**Literary Analysis: Diction**

The term **diction** refers to an author’s particular choice of words. In the case of Homer, the author often chose words that are poetic – that is, words that are not always used in ordinary speech. Words have a denotation, or dictionary definition, as well as a connotation, or associated feeling. For example, *happy* and *ecstatic* have similar dictionary definitions. In both cases, the person feels glad. The word *ecstatic*, however, presents the image of someone jumping up and down for joy, almost unable to control his or her enthusiasm, whereas *happy* merely suggests a smile on someone’s face. This activity familiarizes you with the importance of poetic diction and gives you a better understanding of Odysseus’ character.

**Directions**: Reread the passage below, which describes Odysseus poetically, comparing him to a ravenous mountain lion as he emerges from the underbrush. Then complete the chart on the back of this page.

And now he burst out of the underbrush;

with his stout hand he tore a leafy branch

from that thick wood, to hide his nakedness.

He moved out as a mountain lion would

when – sure of his own strength, his eyes ablaze –

through driving wind and rain, he stalks his prey,

wild deer or sheep or oxen; he’ll attack

a cattle-fold, however tight the fence

that pens the herd – his hunger’s so intense.

So did Odysseus seem as he prepared

to burst into the band of fair-haired girls,

though he was naked; he was ravenous.

But he – his form was filth, fouled with brine –

struck them as horrible; and terrified,

they scattered on the shore, one here, one there,

along the sandspits jutting out to sea.

The daughter of Alcinous was left

alone: her spirit had received the gift

of courage from Athena, who had freed

the limbs of the young girl from fear and trembling.

**Directions:** Answer the questions below after you have completed the chart that follows.

1. What is the overall tone of the passage?
2. What do you think about Odysseus when he is described this way?

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| **Word** | **Dictionary Definition** | **What ideas come to mind when you hear this word?**  (Why is this particular word chosen by the author?) |
| Stout | strong; forceful |  |
| leafy | covered with leaves or foliage |  |
| ablaze | burning; on fire |  |
| driving | having force and violence |  |
| pens | small enclosure for animals |  |
| ravenous | extremely hungry; famished |  |
| fouled | polluted |  |
| brine | the water of the ocean |  |
| sandspits | sandy landform which projects into a body of water |  |
| jutting | to extend beyond the main body or line; project |  |
| spirit | feelings or disposition |  |
| limbs | one of the larger branches of a tree / one of the jointed appendages of an animal |  |
| trembling | to shake involuntarily |  |