

What is Tessitore's thesis?

What does politics require in the *Philoctetes*?

What about religious piety?

What is personally at stake for the characters,  
and what is politically at stake?

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**Protagonist**

**Deuteragonist**

**Tritagonist**

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Philoctetes

Neoptolemus

Odysseus  
“Merchant”  
Heracles

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Is the “Merchant” really Odysseus in disguise?

Does it change the story for you to see  
Odysseus, the “Merchant,” and Heracles  
all played by the tritagonist?

What roles do these Homeric ideas play in *Philoctetes*?

νόστος (*nostos*, homecoming)

κλέος (*kleos*, fame built on honor)

What about these common oppositions?

πειθώ vs. βιά (persuasion vs. force)

λόγος vs. ἔργον (word vs. deed)

Sisyphus and Ixion: who are they,  
and why are they important to the story?

What myths tell of Hephæstus on Lemnos?  
What are the myth of the Lemnian women  
and its accompanying fire ritual?

How many lonely people stuck on islands  
can you remember from Greek mythology?  
How are loners characterized in Greek myth?

How many different archers are mentioned?

NEOPTOLEMUS:

445 I never saw the man, but I heard he was still alive.

PHILOCTETES:

He would be. Evil creatures are never destroyed;  
Some unseen power carefully protects them  
And takes perverse pleasure in diverting  
Criminals and wrongdoers away from Hades,  
450 While the just and the good are sent straight there.  
So what do I make of this? Is this the way of the gods?  
How can I praise the gods when their ways are so evil?

Who is the topic of conversation here?

What did he do?

In a more general sense, does the theodicean question  
remind you of Odysseus' ethics?

PHILOCTETES:

Land of Lemnos, almighty fires  
Ignited by Hephaestus, how could this be tolerated?  
How can you let him tear me from your soil?

ODYSSEUS:

It is Zeus. Know that it is Zeus who reigns here.  
Zeus decides all. I am merely his servant.

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PHILOCTETES:

Detestable man, there is no end to your contrivances—  
Hiding behind heaven, making the gods out to be liars!

ODYSSEUS:

This was decreed—you must follow this path.

Is Odysseus right? Is Zeus behind it all?  
Is Odysseus an instrument of the Διὸς βουλή (plan of Zeus)?  
Or is Odysseus an impious liar who makes liars of the gods?

CHORUS:

It was you. You cursed yourself,  
You poor, deluded man;  
This fate is not forced on you  
Or beyond the bounds of your control.  
You had your chance  
To make the prudent choice.  
There was a better way;  
You had to choose the worse.

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Why is Philoctetes wrong?  
What was the prudent choice, the better way?  
Why did he choose the worse?  
Was Odysseus right all along?

ἔστιν οὖν τραγωδία μίμησις...  
δι' ἐλέου καὶ φόβου περαίνουσα  
τὴν τῶν τοιούτων παθημάτων κάθαρσιν.

So, tragedy is an imitation (*mimesis*)...  
that causes, through pity and fear,  
a cleansing of those same emotions.

Aristotle *Poetics* 1449b

How do ἔλεος (pity, mercy, compassion)  
and φόβος (panic flight, dread, terror)  
work in the *Philoctetes*?



PHILOCTETES:

Was it always your plan  
To take me to Troy, the place that I hate?

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CHORUS:

It is for the best.

What's the relationship between tragedy and epic?  
How many tragedies retell the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*?  
How many take place during the Trojan war? After?

Is there anything special about the Trojan war  
that better suits the themes of the *Philoctetes*  
than would another setting?

What parts of this play resemble an initiation for Neoptolemus?

What kind of person will Neoptolemus become?  
Who is his teacher in virtue or vice?

How many times does Philoctetes sail to Troy?

How did Philoctetes and Odysseus differ  
in how each sailed to Troy?

Why did the Greeks maroon Philoctetes?

What kind of man is Odysseus?

What is Neoptolemus' nature? Odysseus' nature?

How do these characters differ from or resemble  
the same characters you know and love in Homer?