



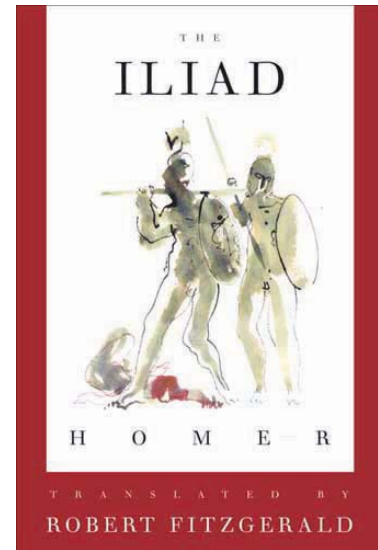
Reading Group Gold

The Iliad

by Homer; Translated by Robert Fitzgerald;
Introduction by Andrew Ford

To the Teacher

This teacher's guide is keyed to the Robert Fitzgerald translation of *The Iliad*. Striking a balance between traditional poetic artistry and immediacy of language, Fitzgerald gives students the full measure of the original epic's astonishing power.



ISBN: 0-374-52905-1 | 640 pages

Little is certain when it comes to the origins of *The Iliad* or its partner epic and sequel, *The Odyssey*. Both epics circulated from the dawn of Greek literature under the name of Homer, but who this fabled poet was, and when and where he lived, remain riddles. Already some ancient critics doubted a single poet wrote both epics, and most modern scholars prefer to ascribe the creation and initial shaping of both stories to oral tradition. As legends about heroes and their exploits were handed down from generation to generation over many centuries, bards developed highly formalized language to chant the stories in public performances. These singers had a large repertoire of tales from which they chose when aiming to satisfy a particular audience's demand, or more likely the request of the local lord. The material was familiar and the language traditional, indeed formulaic, so that a good singer could always perform a song in proper style and meter to suit the performance situation in theme, episodes, details, scope, and tone. The songs gave audiences a vision of their ancestors, people more glorious and admirable (they believed) than they themselves, whether in victory or in defeat. In their greatness, in their heroic pursuit of glory and undying fame, the epic characters defined the heroic code the listeners, at least initially members of a warrior class, were to follow. What conferred undying fame was epic song itself: listeners of epic would have aspired to become the subject of song for subsequent generations.

There must have been many signal moments in the history of epic before *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* achieved the forms in which we know them, but two appear, in retrospect, to have been supremely significant. Many towns and settlements were sacked as peoples competed for land and power in what is now Greece and Turkey, but it seems that a city known as Troy or Ilion, on the northwest coast of Asia Minor and near the strait called the Dardanelles—and for that strategic reason a significant power—was the frequent target of marauding attacks and sieges. One of the most devastating destructions it suffered fell shortly before or after 1200 B.C.E. Around this destruction there seem to have coalesced stories of a Greek army on a mammoth campaign to sack the fortified city that sat astride sea and land lanes to the richer east. What was the reason for the expedition? Not greed and power politics—so legend has it—but the drive to recover something yet more precious: Greek honor in the shape of Helen, the beautiful wife of Meneláos, king of Sparta. Helen, the story went, had been abducted by Paris, the handsome if spoiled Trojan prince. And so the tale was spun backwards.

The legendary campaign against Troy took ten years. *The Iliad*, long though it is, narrates a crucial patch of the tenth year only, when the greatest hero of the Greeks, Akhilleus, fell out with the Greek commander-in-chief, Agamémnon, Meneláos' brother. By the end of *The Iliad*, Akhilleus has lost his companion, Patróklos, but has killed the great Trojan hero, Hektor. Troy is doomed, even if its actual fall as well as Akhilleus' death are narrated in the cycle of songs, now only fragments, that follow *The Iliad*. The storytelling cycle continued with stories of the homecomings



Reading Group Gold

To the Teacher

of the various Greek heroes. It is the homecoming of the craftiest of those heroes, Odysseus, that is told in *The Odyssey*.

