

**ANCIENT GREECE:
HOMER: THE ILIAD**



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Description

Through the investigation of selected primary and secondary sources, including readings from the Iliad, students in this lesson will identify, understand and be able to explain the story of the Trojan War as told in Homer's epic poem the Iliad, the role gods and goddesses play in the story through their interaction with humans, how the poem set the standard for the ideal Greek epic hero in battle, and why the story is seen as important to the development of western literature.

Subjects

English / Language Arts
World History

Grade Level

11-12

Duration

90 minutes (with multiple days for out of class reading)

Tour Links

- Ancient City of Troy, Turkey
- Ancient Athens
- Ancient Sparta
- Ancient Mycenae
- Ancient sites around Greece

Essential Questions

- Who was Homer? What do we know about him and his literary works?
- What is the background for the story of Homer's epic poem, the Iliad?
- What was the Trojan War? Why did it start? Where was Troy? How did it end?
- What message might Homer have been trying to tell through the Iliad about the ideal Greek hero?

Academic Summary

As countless swarms of flies buzz around a herdsman's homestead in the time of spring when the pails are drenched with milk, even so did the Achaeans swarm on to the plain to charge the Trojans and destroy them.

The chiefs disposed their men this way and that before the fight began, drafting them out as easily as goatherds draft their flocks when they have got mixed while feeding; and among them went King Agamemnon, with a head and face like Jove the lord of thunder, a waist like Mars, and a chest like that of Neptune. As some great bull that lords it over the herds upon the plain, even so did Jove make the son of Atreus stand peerless among the multitude of heroes.

And now, O Muses, dwellers in the mansions of Olympus, tell me- for you are goddesses and are in all places so that you see all things, while we know nothing but by report- who were the chiefs and princes of the Danaans? As for the common soldiers, they were so that I could not name every single one of them though I had ten tongues, and though my voice failed not and my heart were of bronze within me, unless you, O Olympian Muses, daughters of aegis-bearing Jove, were to recount them to me. Nevertheless, I will tell the captains of the ships and all the fleet together.

Peneleos, Leitus, Arcesilaus, Prothoenor, and Clonius were captains of the Boeotians. These were they that dwelt in Hyria and rocky Aulis, and who held Schoenus, Scolus, and the highlands of Eteonus, with Thespeia, Graia, and the fair city of Mycalessus. They also held Harma, Eilesium, and Erythrae; and they had Eleon, Hyle, and Peteon; Ocalea and the strong fortress of Medeon; Copae, Eutresis, and Thisbe the haunt of doves; Coronea, and the pastures of Haliartus; Plataea and Glisas; the fortress of Thebes the less; holy Onchestus with its famous grove of Neptune; Arne rich in vineyards; Midea, sacred Nisa, and Anthedon upon the sea. From these there came fifty ships, and in each there were a hundred and twenty young men of the Boeotians.

Homer, The Iliad, Book II, approx. 9th century BCE

As when some cruel spite has befallen a man that he should have killed someone in his own country, and must fly to a great man's protection in a land of strangers, and all marvel who see him, even so did Achilles marvel as he beheld Priam. The others looked one to another and marveled also, but Priam besought Achilles saying, "Think of your father, O Achilles like unto the gods, who is such even as I am, on the sad threshold of old age. It may be that those who dwell near him harass him, and there is none to keep war and ruin from him. Yet when he hears of you being still alive, he is glad, and his days are full of hope that he shall see his dear son come home to him from Troy; but I, wretched man that I am, had the bravest in all Troy for my sons, and there is not one of them left. I had fifty sons when the Achaeans came here; nineteen of them were from a single womb, and the others were borne to me by the women of my household. The greater part of them has fierce Mars laid low, and Hector, him who was alone left, him who was the guardian of the city and ourselves, him have

you lately slain; therefore I am now come to the ships of the Achaeans to ransom his body from you with a great ransom. Fear, O Achilles, the wrath of heaven; think on your own father and have compassion upon me, who am the more pitiable, for I have steeled myself as no man yet has ever steeled himself before me, and have raised to my lips the hand of him who slew my son."

