

## Topic A: Myths & Stories

### Student Pack 1: The Iliad

## The Iliad – fact file



**Author:** Attributed to Homer but existed as an oral story before it was recorded in text.

**Language:** Ancient Greek

**Style:** Epic poem

**Date written:** 8<sup>th</sup> century BCE

**Subject:** The ten-year siege of Troy by the Greek forces following the stealing away by the Trojans of a Greek queen.

### Themes:

- fate & the influence of the gods on mortal human life
- glory, heroism & honour
- anger & hubris (too much self-importance)

### Main characters:

#### GREEKS

**Achilles**, near-immortal fighter  
**Patroclus**, his best friend  
**Menelaus**, king of Sparta,  
Helen's husband  
**Agamemnon**, king of Mycenae,  
Menelaus' brother  
**Odysseus**, king of Ithaca

#### THE GODS

**Zeus**, king of the gods &  
in charge  
**Hera**, his wife  
**Athena**, goddess of war  
**Apollo**, god of disease

#### ΙΛΙΑΣ

Μῆνιν ἄειδε, θεά, Πηληϊάδεω Ἀχιλῆος  
οὐλομένην, ἣ μυρ' Ἀχαιοῖς ἄλγε' ἔειπκε,  
πολλὰς δ' ἰφθίμους ψυχὰς Ἄϊδι προΐαφεν  
ἥρώων, αὐτοὺς δὲ ἐλώρια τῶχε κόνεσσιν  
οἰωνοῖσ' τε πάσι· Διὸς δ' ἐτελείετο βουλή,  
ἣξ' οὐδ' ἄρ' ἐπ' ἄρ' ἀπὸ πρῶτα διαστήτην ἔρισαντε  
Ἀτρεΐδης τε ἀναξ' ἀνδρῶν καὶ δῖος Ἀχιλλεύς.

The opening lines of the Iliad  
in its original Greek language

#### TROJANS

**Priam**, king of Troy, father  
of Paris and Hector  
**Paris**, prince of Troy, took  
Helen  
**Hector**, best Trojan fighter,  
Paris' brother  
**Helen**, wife of Menelaus

# The story of the Iliad



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Our epic tale starts with an argument. Over an apple. But not just any ordinary apple. No, this apple was made entirely of gold, and was inscribed 'to the most beautiful'. And the characters arguing over who was the most beautiful, and who should have the apple? No ordinary mortals. This fight was between Athena, goddess of wisdom, Aphrodite, goddess of love and beauty, and Hera, queen of the gods. None of the other gods would dare take sides in this dispute between three such powerful goddesses, so they chose a mortal to judge. This mortal's name was Paris. Paris was the rather good-looking son of Priam, King of Troy. His sister, the princess Cassandra, could see into the future, and she predicted that he would cause Troy to be destroyed by fire. Cassandra was usually right about things, but unfortunately, she was usually ignored.

So, the three goddesses – Hera, Athena and Aphrodite – gave the young mortal Paris the job of choosing which of them was the fairest. Hera promised him money and power. Athena promised to make him wise above all others. But Aphrodite promised that she would give him the most beautiful woman in the world to marry. Aphrodite got the golden apple. Athena and Hera got very cross.

A few years later, Aphrodite let Paris know that the most beautiful woman was just a boat-ride away, living in the kingdom of Sparta. The only problem was, she was Helen, Queen of Sparta, which meant that she was already married to the King of Sparta. Undaunted, Paris set off to Sparta where the king, Menelaus, welcomed him warmly, unaware of his plans. The goddess Aphrodite worked her divine magic to make Helen fall in love with Paris, and the two ran away in secret, back to Troy.

Menelaus was not happy, to say the least. He called on his brother, Agamemnon, to help him. Now, Agamemnon was King of Mycenae, and the most powerful king throughout the whole of Greece. He helped his brother to put together a large and powerful army to sail to Troy and take back Helen, his brother's wife.

Amongst the warriors fighting for Menelaus and Agamemnon were many mighty heroes. The greatest of these was Achilles. With a goddess for a mother, he was semi-divine. For added protection, his mother had dipped him in the River Styx as a baby – something that was supposed to make his body invulnerable to injury. As a result, he had a fearsome reputation as a warrior.

Another Greek warrior was Odysseus, yet he was great in a different way to Achilles. A mere mortal, his greatest strength was his cunning and his ability to come up with a clever plan in tricky situations. In fact, he'd tried to get out of going to war altogether by pretending that he was mad, but in the end came to the aid of Agamemnon and Menelaus.