The other signal moment in the development of the two Homeric poems was, in fact, a series of moments, for only gradually did poems transmitted orally come to be written. By the middle of the eighth century B.C.E., there emerged singers—one, two, or more—who had so mastered the traditional material and style that they could spin out versions of these episodes of the Trojan cycle that were extraordinary in size, subtlety, and complexity of design, versions that increasingly became the models for performances of *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*. The exact mode in which the Homeric poems were first written down remains obscure, but by the second half of the sixth century B.C.E., the technology of writing in an alphabet adapted from Phoenician letters had advanced to the point that written versions of the Homeric epics became at least thinkable. While we have evidence of considerable variation in written versions of the epics well into the Hellenistic Period—the era following the death of Alexander the Great in 323 B.C.E.—and know of continued “live” performances at public festivals, the range of permissible variation was growing ever more limited. By the third century B.C.E., scholars were working on the epics as written texts, studying and annotating the Homeric poems and comparing different copies. By this date each epic was divided into twenty-four “books.” It is for all intents and purposes this text, after transcription from papyrus rolls to vellum codices and finally printed on paper, that we read, whether in scholarly editions of the Greek original or in translations in many languages like the one you have before you.

However fascinating the history of its transmission, the story *The Iliad* tells is more compelling still. It is the story of a great military campaign, one that seeks redress for a grievance; when it ends, that redress is all but certain, though already the ultimate victors have paid terrible and unanticipated penalties almost as grievous as those the vanquished will pay.

The Iliad offers another perspective as well. High above the plain of Ilion, and usually invisible, the gods are at work—and play. The story of Paris’ abduction of Helen, the justification for the Greeks’ siege and sack of Troy, turns out to be a secondary effect of wrangling among the gods. This may be the strangest feature of the poem for modern students, for many reasons. For starters, apart from Zeus, none of the gods seems to be in the least “god-like.” Zeus’ consort Hêra, his daughter Athêna, his brother Poseidon, Aphrodîtê, and Apollo, along with other deities, including lesser ones (such as Thetis, Akhilleus’ mother), all jockey for power and standing. They have favorites and enemies among the mortals and openly take sides in the struggle between the Greeks and Trojans. Helen herself was Aphrodîtê’s reward to Paris for his having declared her the winner in the heavenly beauty contest between her, Hêra, and Athêna, in which each blatantly sought to bribe the judge with a promise of a fabulous reward. The gods, then, are hardly models of ideal behavior and values. The gods enjoy a world in which passions can be indulged at will and virtually without check. Virtually, that is, because ultimately, Zeus has the power to bend happenings to his will, even if he, too, must accept the loss of his mortal son Sarpêdôn. He grants Hektor and his Trojans great glory up to a point—at the cost of the lives of many Greeks—honoring his promise to Thetis, but he sets limits on Aphrodîtê and Apollo’s support of the Trojans, for its destruction is decreed.

But the great wonder of *The Iliad* is the poem itself. Homer—whether we think of him as a single creative power or the name we give to the tradition that evolved this particular combination of episodes from the last year of the Trojan War—is a virtuoso of prolongation, devising ways to extend the basic line of the plot and include within it bravura variations of detail, tempo, and tone. From within the temporal frame of a relatively few days he includes the history of the Trojan War—indeed, the history of Troy and the lineages of dozens of heroes, with episodes from earlier generations—just as he brings into a military setting, via myriad similes, worlds of hunting and farming,



Reading Group Gold

To the Teacher

fishing and weaving. Though this is an epic of war, peace—or the dream of peace—is never far distant, whether in flashbacks to earlier, happier times or in scenes on the divinely wrought shield of Akhilleus. At the beginning of the poem, Homer asked the Muse, guarantor of epic memory, to sing through him. The Muse still sings in the pages of your book, and she is eager to begin. Attend her, and wonder.

Preparing to Read

The questions, exercises, and assignments that follow are designed not only to guide your students through *The Iliad* and to help them approach it primarily as a compelling narrative that speaks to us directly today, but also to unlock an artifact from another time and place and culture that challenges us to consider what is human and universal, what is culture-bound and relative. *The Iliad* is at once an archaeological treasure and a great read, an adventure story and a time machine. As a compelling narrative, its human dimension will speak immediately and directly to students. What must the Trojans think of Helen? What must Meneláos think of her, and what must everyone think of him? Could any slight to someone's honor be so great as to justify a general refusing to go into battle? What must Akhilleus think after his petulance leads to the death of his Patróklos? Or, right at the start, what must Briseïs feel, “dumped” and—if one really wants to imagine a contemporary situation—traded from one gang leader to another?

