alive. Though old but zestful, Ulysses looks at every hour as a bringer of new things and yearns to follow knowledge even if it is (12) unattainable.

fullest, unquenchable, unattainable, experience, knowledge, king, matters, rust, adventure, unwilling, travel, breathing

Lines 33 to 42

Ulysses desires to hand over his kingdom to his son Telemachus, who would fulfil his duties towards his subjects with care and (2) prudence. Telemachus possesses patience and has the will to civilise the citizens of Ithaca in a (3) tender way. Ulysses is happy that his son would do his work blamelessly and he would pursue his (4) quest for travel and knowledge.

prudence, kingdom, quest, tender

Lines 44 to 70

Ulysses beckons his sailors to (1) gather at the port where the ship is ready to sail. His companions who have faced both (2) thunder and sunshine with a smile, are united by their undying spirit of adventure. Though death would end everything, Ulysses urges his companions to join him and sail beyond the sunset and seek a newer (3) world, regardless of consequences. These brave hearts who had once moved (4) heaven and earth, may have grown old and weak physically but their spirit is young and (5) undaunted. His call is an inspiration for all those who seek true knowledge and strive to lead (6) meaningful lives.

world, thunder, meaningful, gather, undaunted, heaven

2. Answer the following questions in one or two sentences each.

- a) 'Ulysses is not happy to perform his duties as a king.' Why?
Ulysses longs for adventure. He wants to travel to new places.
So he is not happy to perform his duties, as a king.
- b) What does he think of the people of his kingdom?

Ulysses thinks that the people of his kingdom are **savage and they only eat and sleep**.

And also they **do not know** Ulysses as he is always on adventurous wars and voyages.

c) What has Ulysses gained from his travel experiences?

Ulysses has travel led far and wide gaining **knowledge of various places**, cultures, men and matters.

d) Pick out the lines which convey that his quest for travel is unending.

'I cannot rest from travel',

'For ever and forever when I move'. These lines convey that his quest for travel is unending.

e) 'As tho' to breathe were life!' – From the given line what do you understand of Ulysses' attitude to life?

'As tho' to breathe were life!' - means idle life.

According to Ulysses, **life is not simply breathing**.

It is about more than just 'breathing'. It is about adventure.

f) What does Ulysses yearn for?

Ulysses **yearns to gain knowledge** which is like a sinking star. Knowledge is endless.

g) Who does the speaker address in the second part?

In the second part of the poem, Ulysses **addresses to the reader of the poem**.

h) Why did Ulysses want to hand over the kingdom to his son?

Ulysses wants to hand over his kingdom to his son, because he believes that his son would be more responsible and rule them by his slow prudence and tenderness.

i) How would Telemachus transform the subjects?

Telemachus will transform the rugged people mild by his slow prudence and tenderness.

j) 'He works his work, I mine' – How is the work distinguished?

To rule the country is the **work of the son of Ulysses**.

To travel and gain knowledge is the **work of Ulysses**.

k) In what ways were Ulysses and his mariners alike?

The mariners have **toiled, suffered and fought with Ulysses**.

So, Ulysses and the mariners were alike.

l) What could be the possible outcomes of their travel?

There are two possibilities of their travel.

- i. **The gulfs** may **wash them down** and they may die.
- ii. They may **reach the Happy Isles** and meet the great Achilles.

3. Identify the figures of speech employed in the following lines.

- a) Thro' scudding drifts the rainy Hyades **Vext the dim sea...**
eg. The figure of speech **Personification** is employed in the above lines.
- b) For always roaming with a **hungry heart** - Metaphor
- c) And **drunk delight of battle with my peers**; - Metaphor
- d) **.....the deep Moans round with many voices.** - Personification
- e) To follow knowledge **like** a sinking star. - Simile
- f) There lies the port **the vessel puffs her sail** - Personification

4. Read the sets of lines from the poem and answer the questions that follow.

*a) ... I mete and dole Unequal laws unto a savage race,
That hoard, and sleep, and feed, and know not me.*

i. What does Ulysses do?

Ulysses allots rewards and punishments to the people of his kingdom.

ii. Did he enjoy what he was doing? Give reasons.

No, Ulysses **did not enjoy** ruling his country, because he was interested in adventurous travel.

*b) Yet all experience is an arch wherethrough
Gleams that untravelled world, whose margin fades
For ever and for ever when I move.*

i. What is experience compared to?

Experience is compared to an arch.

ii. How do the lines convey that the experience is endless?

