



Unit 8

Herodotus—Happiness

BACKGROUND ON THE LITERATURE READING

- Fill out the following information while watching the *Video Lecture*.

AUTHOR:

TITLE:

IMPORTANT DATES:

GENRE:

OTHER NOTES:

LITERATURE READING

- Read the passage multiple times.
- Annotate the passage, identifying key vocabulary and ideas.
- Make notes in the margin of any thoughts that strike you while reading.

Selection from Book 1 of The Histories by Herodotus, translated by George Rawlinson (1858), edited by T. Matthew Meyer

1. When all these conquests had been added to the Lydian empire, and the prosperity of Sardis was now at its height, there came thither, one after another, all the sages of Greece living at the time, and among them Solon, the Athenian. He was on his travels, having left Athens to be absent ten years, under the pretense of wishing to see the world, but really to avoid being forced to repeal any of the laws which, at the request of the Athenians, he had made for them. Without his sanction the

Athenians could not repeal them, as they had bound themselves under a heavy curse to be governed for ten years by the laws which should be imposed on them by Solon.

2. On this account, as well as to see the world, Solon set out upon his travels, in the course of which he went to Egypt to the court of Amasis, and also came on a visit to Croesus at Sardis. Croesus received him as his guest, and lodged him in the royal palace. On the third or fourth day after, he bade his servants conduct Solon over his treasuries, and show him all their greatness and magnificence. When he had seen them all, and, so far as time allowed, inspected them, Croesus addressed this question to him. "Stranger of Athens, we have heard much of thy wisdom and of thy travels through many lands, from love of knowledge and a wish to see the world. I am curious therefore to inquire of thee, whom, of all the men that thou hast seen, thou deemest the most happy?"
3. This he asked because he thought himself the happiest of mortals: but Solon answered him without flattery, according to his true sentiments, "Tellus of Athens, sire." Full of astonishment at what he heard, Croesus demanded sharply, "And wherefore dost thou deem Tellus happiest?" To which the other replied, "First, because his country was flourishing in his days, and he himself had sons both beautiful and good, and he lived to see children born to each of them, and these children all grew up; and further because, after a life spent in what our people look upon as comfort, his end was surpassingly glorious. In a battle between the Athenians and their neighbors near Eleusis, he came to the assistance of his countrymen, routed the foe, and died upon the field most gallantly. The Athenians gave him a public funeral on the spot where he fell, and paid him the highest honors."
4. Thus did Solon admonish Croesus by the example of Tellus, enumerating the manifold particulars of his happiness. When he had ended, Croesus inquired a second time, who after Tellus seemed to him the happiest, expecting that at any rate, he would be given the second place. "Cleobis and Bito," Solon answered; "they were of Argive race; their fortune was enough for their wants, and they were besides endowed with so much bodily strength that they had both gained prizes at the Games. Also this tale is told of them: There was a great festival in honor of the goddess Juno at Argos, to which their mother must needs be taken in a car. Now the oxen did not come home from the field in time; so the youths, fearful of being too late, put the yoke on their own necks, and themselves drew the car in which their mother rode. Five and forty furlongs did they draw her, and stopped before the temple. This deed of theirs was witnessed by the whole assembly of worshippers, and then their life closed in the best possible way. Herein, too, God showed forth most evidently, how much better a thing for man death is than life. For the Argive men, who stood around the car, extolled the vast strength of the youths; and the Argive women extolled the mother who was blessed with such a pair of sons; and the mother herself, overjoyed at the deed and at the praises it had won, standing

straight before the image, besought the goddess to bestow on Cleobis and Biton, the sons who had so mightily honored her, the highest blessing to which mortals can attain. Her prayer ended, they offered sacrifice and partook of the holy banquet, after which the two youths fell asleep in the temple. They never woke more, but so passed from the earth. The Argives, looking on them as among the best of men, caused statues of them to be made, which they gave to the shrine at Delphi.”

5. When Solon had thus assigned these youths the second place, Croesus broke in angrily, “What, stranger of Athens, is my happiness, then, so utterly set at naught by thee, that thou dost not even put me on a level with private men?”

6. “Oh! Croesus,” replied the other, “thou askedst a question concerning the condition of man, of one who knows that the power above us is full of jealousy, and fond of troubling our lot. A long life gives one to witness much, and experience much oneself, that one would not choose... For thyself, oh! Croesus, I see that thou art wonderfully rich, and art the lord of many nations; but with respect to that whereon thou questionest me, I have no answer to give, until I hear that thou hast closed thy life happily. For assuredly he who possesses great store of riches is no nearer happiness than he who has what suffices for his daily needs, unless it so hap that luck attend upon him, and so he continue in the enjoyment of all his good things to the end of life. For many of the wealthiest men have been unfavored of fortune, and many whose means were moderate have had excellent luck. Men of the former class excel those of the latter but in two respects; these last excel the former in many. The wealthy man is better able to content his desires, and to bear up against a sudden buffet of calamity. The other has less ability to withstand these evils (from which, however, his good luck keeps him clear), but he enjoys all these following blessings: he is whole of limb, a stranger to disease, free from misfortune, happy in his children, and comely to look upon. If, in addition to all this, he end his life well, he is of a truth the man of whom thou art in search, the man who may rightly be termed happy. Call him, however, until he die, not happy but fortunate. Scarcely, indeed, can any man unite all these advantages: as there is no country which contains within it all that it needs, but each, while it possesses some things, lacks others, and the best country is that which contains the most; so no single human being is complete in every respect – something is always lacking. He who unites the greatest number of advantages, and retaining them to the day of his death, then dies peaceably, that man alone, sire, is, in my judgment, entitled to bear the name of ‘happy.’ But in every matter it behoves us to mark well the end: for oftentimes God gives men a gleam of happiness, and then plunges them into ruin.”

READING COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

- After reading and annotating the *Literature Reading* multiple times, answer the following questions. (Refer back to the passage for answers, if necessary.)
- Answers should make use of complete sentences as well as good grammar, spelling, word choice, and so forth.
- Answers should be in your own words.
- Write your answers in below, so you have quick reference to use during the discussion.
- Review your answers before discussing to ensure that you are ready.

1. After the Lydian empire had finished all of its conquests, who came to visit? (Paragraph 1)

2. For what reasons did Solon leave Athens? (Paragraph 1)

3. What did Croesus ask Solon after he had shown him all of his wealth? (Paragraph 2)

4. Why did Solon say that Tellus of Athens was the happiest man? (Paragraph 3)

5. Why did Solon say that Cleobis and Bito were the second most happy men? (Paragraph 4)

6. How does Croesus react to Solon assessment of the happiest men? (Paragraph 5)

7. Even though Croesus has much wealth, why doesn't Solon say that he is the happiest man? (Paragraph 6)

8. Solon states that the wealthy man has the resources to content his desires and to guard himself against calamity. However, he also states that there are blessings for the man of moderate means. List three of those blessings. (Paragraph 6)

9. For Solon, what constitutes a peaceable death? (Paragraph 6)