And Priam answered, "O king, bid me not be seated, while Hector is still lying uncared for in your tents, but accept the great ransom which I have brought you, and give him to me at once that I may look upon him. May you prosper with the ransom and reach your own land in safety, seeing that you have suffered me to live and to look upon the light of the sun."

Achilles looked at him sternly and said, "Vex me, sir, no longer; I am of myself minded to give up the body of Hector. My mother, daughter of the old man of the sea, came to me from Jove to bid me deliver it to you. Moreover I know well, O Priam, and you cannot hide it, that some god has brought you to the ships of the Achaeans, for else, no man however strong and in his prime would dare to come to our host; he could neither pass our guard unseen, nor draw the bolt of my gates thus easily; therefore, provoke me no further, lest I sin against the word of Jove, and suffer you not, suppliant though you are, within my tents."

Homer, The Iliad, Book XXIV, approx. 9th century BCE

The Trojan War...

For over 27 centuries, the story of the war between Mycenaean Greeks and Trojans has been told and retold down through the generations. Most people know the basics. According to the story, Helen of Sparta, said to be the most beautiful woman who ever lived, was kidnapped (or went willingly – it depends on who's telling the story) and taken to Troy, another city in the Greek World. The problem was that Helen was married to a Greek/Spartan king, Menelaus. Paris, son of the king of Troy, was promised by the goddess Aphrodite that he could have Helen. After she was abducted, the Greeks rallied an army and sailed for Troy (hence the idea that Helen was the woman whose "face launched a thousand ships"). After much bloodshed and a ten year siege during which the Greeks and Trojans slaughtered much of each other's armies, the Greek war hero Achilles kills Hector, brother of Paris. Paris then gets his revenge by killing Achilles with an arrow (possibly through the tendon by his heel that now bears his name, but this is unclear in the original story).

The first part of the story ends with the Trojan War still raging, but eventually the Greeks come up with an ingenious plan for victory. Rather than use their brawn to overpower the city, the Greeks instead build a wooden horse. The Trojans believe it is a peace offering and that the Greeks are surrendering, so they bring the horse inside the city walls. Little do they know that thirty Greek soldiers are hiding inside the wooden beast. As the story goes, the Trojans celebrate their supposed victory with copious amounts of alcohol, partying long into the night. When everyone passes out, the Greek soldiers quietly left the horse, opened up the city gates (allowing their comrades to rush in), and the sack of Troy was on. Helen, for her part, was taken back to Sparta.

The most commonly cited primary source for the story of the Trojan War is the 8th century BCE ancient Greek epic poem *The Iliad*. According to most traditions surrounding the *Iliad*, the poem was written by Homer, a blind poet. The *Iliad* itself is considered to be the first piece of "Western" literature. The problem with that tradition

is that Homer may or may not have even existed. Very little is known about the supposed author himself. Stories of Homer, some written hundreds of years after his death, vary in their descriptions, and there may even be an issue with translations from Ancient Greek to other languages. It is probable that the stories of Homer's life (or whoever wrote the poems) were told and retold as oral traditions over the span of time and that they may have been changed or consolidated along the way. What we do know is that by the time of the Classical Greek Age (4th and 5th centuries BCE), the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* were established tales probably known to all Greek citizens. Homer's legacy by that time was secure, as most Greeks believed him to be the father of their entire collection of heroic literature (most scholars no longer hold this view).

The *Iliad* tells only part of the story of the Trojan War. Part II, called the *Odyssey*, makes a brief reference to the story of the Trojan Horse (most of what we know today about that story is found in Virgil's *Aeneid* from much later), the Greek victory over Troy, and the return trip home (which took ten years) back to Ithaca by Odysseus and his men. That part of Homer's tale will be covered in a separate lesson.

For centuries, many historians thought the story of the Trojan War was simply a story made up by Homer. In the 1870s, however, German businessman and amateur archaeologist Heinrich Schliemann organized an excavation at a site in what is now Western Turkey on the Aegean coast, where he found enough evidence to conclude that he was digging in Troy. Work continues at the site to this day.