The Greek forces, led by Agamemnon, arrived at the shores of Troy. The flat land around the walled city of Troy became the site for nine years of battle, as the Greeks besieged the city sheltering Paris and his stolen wife Helen. However, neither side emerged victorious. At this point, the gods and goddesses decided to interfere in human events. Of course, Hera and Athena were still cross with Paris because he gave Aphrodite the golden apple, and so they sided with the Greeks. On the Trojan side, of course, was Aphrodite: after all, she started the whole bother in the first place. Troy was also supported by Apollo, god of music and medicine, because the Greek King Agamemnon had insulted him. Apollo decided to teach Agamemnon a lesson by striking his men down with a deadly plague.

# The story of the Iliad (continued)



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As if an outbreak of plague wasn't enough, things got even worse for the Greeks. A silly argument among the Greek warriors about who owned what slave girl turned really nasty, and Achilles, the top Greek warrior, walked off in a huff, taking his soldiers with him. Worse still, Zeus, the mightiest god of all, got involved, helping the Trojans to greater victories in their battles against the Greek forces. In one of the battles, the gods Zeus and Apollo had ensured that Hector, prince of Troy, was able to kill Patroclus, dearest and best friend of Achilles.

Achilles was furious. Seeing his best friend's lifeless body, he swore to avenge him. Putting on new armour (he'd lent his old armour to Patroclus), Achilles led his troops into battle to face Hector, killer of his best friend Patroclus. Apollo protected Hector but Achilles had Athena on his side. Finally, in a one-on-one duel to the death, Achilles got the better of Hector, and stabbed him through his armour. Finally, Patroclus was avenged.

But, as in most wars, things didn't stop there. Apollo got involved in the mortals' fighting again. The god inspired Paris – yes, the troublemaker who started this whole war – to take a very fortunate shot with his bow and arrow at Achilles. Now, as we heard before, Achilles had been lucky as a baby, as his goddess mother had dipped him in the River Styx, whose waters had made his body invulnerable. No sword could cut him, no spear could pierce him. However, when he was being dipped in the magical waters, his mother had held him by the heel, so this part of his body received no special protection. And guess where Paris's arrow hit him? Yep, in his heel. The invincible Achilles was finally defeated and died.

Without their greatest warrior, how were the Greeks to win? Not by fighting, suggested Odysseus, but by clever tactics and a cunning plan. He instructed the Greek forces to build a huge wooden horse. When it was finished, it was left outside the city gates of Troy, and the Greek ships sailed away. The suspicious Trojans at first went to check that the Greeks had really left. They found one Greek fighter left behind, who told King Priam and the people of Troy that the Greek forces had given up and left, and that the giant wooden horse was an offering to Athena, so that she would see them all home safely. So, the Trojans brought the horse into their city, and celebrated the departure of the Greeks and the end of a very long war.

Of course, that wasn't the end of the war. In the dead of night, with the Trojan people fast asleep after their celebrations, a band of soldiers, led by Odysseus, crept out of the belly of the wooden horse. Stealthily, they captured the royal palace and killed King Priam. At the same time, the Greek ships sailed back from their nearby hiding places and stormed Troy, looting treasure, killing people, burning down houses. Now the war was finally over, but not exactly as the Trojans had imagined just a few hours before. King Menelaus, remembering exactly why this war had been fought, found Helen, put her on his ship and with all the other Greeks set sail, finally, for home.

## More research



**The Trojan Horse: The Fall of Troy** (Graphic Myths and Legends) by Ron Fontes, Justine Fontes, Gordon Purcell

**The Orchard Book of Greek Gods and Goddesses** by Geraldine Mccaughrean

**Black Ships Before Troy: The Story Of The Iliad** by Rosemary Sutcliff

**The Trojan Horse: How the Greeks Won the War** by Emily Little

**The Iliad and the Odyssey** by Marcia Williams



**Classic Tales: The War With Troy** <https://classictales.co.uk/war-with-troy>

**BBC School Radio** <https://www.bbc.co.uk/teach/school-radio/history-ks2-ancient-greece-the-trojan-war-troy/zhbdd6f>

**The British Museum: Why the Trojan War started**  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v2pCwxCX2as>

**Greek Myth Comix: Iliad Comix**  
<https://greekmythcomix.com/iliad-comix/>



A Lego Trojan horse



## Ideas for projects

- How could we write a newspaper covering the events of the Iliad? Can we imagine interviews with leading figures in the Trojan War?
- Can we write and put on a play showing Paris as he decides whether to give the golden apple to Hera, Aphrodite and Athena?
- What's the best way to design and construct a model of the Trojan Horse?
- Could we use all our writing and drawing skills to create a graphic novel version of the Iliad?