To prepare your students, you may want to show them images from Greece and other Eastern Mediterranean cultures from ca. 2000 B.C.E. to 500 B.C.E. to help them visualize the world in which the Homeric heroes and Homeric audiences lived. If you can arrange a field trip to a local museum that has a collection of Greek antiquities, so much the better. You may also want to have them develop a time line from the Bronze and Iron Ages to the present, on which you can help them plot the fall of Troy and the final phases of the development of the Homeric poems against the events of other cultures. Independent of such specifics, one should ask what it means for readers today to overhear the voices of so fundamentally “other” a culture. To what extent should we be prepared to suspend our own deeply ingrained moral expectations and accept the fact that both Greeks and Trojans owned slaves? That captured women were booty? That animals were sacrificed to gods? That even humans were slain in memory of Patróklos? How does *The Iliad* itself present us with questions of cultural difference?

As an epic meant to commemorate a culture's heroes, *The Iliad* is dense with names and details. Encourage your students to keep a journal of their reading and to bring to class any and all questions that occur to them as they read. Finally, don't forget that *The Iliad* was, and in your translation is, poetry. Have each student select and prepare one or more passages he or she finds particularly significant or intriguing and then read them aloud to the class with feeling and dramatic gesture. You could also have pairs or small groups of students do a concerted reading or even perform certain key scenes from the text—for example, the initial confrontation between Agamémnon and Akhilleus, Hektor's leave-taking of Andrómakhê, the embassy to Akhilleus, Priam begging Akhilleus to release Hektor's body, or any one of several divine councils.



Reading Group Gold

Questions for Basic Understanding

BOOK I:

What is the cause of the quarrel between Akhilleus and Agamémnon? Why does Akhilleus want to kill Agamémnon, and why doesn't he? How does Akhilleus want his mother Thetis to help him, and why does he expect Zeus will be inclined to listen to her? What problems does Zeus have with his wife Hêra?

BOOK II:

What dream does Zeus send Agamémnon? How does Agamémnon respond? How and why do Hêra and Athêna rally the troops? What special talents of Odysseus are revealed by this entire episode? What is the portent at Aulis that he recalls for the Akhaians? Does Agamémnon already rue his quarrel with Akhilleus? Who are the Muses, and why does the poet call on them again shortly after the middle of Book II (line 567)? What extended passage does this introduce?

BOOK III:

Why does Aléxandros (Paris) offer to engage Meneláos in single combat when the former knows he is no fighter? Why does Priam hold Helen blameless for the suffering she has brought on both Trojans and Greeks? Why does Priam go back to the city before the duel? How does Paris escape death at Meneláos' hands? What is Helen's reaction to Aphrodîtê's invitation? How does Agamémnon interpret Paris' disappearance from the battle field?

BOOK IV:

Who among the gods supports the Greeks, who the Trojans? Why is Hêra not content with the outcome of the single combat? How and why do the gods see that the truce is broken, and why do they arrange for it to be broken by the Trojans first? How do both Agamémnon and Meneláos react? What strengths of Agamémnon as a military leader emerge in the ensuing crisis?

BOOK V:

What is special about Aineías' team of horses? How and why do the gods take special care of Aineías? What happens when Aphrodîtê enters the fray? Are other gods and goddesses better fighters? Why is the encounter between Tlêpólemos and Sarpêdôn so fraught for Zeus? What is the outcome of their fight? Which side overall gets the better of the fighting in Book V?

BOOK VI:

How do Meneláos and Agamémnon differ in their views of taking Adrêstos as a prisoner for ransom? Why do Glaukos and Diomêdês abstain from battling each other? Does Athêna listen to the prayers of the Trojan women? How does Helen address Hektor, and what opinion does she claim to have of Paris? What reason does Andrómakhê have to hate Akhilleus in particular? What future does Hektor imagine for her?