The more Ulysses travels, the more the margins of the 'Untravelled world' recede. It never ends and so the experiences of Ulysses never end. Thus these lines convey that the experience is endless.

*c) Little remains: but every hour is saved
From that eternal silence, something more,*

A bringer of new things; and vile it were

i. How is every hour important to Ulysses?

Every hour brings **some new experiences and new knowledge** to Ulysses.

So it is important to him.

ii. What does the term 'Little remains' convey?

"Little remains" means 'time will be insufficient' to touch all places of the world.

d) This is my son, mine own Telemachus,

To whom I leave the sceptre and the isle Well-loved of me,

i. Who does Ulysses entrust his kingdom to, in his absence?

Ulysses entrusts his kingdom to his son Telemachus.

ii. Bring out the significance of the 'sceptre'.

'Sceptre' is an **ornamented rod** carried by rulers as a symbol of sovereignty.

e) That ever with a frolic welcome took

The thunder and the sunshine, and opposed

i. What do 'thunder' and 'sunshine' refer to?

'Thunder' refers to 'bad times', and 'sunshine' refers to 'good times' at sea.

ii. What do we infer about the attitude of the sailors?

The sailors **welcome both the bad times and good times equally**. They could face hardships as free and self-reliant men.

f) Death closes all: but something ere the end,

Some work of noble note, may yet be done,

Not unbecoming men that strove with Gods.

i. The above lines convey the undying spirit of Ulysses. Explain.

Ulysses opines that **death is end to all**. But, before the death engulfs him,

he wants to do something great.

ii. Pick out the words in alliteration in the above lines.

Words in alliteration: **ere - end; noble - note**

*g)for my purpose holds
To sail beyond the sunset, and the baths
Of all the western stars, until I die.*

i. What was Ulysses' purpose in life?

Ulysses purpose in life is **to sail to new places beyond the sunset, and beyond the western stars** to gain knowledge.

ii. How long would his venture last?

His venture would last **till his death**.

*h. One equal temper of heroic hearts,
Made weak by time and fate, but strong in will
To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield.*

i. Though made weak by time and fate, the hearts are heroic. Explain.

Though Ulysses and his mariners **grew old and weak**, their **spirit is young** and undaunted.

ii. Pick out the words in alliteration in the above lines.

heroic - hearts, strong - strive - seek

*1. It little profits that an idle king,
By this still hearth, among these barren crags,
Match'd with an aged wife, I mete and dole*

i. What does the phrase 'it little profits' means?

It means **'It is useless'**.

ii. Who does 'I' refer to?

'I' refers to **Ulysses**.

*2. I cannot rest from travel: I will drink
Life to the lees: all times I have enjoyed*

i. What does 'lees' mean?

'Lees' means **sediment accumulated at the bottom of a bottle of wine**.

ii. -I will drink life to the lees". Explain.

It means **to drink to the very last drop**. Ulysses wants to live the life to the fullest.

*3. Through scudding drifts the rainy Hyades
Vexed the dim sea: I am become a name;
For always roaming with a hungry heart*

i. What is 'Hyades'?

Hyades is **group of stars**.

ii. How was Ulysses roaming?

Ulysses was roaring **with a hungry heart** to quench the thirst of adventure.

*4. To follow knowledge like a sinking star,
Beyond the utmost bound of human thought.*

i. What comparison is used here?

Ulysses wants to chase after **knowledge** as it sinks **like a star**, (*or*) Ulysses **himself** could be the 'sinking star' which means he is about to die.

ii. Mention the figure of speech in the above line.

Figure of speech: **Simile**.

*5. To whom I leave the sceptre and the isle —
Well-loved of me, discerning to fulfil
This labour, by slow prudence to make mild*

i. What does Ulysses leave to his son?

Ulysses leaves **the sceptre and the kingdom** to his son.

ii. What does Ulysses describe in this line?

Ulysses describes **his son's character and his ability**.

6. When I am gone. He works his work, I mine.

There lies the port; the vessel puffs her sail:

i. Where is the ship?

The ship is in the port.

ii. Who does 'her' refer to?

'Her' refers to Ulysses' ship.

iii. Who does 'he', and 'I' refer to?

'I' refers to Ulysses. 'He' refers to his son Telemachus.

7. Free hearts, free foreheads - you and I are old;

Old age hath yet his honour and his toil;

i. Who are old here?

