

Teacher Guide

Background and Drill

The *Iliad* is full of surprises, especially considering the preconceived notions of modern readers. It is not the story of the Trojan War. It begins in the tenth year of the war and ends before any sign or mention of an Achilles' heel or a Trojan horse. Readers who come to it with expectations of these are sure to walk away disappointed. When readers start with the right context and background, though, they will find the first and perhaps truest form of epic, one that rises out of the monotony of event and reaches for the climax of moment, truly grasping for and touching the heartstrings of courage or terror, desire or lot, life or death. There is no tying up loose strings as with modern narrative, but the reader is steeped in many a moment of powerful, faceted gems. As an epic, it involves scenarios both human and divine, ever mixing the two, seeing imperfections in both. It is the poem-song of the anger of Achilles.

Begin the class by asking students to write one page on what they believe the *Iliad* is about. Below are some initial "drill" questions that will plumb some of the ideas already stirring about in a student's head. You can write these on the board to help students begin to anticipate the epic. (There are no right answers, but it is nice to compare them at the end upon doing a similar outline).

The Iliad is known as the first epic of Western civilization. Define "epic." How do you expect the Iliad to measure up to your definition? Summarize what you expect to happen in the Iliad. Take these up and keep them to return upon doing a similar assignment in Book 24.

Discussion Help

It is nice to have some competition for the best and worst character in the *Iliad*. Many students have the idea that Achilles will be the epic's hero, but this will not necessarily be the experience as they read. Some students may walk away thinking Achilles is actually the worst action hero. Discuss how students understand heroism, courage, and honor.

Agamemnon receives prizes because of his superiority by right in a hierarchical culture, even superiority over Achilles. Discuss what it means to have hierarchy, one person naturally or divinely over all others. In Book 1, Achilles and Agamemnon are competing for glory, not for a girlfriend. *Glory* is what the *Iliad* is all about.

BOOK 1: THE ANGER OF ACHILLES

Identify Places and Characters:

| | |
|-----------|---|
| Chryses | (kreye-seez) priest of Apollo who asked Agamemnon to give his daughter back |
| Tenedos | (ten-e-dos) small northeastern Aegean island sacred to Apollo and just west of Troy |
| Chryseis | (kreye-see-is) daughter of Chryses |
| Briseis | (bri-say-is) Achilles' prize; daughter of Briseus |
| Nestor | venerable leader of the Pylians; the oldest and wisest Greek chieftain |
| Patroclus | (pa-tro-klus) older friend and squire of Achilles; son of Menoetius (me-nee-shuhs) |
| Argos | important city near Mycenae in the Argolid; under the rule of Diomed |
| Myrmidons | the followers of Achilles; from Phthia; the "ant people" |

Comprehension Questions:

1. What was Chryses' petition? How did Agamemnon respond, and what does this tell you about his character? Chryses asked for his daughter, and Agamemnon was disrespectful and arrogant with him.
2. Who brought the plague upon the Greek camp, and why? Apollo shot arrows of pestilence on the Greek camp because Chryses prayed to him.
3. Which Greek called the assembly and spoke first? What was his request? Achilles spoke first and asked that they consult a priest or prophet to discover the cause of the pestilence.
4. Calchas asked for the protection of Achilles before he spoke. What did he say? Apollo would relent once Agamemnon restored Chryseis and took hecatombs to Chryse.
5. Make Agamemnon's case in this quarrel. Though angered, Agamemnon agreed to release Chryseis if the Greeks found another girl for him. He decided to take Briseis from Achilles because of Achilles' insolence in front of the Greeks.
6. Make Achilles' case in this quarrel. Achilles pointed out that there were no unclaimed females for the Greeks to give to Agamemnon. Rather, Agamemnon would have to wait for the Greeks to sack Troy to replace Chryseis.
7. Who prevented Achilles from attacking Agamemnon? Athene

8. Why does Nestor command respect? What was his advice? Nestor was a wise ruler and good speaker, much older than most of the Greeks. He said Agamemnon should not take Briseis, and Achilles should not strive with Agamemnon.
9. How did Achilles bring his mother up from the depths of the sea? What did he ask her to do? Thetis heard Achilles weeping and praying to her from the shore near Troy. Achilles asked her to plead with Zeus to aid the Trojans as a punishment on Agamemnon.
10. Why was Zeus reluctant to honor Thetis' request? Zeus knew that Hera would quarrel with him for helping the Trojans.
11. Describe Hera's personality. Hera was quickly suspicious of Zeus and was eager to scold her husband. She was stubborn—but also afraid of Zeus—and did pipe down.
12. Who comforted Hera? What story made her smile? Hephaestus reminded his mother, Hera, of the time that Zeus flung him to Lemnos for helping her.
13. Describe Olympian bliss. Hephaestus served sweet nectar to the gods, and they feasted. Apollo played the lyre, and the Muses sang till sundown.