BOOK VII:

Which gods arrange for the truce between the Akhaians and the Trojans? Who volunteers to fight Hektor? How is it decided who will stand up against him? Why don't the Trojans do as Antênor suggests and return Helen to the Greeks?

BOOK VIII:

How does Zeus turn the tide? In what terms does Hektor insult Diomêdês? What sign does Zeus send that heartens the Greeks, and indicates that he has heard and granted Agamémnon's prayer? Are Hêra and Athêna of a mind to obey Zeus' command? How does he thwart them?



Reading Group Gold

Questions for Basic Understanding

BOOK IX:

Why is Agamémnon now eager to make peace with Akhilleus? Does Agamémnon admit he was wrong and take full responsibility? What is Odysseus' role in the embassy? How does Akhilleus respond to him and why? Who is Phoenix and what is his role in the embassy? Is the embassy successful?

BOOK X:

What is the purpose of the Greeks' night expedition? What of the Trojans'? What happens when they meet?

BOOK XI:

Why does Zeus still favor the Trojans? Does this mean the Trojans suffer no losses? How does Zeus "manage" the battle to his liking? What moves Akhilleus to send Patroklos to the Greeks? What is the purpose of Nestor's lengthy narrative?

BOOK XII:

What is the omen or "bird-sign" that frightens the Trojans? How is it or should it be interpreted? What is Sarpêdôn's particular role in storming the ramparts? Why does he have such special protection?

BOOK XIII:

What does Poseidon, god of the sea and bringer of earthquakes, undertake to rally the Greeks? In what various ways do the mortal fighters perceive his divine force? What in particular moves Aineias to face Idomeneus in battle?

BOOK XIV:

Why does Odysseus upbraid Agamémnon so unmercifully? How and why does Hêra deceive Aphrodîtê? How does she bribe Sleep? What is the result of her seducing and "sidelining" Zeus for a time?

BOOK XV:

How does Zeus arrange future events and see to it that the other gods obey his commands? What dangers does the wrath of Poseidon threaten? How is that wrath averted?

BOOK XVI:

How and why does Patroklos appeal to Akhilleus when he does? To what does Akhilleus agree? Does Akhilleus bear ill will to the Greeks in general? How does Hêra persuade a hesitating Zeus not to prevent the death of Sarpêdôn? How and why does Patroklos exceed the limits Akhilleus set for him? What are the consequences?

BOOK XVII:

Why does Glaukos the Lykian upbraid Hektor and threaten that the Lykians, Trojan allies, will now abandon Troy? Whose armor had Patroklos' been wearing, and what will it mean for Hektor to put it on?

BOOK XVIII:

What is the scale of lamentation for Patroklos? Why is Hêphaistos so well disposed to Thetis? Describe Akhilleus' shield and discuss both the scenes depicted on it as well as the way the poet presents their creation.

BOOK XIX:

What is the relevance of Agamémnon's fable of Zeus and folly? What are Odysseus' practical concerns that run counter to Akhilleus' heroic singlemindedness? Why does Briseïs feel special grief over the death of Patroklos? Who is Akhilleus' son?



Reading Group Gold

Questions for Basic Understanding

BOOK XX:

Why do the gods save Aineias? Why does Hektor at first hang back and then, later, close with Akhilleus? How is he spared?

BOOK XXI:

For what purpose does Akhilleus take twelve young men prisoner? What further harm does Akhilleus do to Lykáôn after killing him? Why is the river Skamánder provoked with Akhilleus? What roles do Poseidon, Hêra, and Hêphaistos play in helping Akhilleus against these superhuman forces? What gods does Athêna strike? How does Apollo create a diversion so that many Trojans can reach safety within the city walls?

BOOK XXII:

With what arguments do Priam and Hêkabê try to dissuade Hektor from facing Akhilleus outside the walls? What motivates Hektor to reject their pleas and make his last stand? What role do the gods play? Will Akhilleus bargain with Hektor and agree to return his body to his parents for proper burial? What end does Hektor prophesy for Akhilleus? What does Akhilleus do to Hektor's corpse?

