1. Read the poem through and say:
   * who is speaking and to whom? The speaker is Ulysses and he is talking to himself.
   * how old is he? He is an old man and is speaking some years after he has returned to Ithaca.
   * where is he? He is in Ithaca.
   * what he is setting out on? He will left from Ithaca and leaves his reign to his daughter.
2. Now read the text again, this time paying attention to the development of the argument. Summarize what Ulysses says and feels following the guidelines on the left. For each point consider also Tennyson's vocabulary indicating which words and phrases, in particular, reveal in the hero's traits and attitudes. The first point has been written for you.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Life on Ithaca (lines 2-5) | It is uncivilised and… Negative adjectives such as idol, aged convey Ulysses’s total dissatisfaction with life on Ithaca |
|  |  |
| His past life | It was an heroic life, full of adventures |
|  |  |
| View of present and future (19-32) | Ulysses thinks that life must be busy and movimented |
|  |  |
| Attitude to Telemachus (33-44) | Telemachus is responsible and suitable to reign in place of his father |
|  |  |
| Address to his mariners (45-70) | Ulysses is tied with his mariners and considers them great workers with free hearts and free minds |
|  |  |
|  |  |

3a) How is Ulysses portrayed in the poem?

To answer the question, consider:

* + His present situation
  + The contrast with Telemachus
  + What he can be taken to be symbolic of
  + Whether he differs from the picture we usually associate with the hero of the Odyssey

The Tennyson Ulysses is a bit different from the Homeric one. The traditional text present Ulysses as a character who wants to stay in Ithaca with Penelope, his wife, and Telemachus. Instead, Tennyson propose a modern version with a more dynamic and active hero. Tennyson's Ulysses is represented like a passionate warrior who would not be very happy with a life devoid of challenges and adventures. In contrast, his son Telemachus, who will succeed him as king, seems happy to stay in Ithaca and rule subjects. Ulysses loves him and knows that he will govern wisely. However, Telemachus does not have the same energy of the father.

3b) What is the poet’s attitude to Ulysses and Telemachus? With whom does it side?

The poet sides with Ulysses because accentuate his desire to not waste life.

1. The poem was composed when Tennyson was still suffering for the death of his dearest friend, A. Hallam, in 1883. Does the poem reflect a sense of loss?

The poem reflects the sense of loss but at the same time it conveys the idea of the need of going forward with courage.

1. As you will have realised the hero’s feelings are communicated through a careful choice of words.

What observations can you make about the meter and the music of the poem and the relationship with its meaning?

It is a dramatic monologue: a poem spoken by a single person to an audience. The poem is composed with the iambic pentameter: each line has five iambs, or feet: each iamb contains an unstressed syllable followed by a stressed syllable and this, but it is often interrupted with enjambments that highlight Ulysses’s dissatisfaction.