Quotations:

- "Sing, O goddess, the anger of Achilles, son of Peleus, that brought countless ills upon the Achaeans. Many a brave soul did it send hurrying down to Hades, and many a hero did it yield a prey to dogs and vultures, for so were the counsels of Zeus fulfilled from the day on which the son of Atreus, king of men, and great Achilles first fell out with one another."
— Homer's appeal to the Muse
- "You are steeped in insolence and lust of gain. With what heart can any of the Achaeans do your bidding."
— Achilles to Agamemnon
- Then arose smooth-tongued Nestor, the facile speaker of the Pylians, and the words fell from his lips sweeter than honey.

Discussion Questions:

1. Who do you have more sympathy for, Agamemnon or Achilles? Why?
2. How did Agamemnon and Achilles acquire their prizes? What kind of culture is depicted in the *Iliad*? Give other examples of this kind of culture.

Questions to Mark for Test:

Students should mark the following items in their study guides, which they will be responsible for on their test:

Identifications:

Chryses, Chryseis, Briseis, Nestor, Patroclus

Comprehension Questions:

Numbers 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 11

Quotations:

"Sing, O goddess, the anger ..."

— Homer's appeal to the Muse

Teacher Notes

At the end of each lesson you will tell students the short list of information which they will be responsible for on their test. Since this is the first lesson, **spend more time** explaining testing and study expectations. You will want to repeat this periodically before the first test, and even after that, so that students can internalize the course expectations.

There will be three tests for the *Iliad* and three for the *Odyssey*. Each *Iliad* test **IS** cumulative, but students will only need to study new highlighted material and the last test (not all highlighted material from past sections).

Iliad tests will come after Book 10, Book 18, and Book 24. The final test will have slightly

greater weighting, but generally student performance is lowest on the middle test. At that point, the material has grown significantly, but the book is not finished. Students seem to expect that the test will not be more difficult than the first and might study less. The most important reminder at the mid-point is that students must study the last test AND the new material. To focus on one and not the other will greatly hurt performance.

All students should clearly circle the ID, Question #, and Quotation bullet points for each week as noted in the *Questions to Mark for Test* section above. The students should memorize the place/character for the ID (there will be no word bank to help with memory or spelling, and more than 2 letters off spelling will be considered wrong). Any part of a comprehension question can be tested as a multiple choice or short answer. Quotations will be given. A student should know who is speaking and to whom—again no word bank or other helps will be given.

Students will memorize the first lines of each epic and a speech in Book 9.

Teacher Guide

Background and Drill

Drill students from the highlighted Identifications, Comprehension Questions, and Quotations from the previous lesson. Remind students to review these often (perhaps make flashcards as well).

The *Iliad* is part of the Epic Cycle, a series of poems referred to in part by Herodotus, Euripides, Aristophanes, Plato, Aristotle, and many others. This helps to explain the small window of the war that it details. While only fragments remain from the other eleven or more poems, details about the Trojan War are often repeated from other epics by writers like those above. It should be noted that the varied religious, historical, and genealogical information given in Homer is often contradicted in other places. Students should not worry if a god or human's genealogy differs from what they have read elsewhere. They also should not build their understanding of Greek and Roman religion only from Homer. While ancient Greeks generally agreed that this was their greatest epic, it was never their only literature.

Book 2 gives an excellent example of an ancient "catalog" from war. Greeks included these in their later historical writing (Herodotus has well over 100 pages of this), and it was a common form throughout the ancient world. An Egyptian temple or tomb would be incomplete without some catalog of the builder-pharaoh's expeditionary forces. This listing was meant to impress readers by the sheer size of forces. It is clear that the chief Greek, Agamemnon, is the one with the most men. While this might seem like dry reading, it proves to be an excellent reference later when one is trying to sort through who commanded the Locrians and on which side the Paeonians fought. When students ask about a person or group, have them check this catalog for themselves. That is historical research.

Drill students from the highlighted Identifications, Comprehension Questions, and Quotations from the previous lesson. Remind students to review these often (perhaps make flashcards as well).

Discussion Help

The Greek idea of divinity is not a Christian ideal. The gods on Olympus are fickle and often have conflicting allegiances. A god may be pleased or displeased with sacrifice depending on the moment and the person offering. Greek gods are very human, with personalities, facing fears and even shame on occasion. After sacrificing an animal to a god or gods, the Greeks eat the meat.