BOOK XXIII:

Why does Akhilleus refuse to bathe himself? What does Patrôklos' shade say to Akhilleus? Why is burial so crucial to the dead man? What roles do various gods play in attending to the corpses of Patrôklos and Hektor? Who and what else were burnt on Patrôklos' funeral pyre? What is the order of competitors at the finish of the chariot race? What is the order and value of the prizes set out for the wrestling match? How does Agamémnon win the top prize for javelin throwing?

BOOK XXIV:

Why do the gods decide Akhilleus must agree to surrender Hektor's body for ransom? How much time has elapsed since Hektor's death? How does Zeus arrange for his message to Akhilleus to be delivered? And his message to Priam? Why does Priam reject the advice of his wife, Hêkabê? What does he think of his surviving sons? What omen encourages Priam and Hêkabê that he will be received with kindness? What identity does Hermês take on as he guides and assists Priam? With what appeal does Priam begin his speech to Akhilleus, hoping to soften his heart? How does Akhilleus take care lest he be moved to anger once again and defy the express command of Zeus? How long a truce does Akhilleus promise Priam, so that the Trojans have time to mourn and bury Hektor before war resumes? What end does Andrómakhê fear for their son? In what terms does Helen—even Helen!—lament Hektor?

Questions for Further Study

BOOK I:

In the altercation between Akhilleus and Agamémnon, who wins, who loses? How does each "save face"? What do we learn about the character of each man? How is the council of the gods similar to the assembly of Greek leaders, and how is it different?

BOOK II:

What kind of god sends a false dream to mortals? Is Agamémnon an effective leader? Why does Homer include the entire episode of the "false retreat"? What does Thersites, as well as the attitude of other characters and the poet to Thersites, reveal about heroic ideals? What does his inclusion add to the epic?



Reading Group Gold

Questions for Further Study

BOOK II:

Make a list of all the similes in Book II. From what spheres of life are they drawn? How do they function? What pleasure could audiences derive from the “catalogue of ships”? Why does a goddess like Iris take on the form of a specific Trojan and not appear in her own guise?

BOOK III:

What impressions do we receive of the characters of Hektor and Paris (also known as Aléxandros), Helen and Priam? How is Helen treated by the Trojans? How does the sacrifice of animals solemnize the oaths Agamémnon and Odysseus swear? What role do various gods play in this episode? Does Helen love Paris? Is Helen herself merely a pawn?

BOOK IV:

What (if anything) is divine about Zeus and the other Olympian gods? Could Athêna’s incitement (in Laódokos’ form) of Pándaros be understood as Pándaros’ giving in to thoughts a Trojan might well have on his own in such a situation? What is the singer’s judgment of Pándaros? What effect is achieved when the poet describes so exactly how the blood trickles down Meneláos’ thigh, lavishing a full-blown simile on it? Give some examples of how Agamémnon, as he musters the troops, varies his approach depending on the particular strengths and character of the general he’s addressing. What does it portend for the Trojans that the poet compares them as they prepare for battle to flocks of sheep? Is the detail “in a rich man’s pen” (line 524) relevant?

BOOK V:

What is the value of stripping arms from the corpse of the man one has killed—in other words, of taking booty? Describe how the focus on the exploits of one fighter—here it is Diomêdês, son of Tydeus—organizes the battle scene. What do you make of the fact that a mortal like Diomêdês can actually wound a goddess? Are there limits? Can a character like Aineías be spirited away, even avoid a fight, and remain a heroic figure of honor? How does Zeus look upon battles even between the gods? Is his attitude toward Arês, the god of warfare, contradictory?

BOOK VI:

Why does Hélenos advise Hektor to instruct the Trojan women to pray to Athêna and promise sacrifices? What does the episode of Glaukos and Diomêdês suggest about the loyalties and priorities of Homeric heroes? Describe the impact the domestic scenes of Hektor with the various members of his family in Troy have on the narrative tone and rhythm of the poem. Is Homer as convincing a poet of tenderness and laughter as he is of terror and mayhem?

BOOK VII:

Explain the difference in treatment of arms and corpse stipulated by Hektor in the terms of the duel he proposes. What is the importance of offering each side the right to bury its dead according to its fashion? What is the value of the formal speech of challenge, boasting even, which each fighter hurls at the other before engaging in armed struggle? How does Homer make the scene of the two armies each collecting their dead from the battlefield so uncanny?