Ulysses and his loyal mariners are old.

ii. *Old age hath yet his honour and his toil - Explain*

Speaking of old age, Ulysses suggests that **though old people are respected, they also have responsibilities.**

8. It may be we shall touch the Happy Isles,

And see the great Achilles, whom we knew.

i. What does 'Happy Isles' refer to?

'Happy Isles' refers to heaven, in Greek mythology.

ii. Whom does he want to meet?

He wants to meet his war companion Achilles.

9. We are not now that strength which in old days

Moved earth and heaven; that which we are, we are;

i. What does 'we' refer to?

'We' refers to Ulysses and his mariners.

ii. Do they have strength now?

No, they do not have strength now.

10. Made weak by time and fate, but strong in will

To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield.

i. What has taken their strength?

Time and fate has taken their strength.

ii. What is strong to the mariners now?

The mariners' will is strong to them.

5. Explain with reference to the context the following lines.

a) *I cannot rest from travel:*

I will drink Life to the lees:

Reference : These lines are taken from the poem 'Ulysses' written by Lord Tennyson.

Context: These lines are uttered, when he reveals the travel thirst.

Explanation : Ulysses tells us that he does not want to take rest, as he wants to travel to new places to gain more experience and knowledge. He wants to drink to the very last drop of life. It means he wants to live the life to the fullest as the last drop of the wine bottle is enjoyed.

Meanings:

Lees – Sediment accumulated at the bottom of a wine bottle.

Comment : Ulysses' love for adventure is revealed to the fullest.

b) *I am become a name;*

For always roaming with a hungry heart

Reference: These lines are taken from the poem 'Ulysses', written by Lord Tennyson.

Context: These lines are uttered, when he reveals the travel thirst.

Explanation : Ulysses says that he gets name and fame through his adventures. He portrays himself a traveller with an unquenchable desire to visit as many places as he can. 'Roaming with a hungry heart' means the attitude of travelling with unquenchable thirst for adventure'.

Meaning:

Roaming - moving about aimlessly or unsystematically, especially over a wide area.

Comment : Ulysses' love of adventure is really enchanting.

c) *How dull it is to pause, to make an end,*

To rust unburnished, not to shine in use!

Reference : These lines are taken from the poem 'Ulysses' written by Lord Tennyson,

Context: These lines are uttered, when he reveals the travel thirst.

Explanation : Ulysses says how boring it is just sitting at his kingdom and spending his whole life. He wants to spend the rest of his life exploring the world. In his opinion, to rest is to rust. He compares himself to a metal weapon. He wants to shine in use rather than being rusted.

Meaning:

Unburnished - **not carefully reworked or perfected or made smooth by polishing**

Comment : Ulysses' attitude to be active is appreciable.

**d) *To follow knowledge like a sinking star,
Beyond the utmost bound of human thought.***

Reference : These lines are taken from the poem 'Ulysses,' written by Lord Tennyson.

Context: When Ulysses reveals the desire of his own, he says these words.

Explanation : Ulysses speaks that he wants to follow knowledge like sinking star. It means two things. He compares himself like a sinking star which means he is about to die. On the other hand, he compares it with knowledge. He wants to chase after knowledge and try to catch it as it sinks like a star. The knowledge or the death is beyond the limit of human knowledge.

Meaning :

Sinking star - A falling star/meteor/shooting star is a brief flash, then disappears.

Comment : Ulysses' comparison is very apt and meaningful.

e) *He works his work, I mine.*

Reference: This line is taken from the poem 'Ulysses' written by Lord Tennyson.

Context : When Ulysses entrusts his works with his son, he says these words.

Explanation : At the time of his parting with Ithaca, Ulysses says that his son Telemachus has the duty of ruling the kingdom in fair manner and it is his duty to go back to sea for some more adventures.

Comment : Ulysses' duty consciousness is appreciated.

f)....*you and I are old;*

Old age hath yet his honour and his toil;

Reference: These lines are taken from the poem 'Ulysses,' written by Lord Tennyson.

Context: When Ulysses describes his companions, these words are uttered.

Explanation : Ulysses tells his companions that all of them have come to old age. Speaking of old age, Ulysses suggests that even though old people are respected, they also have responsibilities.

Meaning:

Toil : hardwork

Hath : has

Comment : Ulysses's responsibility and inspiration even at his old age are appealing.

**g) *The long day wanes: the slow moon climbs: the deep
Moans round with many voices.***

Reference : These lines are taken from the poem 'Ulysses', written by Lord Tennyson.