Through the investigation of selected primary and secondary sources, including readings from the *Iliad*, students in this lesson will identify, understand and be able to explain the story of the Trojan War as told in Homer's epic poem the *Iliad*, the role gods and goddesses play in the story through their interaction with humans, how the poem set the standard for the ideal Greek epic hero in battle, and why the story is seen as important to the development of western literature.

Objectives

1. Students will identify, understand and be able to explain the story of the Trojan War as told in Homer's epic poem the *Iliad*.
2. Students will identify, understand and be able to explain the role different gods and goddesses play in the *Iliad* through their interaction with humans.
3. Students will identify, understand and be able to explain how through the *Iliad* Homer set the standard for the ideal Greek epic hero in battle.
4. Students will identify, understand and be able to explain why the *Iliad* is seen as important to the development of western literature.

Procedures

I. Anticipatory Set

- Writing / Question: What do most people know from the story of the Trojan War? (5 min)
- Handouts – Copies of documents and readings from the websites listed. (5 min)

II. Body of Lesson

- Lecture / PPT – Trojan War and Homer’s Iliad (20 min)
- Video – The Iliad Illustrated: All 3 parts (20 min)
- Independent Activity – Students read the articles and sources on the Trojan War and Homer’s Iliad, taking notes as appropriate. (20 min)
- Suggestion: Have the students read some of these articles and sources for homework before class.
- Suggestion: Advanced/AP students should focus on reading the text itself along with secondary sources so they can understand it. See the links section below for websites appropriate to this task.
- Group Activity – Socratic Seminar: Discussion on the Iliad and the Trojan War (15 min)

III. Closure

- Assessment / DBQ – Essay: Explain in detail the story of the Trojan War as told in Homer’s epic poem the Iliad, the role gods and goddesses play in the story through their interaction with humans, how the poem set the standard for the ideal Greek epic hero in battle, and why the story is seen as important to the development of western literature.

Extension

On tour: Ancient Troy, Turkey

While on tour, students traveling to Turkey can visit the city of Ancient Troy where they can see for themselves where the Trojan War took place over 3000 years ago. In addition to being a Turkish national park, the site is now on the world heritage list of UNESCO. At the entrance to the site is a large wooden horse students can climb into (if it is not too crowded – the site is a heavy tourist attraction). To the southeast of the city is Mount Ida. According to Homer’s epic, it was from Mount Ida that the gods and goddesses watched the war unfold (sometimes interfering as well).

Web Links

Lesson Plan Websites

- classics.mit.edu/Homer/iliad.html
The Iliad by Homer (primary source) – full text at the Internet classics Archive at MIT
- www.theoi.com/Text/HomerIliad1.html
Iliad by Homer (primary source) – selected excerpts from the Theoi Greek Mythology Website
- www.sparknotes.com/lit/iliad/
The Iliad (website) – from Sparknotes. General overview of each book. A useful tool for students doing a full reading of Homer’s poem.
- academic.reed.edu/humanities/110tech/iliad.html
Iliad Homepage (website) – from the Humanities Department at Reed College (OR). Great resource for all students and teachers.
- people.duke.edu/~wj25/UC_Web_Site/epic/study_guide2.html
Study Guide for Homer’s Iliad (website) – from William Johnson, Professor of Classical Studies at Duke University
- www.temple.edu/classics/iliadho/index.html
Study guide for reading Homer’s Iliad (web article) – from Robin Mitchell-Boyask, Professor of classics at Temple University
- faculty.gvsu.edu/webster/Iliad.htm
Iliad: Reading Assignments and Study Guide (website) – from Michael Webster, Professor of English, Grand Valley State University (MI). Highly recommended for AP/Advanced students and teachers.
- www.users.globalnet.co.uk/~loxias/iliad/iliadframesnewx.htm
The Iliad Game (website). Outstanding online game for students where they have to answer questions to “progress through” the website. Be careful, they need to read first! Highly recommended for all students and teachers.
- www.slideshare.net/tomrichey/the-trojan-war-and-homers-iliad-ancient-history
The Trojan War and Homer’s Iliad (PowerPoint) – from Tom Richey, History Teacher at Seneca HS (SC)
- www.teachingchannel.org/videos/choosing-primary-source-documents?fd=1
Reading Like a Historian: Primary Source Documents (video). Great 2-minute video on how to incorporate primary sources into the Common Core and history classes. From Shilpa Duvoor of Summit Preparatory Charter High School in Redwood City, CA. Highly recommended for teachers.
- www.youtube.com/watch?v=onIapU0z0aQ
The Iliad Illustrated: Part One (video). From Carey Harrison, Professor of English at the City University (NY). This video (all 3 parts) is highly recommended for all classes.
- www.youtube.com/watch?v=XCCIHnf199Q
The Iliad Illustrated: Part Two (video). From Carey Harrison, Professor of English at the City University (NY). This video (all 3 parts) is highly recommended for all classes.
- www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y8QKD9aVTpM
The Iliad Illustrated: Part Three (video). From Carey Harrison, Professor of English at the City University (NY). This video (all 3 parts) is highly recommended for all classes.
- www.youtube.com/watch?v=ciQFUYg35xl
The Truth of Troy (video) – from the BBC. At 45 minutes long, this video is