BOOK VIII:

Does Zeus control the destinies of the Greeks and Trojans he weighs in his balance, or are those destinies beyond his control? What point could there be for Homer to have Agamémnon emphasize Teukros’ “bastard birth” even as he praises him? Zeus announces already that the death of Patróklos will mark the turning point of the war: Does suspense not play a role in the Homeric aesthetic?



Reading Group Gold

Questions for Further Study

BOOK IX:

Discuss the range of gifts Agamémnon promises Akhilleus in order to placate him. What, based on Akhilleus' response to Odysseus, does Akhilleus' value system appear to be? Why does Phoinix tell the story of Meléagros?

BOOK X:

What might be the point of Homer giving the history of various elements of arms, such as the helmet Odysseus wears on the night expedition? What examples of his famous cunning intelligence does Odysseus evince in this episode?

BOOK XI:

How does the poet use similes or comparisons to help his audience more intensely visualize or experience the fighters or the fighting? Assemble specific examples. Does a coherent pattern of comparisons emerge across the book (and, possibly, extend into Book XII)? Did these similes enrich your reading experience or distract you? Do you think Homeric audiences liked them? Why or why not?

BOOK XII:

What impact does the “flash forward” description of Poseidon and Apollo's destruction of the Greek rampart, long after the end of the Trojan War, carry at this juncture in the narrative? Though the epic's division into books is likely a later (though still ancient) development in the poem's evolution, consider whether the final moment of Book XII makes for a sound or effective book ending—indeed, for a dramatic end to the first “half” of *The Iliad*.

BOOK XIII:

What kind of god is Zeus, given that he looks away from Troy at such a crucial moment? How is a “lesser” or “middling” figure like Idómeneus individualized as a character? What aspects of Paris' character are revealed by his response to Hektor's rebuke?

BOOK XIV:

Why would Diomédês think it worthwhile to preface the presentation of his battle strategy with a boasting account of his noble lineage? What kind of an effect does the rapid shift from bloody battlefield to Hêra's luxurious dressing-room have? Are gods such as the ones Homer describes admirable?

BOOK XV:

Does Hêra still hope to stir up trouble by exciting Arês? How unusual in *The Iliad* so far is it for a god to appear and announce himself openly, as Apollo does to Hektor? Do the Trojans misinterpret the peal of thunder Zeus sends in response to Nestor's prayer? Consider how Homer manages to vary one of the most common speech types in these battle books—the speech of a commander rallying his men. Make special note of Aías' ironic, darkly jesting tone.

BOOK XVI:

What is the significance of the details the poet provides of Patróklos' arming? Consider Akhilleus' prayer to Zeus and the poet's revelation of Zeus' response. What is the role of suspense in *The Iliad*? Does the tempo of battle change with Patróklos' entry into the fighting? How does the poet create a focus and rising tension leading to the clash of Patróklos and Sarpêdôn, and keep Sarpêdôn a focal point even after his death? Describe how the influx of the divine, or even unreality, affects an otherwise realistic battle scene when Apollo simply lifts Sarpêdôn's corpse out of the fray.



Reading Group Gold

Questions for Further Study

BOOK XVII CONTINUED:

What is the effect of Homer's careful description of wounds, blood, and gore as soldiers die? What is the effect of his moralizing asides or references to the parents or family of the dead at home? What could it mean for men to exceed the limits set by Zeus or go, as Apollo says to Aineias, "beyond the will of Zeus"?

BOOK XVIII:

Does Akhilleus now, talking to his mother, display full self-awareness? Why is he the darling of the gods, to the point that Athēna will even cover him with her shield? Could a design on a shield possibly show all the action and effects (including sound) Homer describes?

BOOK XIX:

To judge from Akhilleus' first speech in assembly, how important is Brisēis to him? How do both generals find a face-saving explanation for their earlier obstinacy? Does the response of Akhilleus' divine horse surprise or jar, or does it seem fitting to enter ever more into magical realms when Akhilleus is the hero in question?