Context: When Ulysses describes his adventurous travel, these words are said.

Explanation : Ulysses observes the sunset and the arrival of night. He says the moon is appearing. The wind and the waves of the sea murmur and grumble. Through these lines, he inculcates confidence among his old warriors to get them ready.

Meaning :

Deep - sea (in poetry deep means sea)

Moans- Cries/ groans

Comment : The poet brings out Ulysses' readiness to his adventure.

**h) *It may be we shall touch the Happy Isles,
And see the great Achilles, whom we knew.***

Reference: These lines are taken from the poem 'Ulysses', written by Lord Tennyson.

Context : Here Ulysses guesses the end of his trip.

Explanation : Ulysses realizes if they die in their adventure, they might go to the 'Happy Isles' and visit his old Trojan war companion Achilles. The 'Happy Isles' refers to the Islands of the Blessed. In Greek, it means Heaven where Greek heroes are there.

Meaning:

Happy Isles – It refers to the Blessed Islands in Greek Mythology

Achilles – Trojan Hero

Comment : The poet shows Ulysses' ultimate destination by pointing out the Greek mythological character.

i) *We are not now that strength which in old days*

Moved earth and heaven;

Reference : These lines are taken from the poem 'Ulysses,' written by Lord Tennyson.

Context : When Ulysses recalls his glorious adventures of the past, these words are said.

Explanation : Ulysses realizes that his companions and he himself are all growing old and they are not strong. But in those days, when they were young, they could move the earth and the heaven. The idiom 'to move earth and heaven' means to put in hard work and achieve something great.

Comment : The poet shows Ulysses and his mariner's strength in the olden days.

j) *To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield.*

Reference: This line is taken from the poem 'Ulysses' written by Lord Tennyson.

Context: When Ulysses instills the seeds of adventure in the minds of his companions, these words are said.

Explanation : Though Ulysses and his friends have grown old, they are still strong in mind to strive, to seek, to find, not to yield. Even at their old age, they can travel more and more and meet with adventures and gain new experiences and new knowledge.

Meaning:

Strive : Work hard

Yield : Surrender

Comment : Ulysses' undying thirst of adventure is revealed, even at his old age.

6. Answer the following questions in a paragraph of about 100 words each.

a) What makes Ulysses seek newer adventures?

Ulysses is a great hero. Now he is old. He does not want to end his life as an idle king, making laws and punishing his rugged people. He is filled with an unquenchable thirst for travel. He wishes to live his life to the fullest. He has travelled far and wide gaining knowledge of various places, cultures, men and matters. Enriched by his experience, he portrays himself a traveller with an unquenchable desire to visit as many places as he can. He declares that it is boring to stay in one place. In his opinion, to rest is to rust. He wants to shine in use rather than being rusted. Life is not merely breathing. Though old but zestful, he looks at every hour as a bringer of new things. He yearns to follow knowledge, even if it is unattainable. Hence he always seeks new adventures.

b) List the roles and responsibilities Ulysses assigns to his son Telemachus, while he is away.

Ulysses describes his son, Telemachus, as a man who lacks his adventurous spirit. But he feels that his son is more suitable for governing Ithaca. So he desires to hand over his sceptre and kingdom to his son Telemachus. He wants his son to fulfil his duties towards his subjects with care and Prudence. He believes him that he would perform all his duties well and be a wise ruler. He expects his son to possess patience and has the will to subdue and civilise the rugged citizens of Ithaca in a tender way. He assigns Telemachus to pay due adoration to his

household gods. As a father, he wishes his son would do his work blamelessly. These are the roles and responsibilities Ulysses assigns to his son Telemachus, while he is away.

c) What is Ulysses' clarion call to his sailors? How does he inspire them?

Ulysses is a great lover of adventure even at his old age. Like him, his companions too love adventure. For their adventure, Ulysses summons his sailors to gather at the port, where the ship is ready to sail. He praises his companions that they have faced both thunder and sunshine with a smile. They are united by their undying spirit of adventure. Though death would end everything, Ulysses urges his companions to join him and sail beyond the sunset. He asks them to seek a newer world regardless of consequences. He reminds them that they have brave hearts and once they had moved the heaven and the earth. He inspires them by saying that they may have grown old and weak physically but their spirit is young and undaunted. His call is an inspiration for all those who seek true knowledge and strive to lead meaningful lives. Thus Ulysses' clarion call inspires his sailors very much and encourages them to start their adventure.