probably too long for most in-class showings, but it is well worth it. Good explanation of the excavations in Turkey.

- www.youtube.com/watch?v=BFck7uMvnOU
Troy – The Real Story (video). From the History Channel. At 90 minutes long, this video is probably too long for most in-class showings, but it is well worth it. Highly recommended for out-of-class assignments for students studying Homer’s epics, especially those in AP or Advanced classes.
- www.youtube.com/watch?v=XD0FEcK9smE
The Contemporary relevance of the Iliad (video lecture) – from Edwin Cook, Classical Studies Professor at Trinity University (TX). This video, at just over 45 min long, is highly recommended for teachers in preparing to teach Homer’s epic poem. The lecture was given as part of Trinity University’s “Food for Thought” Luncheon-Lecture series in 2013.

Background Information

- www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iliad
Iliad – Wikipedia article
- www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Homer
Homer – Wikipedia article
- www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trojan_War
Trojan War – Wikipedia article
- www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Helen_of_Troy
Helen of Troy – Wikipedia article
- www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Achilles
Achilles – Wikipedia article
- www.passports.com/group_leaders/on_the_road/greece/country_profile
On the Road: Greece – from Passports Educational Travel

Other Relevant Passports Lesson Plans

- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/greece/ancient-greece-homer-iliad
Ancient Greece – Homer’s Iliad
- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/greece/ancient-greece-homer-odyssey
Ancient Greece – Homer’s Odyssey
- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/greece/ancient-greece-minoan-civilization
Ancient Greece – Minoan Civilization on Crete
- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/greece/classical-greece-alexander-the-great
Classical Greece (4th/5th Centuries BCE) – Alexander the Great
- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/greece/classical-greece-sparta
Classical Greece (4th/5th Centuries BCE) – Sparta
- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/greece/classical-greece-athens-democracy
Classical Greece (4th/5th Centuries BCE) – Athens
- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/greece/classical-greece-battle-of-marathon
Classical Greece (4th/5th Centuries BCE) – Battle of Marathon 490 BCE
- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/greece/classical-greece-battle-of-thermopylae
Classical Greece (4th/5th Centuries BCE) – Battle of Thermopylae: Leonidas and the 300
- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/greece/plato-allegory-of-the-cave
Classical Greece (4th/5th Centuries BCE) – Plato: Allegory of the Cave
- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/greece/classical-greece-plato-euthyphro
Classical Greece (4th/5th Centuries BCE) – Plato: Euthyphro
- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/greece/plato-republic-philosopher-kings

Classical Greece (4th/5th Centuries BCE) – Plato: Philosopher Kings and the Republic

- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/greece/classical-greece-socrates
- Classical Greece (4th/5th Centuries BCE) – Socrates: Father of Western Philosophy

Key Terms

- Achilles (of Greece)
- Ancient Greece
- Epic poetry
- Homer (poet)
- Iliad
- Paris (of Troy)
- Trojan War
- Troy