BOOK XX:

Why does Zeus now encourage the gods to enter the battle, each supporting his or her favored side? Consider the length and formality, implausible from the perspective of reality, of a speech like Aineias' to Akhilleus. What purposes does it serve? How does Homer manage to prolong the scenes of Akhilleus' battle prowess?

BOOK XXI:

Is a battle between Akhilleus and the river Skamānder believable? And is this even a relevant question? Are there other signs here indicating that the poet has moved us to another plane of reality? Why does Zeus take joy in the battle of the gods? Does the scene of the gods' strife serve as "comic relief" to the war of men or does it inspire deeper meditations on war and violence? Can it do both?

BOOK XXII:

How does Homer reveal to us Hektor's inner thoughts? How does the poet show Hektor's piety even as the gods desert and trick him? How does Andrómakhē's initial ignorance of her husband's fate prolong and deepen the piteousness of Hektor's death? Do we as readers sympathize with Andrómakhē or are we always on the side of the Greeks?

BOOK XXIII:

What distinguishes Myrmidons from Akhaians? Are there any other two, Greek or Trojan, who are so bound in friendship as Akhilleus and Patróklos? What are the functions of the funeral games for the Akhaians at this juncture in the war, and what are their functions in the poem at this point, given that Homer lavishes such extensive coverage on them? What considerations, extraneous to our view, can and do enter into the awarding of the prizes? What contrast does this permit us to draw between Homeric society and our own? In what way is the awarding of the prize for javelin throwing a fitting conclusion to the games, and to the strife with which *The Iliad* began?



Reading Group Gold

Questions for Further Study

BOOK XXIV:

Though Zeus could presumably have simply snatched Hektor's corpse from Akhilleus and have it delivered straightaway to Troy, what is the value of his having Akhilleus and Priam play out their parts in the transfer? What does Akhilleus honor in Priam? Akhilleus refers to himself as "of all seasons and none" (line 649). What do you think he means by this? What is the significance of the meal Akhilleus and Priam take together? In what ways does the episode of Priam's visit to Akhilleus and the ransoming of Hektor's corpse serve as a satisfying capstone to the epic we call *The Iliad*? And what of the final scenes, the series of speeches over his body and his cremation? How well do these final scenes conclude the epic?

Expanding Your Knowledge

On a map, pinpoint the following locations and either name the character(s) who come from them or otherwise describe their significance in *The Iliad*: Troy, Ithaka, Sparta, Aulis, Krete, Mykênê, Lykia, Thrace, and Athens.

Consider the situations of *The Iliad* from a range of different points of view, for example: Helen's, Agamémnon's, Meneláos', Akhilleus', Patróklos', Odysseus', Nestor's, Priam's, Andrómakhê's, Hektor's, and Paris'.

The "real world" societies described in *The Iliad* are vastly different from modern societies. Identify and discuss some of these differences. Among the differences you might consider: political systems, slaves, marriage and the role of women, religion, sacrifice, modes of warfare, and conventions concerning prisoners of war (POWs).

Discuss the gods in *The Iliad*. What are the particular roles of Zeus, Athêna, Apollo, Hêra, Arês, Hêphaistos, Thetis, and Hermês (also known as the Wayfinder)? Why and in what ways do humans honor the gods? If you had lived in the time of the Homeric heroes, would you have worshipped the gods?

The Iliad is a poem about war, the campaign of a large coalition to "punish" an overseas power for infractions against certain norms and standards. Discuss this point with reference to modern history and, especially, events of your own lifetime.

The Iliad sets a virtually unattainable standard of objectivity as it looks without squinting at the foibles and follies of the ultimately victorious Greeks, even as it often shows some of the Trojans in a flattering light. Particularly in a time of war, one marvels to see the courtesy that can exist between Greek and Trojan. What might explain this? = There is little of the mutual national demonization we have grown accustomed to. Discuss that last observation with reference to current events.

Do we have any heroes or story cycles comparable to the tales told about the Trojan War? If so, what are they? If not, why do you think that is? As far as we can tell, the Homeric poems were immensely popular in ancient Greece. How does *The Iliad* differ from popular entertainment today? Are there any ways in which it is similar?

