

Teaching notes on MCG Homer & epic poetry

Slide 1

Learning objective: To encounter stories from Homer's Iliad and Odyssey and to make a card game based on the characters in these stories

Slide 2

An introduction to Homer and his epics. It's likely that your class already know many of the tales told by Homer, but they may not know that he was the author of them. We know very little about Homer, apart from his name ('Homerus' in Greek). We don't even know when he lived: it could have been the 12th Century BCE (mouse-click), or much later in the 8th Century BCE (mouse-click). But we're very sure that it was a long, long time ago and it's amazing that his stories, written as epic poems, have survived.

What do you know about 'epic' poetry's style or content? [The poems are long, full of great heroes and events] What other cultures had 'epic' poetry? [The Ramayana and Mahabharata from India, Beowulf in Old English, or Norse sagas] How do we use the word 'epic' in modern times? [brilliant, great, awesome!]

In fact, we're not even sure if 'Homer' is just one person. The work that he is thought to have composed could well have been added to or changed by lots of other people over the ages (mouse-click). But whoever wrote the tales, you probably have already heard some of them:

The Trojan War (mouse-click): What does the class know about the Trojan War?

The Trojan Horse (mouse-click): What does the class know about the Trojan Horse?

The Cyclops (mouse-click): What do you know about this story? Who was the Cyclops?

People being turned into animals by witches. This is the story of Circe, Odysseus, and his unfortunate crew who got turned into pigs.

During this lesson, we're going to hear more of Homer's epic tales.

Slide 3

... shows you the location of the Homeric epics, showing where Troy is in relation to Greece. To the right of the map is an overview of the two Homeric epics, the Iliad and the Odyssey, and their relation to the Trojan war.

Slide 4

... sets out what we're now going to do for the rest of the lesson.

First of all (mouse-click), the pupils will collectively tell the story of the Iliad and the Odyssey. The download file named 7.03a_epic_readthrough.pdf is an accessible, condensed version of the Iliad and the Odyssey, broken into thirty chunks, so each pupil can have a turn at reading. At the beginning of each 'chunk' is a phonetic pronunciation guide to the Greek names contained in the text. Pupils can practice these tricky words before reading.

Secondly (mouse-click), working in groups, the class will create sets of Epic Trumps cards. The download file named 7.03a_cards_template.pdf contains thirty character cards (with rankings based on intelligence, power, bravery and beauty according to their portrayal by Homer). The cards need cutting out, sticking onto stiff card, and illustrating with the relevant character. Either each pupil can be given one card (creating one set for the class), or each table group can be given a complete set, so each pupil illustrates five or six. If short on time, this can make a nice home task.

Thirdly (mouse-click), once completed, the cards can then be used in a game. Cards are shuffled and dealt between 2–4 players. Each player then takes it in turns to draw the card from the top of their pile and nominate a category. Each player then lays down their card, and whoever has the highest score in the nominated category wins the cards. Players are eliminated as they go down to zero cards. If two or more cards draw on the highest score, the cards are put into the middle of the game and can be won by the next hand.

Slide 5

The plenary slide:

Question 1 What started the Trojan War? [Paris judging Aphrodite to be the winner of the Golden Apple and Aphrodite promising Paris he could marry Helen, wife of the Greek king Menelaus and the most beautiful woman in the world.]

Question 2 How did the siege of Troy end? [Odysseus came up with the idea of leaving a 'gift' of a giant wooden horse for the Trojans, whilst the Greeks pretended to have given up the fight. The horse was full of Greek warriors who, once the horse had been taken into Troy, opened the gates and let in all the other Greek fighters.]

Question 3 What did Odysseus and his men do to the Cyclops Polyphemus? [Blinded him by sticking a sharp stick into his only eye – ouch!]