Homer is the name that has been given to the author of the two ancient Greek epics, the Iliad and the Odyssey. Little is known, however, about this person. Most modern scholars hold that the accounts of Homer's life provided by ancient writers – including the fact that he was a blind bard from Ionia – are likely legends. Some believe that a single genius poet named Homer never actually existed.

The original versions of the two poems were likely oral, performed by singers or professional storytellers, and were written down in their final form between the 8th and 7th centuries BCE. They were composed in Homeric, or Epic Greek.

The Iliad and Odyssey are certainly epic in length. The Iliad consists of more than 15,000 lines of dactylic hexameter verse and the Odyssey has more than 12,000 lines.

The Iliad recounts the battles and events that take place over a period of weeks during the Trojan War, a ten-year siege of the city of Troy by a coalition of Greek states. At the heart of the epic's story is the conflict between King Agamemnon and the warrior Achilles.

The Odyssey tells of Odysseus' 10-year struggle to return home after the Trojan War. Along the way, he battles mythical creatures and faces the wrath of the gods. Meanwhile, his wife Penelope and his son Telemachus endeavor to hold off an unruly group of suitors competing for Penelope's hand long enough for Odysseus to return.

The Odyssey is replete with noteworthy literary elements; prominent among them are its non-linear plot and the influence on events of choices made by women and slaves. In the English language – as well as many others – the word odyssey has now come to refer to any epic voyage.

Together, the Iliad and Odyssey provide the framework for epic tales throughout the history of Western civilization. They have also inspired many famous works of literature, music, art, film,
and gaming, and have had a profound influence on Western concepts of the hero, imagery, and plot structure.

Imagine you were to tell a friend that you were embarking on an odyssey. In the context of your life, what might that mean?

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