Ajax son of Telamon = Ajax the Greater

Ajax son of Oileus = Ajax the Lesser (but quicker)

BOOK 2: BEFORE BATTLE

Identify Places and Characters:

| | |
|-------------|---|
| Dawn | "rosy-fingered" and "saffron-robed" Eos—goddess of the break of day |
| Icarian Sea | part of the Aegean sea around the island Icaria; where Icarus drowned |
| Eurybates | (yoo-ri-ba-teez) Ithacan and faithful servant of Odysseus; a herald of the Greeks |
| Thersites | (ther-si-teez) ugliest of the Greeks; an endless talker |
| Aulis | coastal town in eastern Boeotia; where Greeks met before sailing to Troy |
| Scamander | the chief river god who flows through the plain below Troy |
| Iris | messenger of the gods, especially of Zeus |
| Lycia | region in southern Anatolia; capital is Xanthus; led by Sarpedon and Glaucus |

Comprehension Questions:

1. Of what did Zeus inform Agamemnon in the "Lying Dream"? Why did Zeus send this dream to Agamemnon? Zeus told Agamemnon to conduct the Greeks into battle and take Troy.
Zeus wanted to honor Achilles and destroy many men at the ships.
2. Whose form did the dream take? Why? Nestor's; Agamemnon respected him.
3. What unusual plan did Agamemnon devise to test the Greeks? Agamemnon decided to tell the men to flee while the other leaders prevented them.
4. Athene prevented the Greeks from leaving by sending Odysseus, her favorite.
5. What was Thersites' criticism of Agamemnon? How did Odysseus respond? Thersites complained that Agamemnon received too many prizes. Odysseus told him to bridle his tongue, then threatened and beat him.
6. How did Calchas convince the Greeks that they would win the war in the tenth year? Before leaving Greece, Calchas interpreted an omen from Zeus. A serpent ate 8 sparrows and their mother, then turned to stone. Thus the Greeks would win the war in the tenth year.

7. While the Greeks prepared for battle, Agamemnon sacrificed a bull. Name the six people he invited. Who else showed up? Nestor, Idomeneus, Ajax, Ajax, Diomed, and Odysseus were invited. Though not invited, Menelaus showed up.
8. The "Catalogue of Ships" is an oft-used literary technique in ancient oral and written traditions. All of Greece is mentioned in this section, and many of the warriors had hero cults in their home cities during the classical age. Which king brought the most men? 2nd most? 3rd most? Who brought the fewest? 1st—Agamemnon, 100 ships; 2nd—Nestor, 90 ships; tie for 3rd—Idomeneus and Diomed, 80 ships each; Nireus was the second most handsome Greek (next to Achilles) but had the fewest ships—only 3.
9. How many men did not fight because of the quarrel between Agamemnon and Achilles (estimate 120 men per ship)? fifty ships = approximately 6000 men
10. Which Greek drove the best horses? Eumelus drove horses bred by Apollo.
11. Next to Achilles, who was the greatest footsoldier of the Greeks? Ajax son of Telamon

Quotations:

- "Odysseus has done many a good thing ere now in fight and council, but he never did the Argives a better turn than when he stopped this fellow's mouth from prating further. He will give the kings no more of his insolence."
— the Greeks about Thersites
- Achilles was now holding aloof at his ships by reason of his quarrel with Agamemnon, and his people passed their time upon the seashore, throwing discs or aiming with spears at a mark, and in archery. Their horses stood each by his own chariot, champing lotus and wild celery. The chariots were housed under cover, but their owners, for lack of leadership, wandered hither and thither about the host and went not forth to fight.

Discussion Questions:

1. Is a god obligated to answer a request accompanied by sacrifices? What does this tell you about the Greek perception of divinity? After sacrificing an animal, what do the Greeks do with the meat?
2. Differentiate between the two Ajaxes.

Questions to Mark for Test:

Students should mark the following items in their study guides, which they will be responsible for on their test (Remind students to clearly circle the ID, Question #, and Quotation bullet point):

Identifications:

Eurybates, Thersites, Scamander, Iris

Comprehension Questions:

Numbers 1, 3, 4, 11

Quotations:

"*Odysseus has done ...*"

— the Greeks about Thersites

Teacher Notes

Recommend or require students to make flashcards to prepare for testing.

Students should have reviewed "The Friends and Foes of Homer's *Iliad*" in the Appendix of this study guide by this point. The teacher should regularly ask who these characters are. Students should be retested over that material until they get a perfect score. It makes a great difference while reading when the student has mastered these.

Testing Note: Students must spell all Identifications correctly (within two letters is

a good rule of thumb unless a misspelling changes the answer to something else—*Chryses* and *Chyrseis* have one letter different; *Tartarus* and *Gargarus* in Book 8 have two letters different). Therefore, students should study/practice spelling these during their regular study. The students will have the italicized definition on the test, and there will be no word bank for the places or characters themselves. *Now is the time to establish good study habits!*

Essays and Assignments

Draw or reference a map of Asia Minor and the Aegean while teaching Book 2. Print a copy for students and ask them to write in the places themselves. Excellent (and free!) blank and labeled maps of the Ancient world can be found on the Ancient World Mapping Center website hosted by UNC Chapel Hill. Make a transparency for quick reference while teaching. A sense of place greatly heightens the meaning and immediacy of the epics. A map including the Greek territories will also be immensely helpful when you begin Homer's *Odyssey*.

Find the various map options at: <http://www.unc.edu/awmc/mapsforstudents.html>