Encounters on the battlefield follow one of a limited number of patterns. Describe some. How does Homer keep our focus on the fates of the major figures in the midst of mass battle scenes? How does he deploy less important characters? Homer's technique has often been described as "cinematic" (though historically, of course, the comparison runs the other way). Compare Homer's "camera work" and "editing," especially but not exclusively in his battle scenes, with sequences in some familiar Hollywood genres—say, war films (World War II or Vietnam), Westerns, and space epics.



Reading Group Gold

About the Author

Apart from *The Iliad*, Robert Fitzgerald's versions of *The Odyssey*, *The Aeneid*, and the *Oedipus* plays of Sophocles (with Dudley Fitts) are also classics. An admired poet and teacher of writing, he died in 1985.

Further Reading

In many ways, the most helpful book to read as background to *The Iliad* is its sequel and the other Homeric epic, *The Odyssey*. Numerous translations are available, among them Robert Fitzgerald's celebrated version. There is also *A Guide to the Odyssey: A Commentary on the English Translation of Robert Fitzgerald* (New York, 1993) by Ralph Hexter, the author of this Teacher's Guide. There also exists *A Guide to The Iliad: Based on the Translation by Robert Fitzgerald by James C. Hogan* (Garden City, N.Y., 1979).

For the historical background to the Homeric poems, the indispensable starting point is Ian Morris and Barry Powell, eds., *A New Companion to Homer* (Leiden and New York, 1997). Of older scholarship, Denys L. Page, *History and the Homeric Iliad* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1959), remains provocative. Walter Burkert offers perhaps the best overview in *Greek Religion* (originally 1977; trans. by J. Raffan [Cambridge, Mass., 1985]). Specifically on Near Eastern connections, Martin L. West, *The East Face of Helicon: West Asiatic Elements in Greek Poetry and Myth* (Oxford, 1997) is fascinating. The story of Heinrich Schliemann's search for the site of Troy is a gripping narrative itself, as Susan Heuck Allen's, *Finding the Walls of Troy: Frank Calvert and Heinrich Schliemann at Hisarlik* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1999) describes. It has been fictionalized by Irving Stone in *The Greek Treasure: A Biographical Novel of Henry and Sophia Schliemann* (Garden City, N.Y., 1975). Specifically on the matter of oral composition, while Albert B. Lord's *Singer of Tales* (Cambridge, Mass., 1960) is basic, I would recommend any of several recent books by Gregory Nagy (e.g., *Homeric Questions* [Austin, 1996]). On the issue of writing, an important element in the history of transmission, Eric A. Havelock, *The Muse Learns to Write: Reflections on Orality and Literacy from Antiquity to the Present* (New Haven, 1986), and Barry B. Powell, *Homer and the Origin of the Greek Alphabet* (Cambridge, 1991) represent two very different approaches. Mary Renault, who wrote so many fictions about ancient Greece, describes the life of the archaic Greek poet Simonides as he travels through the Greek world performing, in *The Praise Singer* (New York, 1978).

Among the individual interpretive studies of *The Iliad*, a very good starting place would be Gregory Nagy, *The Best of the Achaeans: Concepts of the Hero in Archaic Greek Poetry* (Baltimore, 1979). Several broad studies from the 1970s and 1980s worth keeping in mind are Hugh Lloyd-Jones, *The Justice of Zeus* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1971); James M. Redfield, *Nature and Culture in the Iliad: The Tragedy of Hector* (Chicago, 1975); M. W. Edwards, *Homer: Poet of the Iliad* (Baltimore, 1987); Richard P. Martin, *The Language of Heroes: Speech and Performance in the Iliad* (Ithaca, 1989); Seth L. Schein, *The Mortal Hero: An Introduction to Homer's Iliad* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1984); and Jasper Griffin, *Homer on Life and Death* (Oxford, 1980). Of more recent scholarship, Laura M. Slatkin, *Power of Thetis: Allusion and Interpretation in the Iliad* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1991); Oliver Taplin, *Homeric Soundings: The Shaping of the Iliad* (Oxford, 1992); Graham Zanker, *The Heart of Achilles: Characterization and Personal Ethics in the Iliad* (Ann Arbor, 1994); and Donna F. Wilson, *Ransom, Revenge, and Heroic Identity in the Iliad* (Cambridge, 2002) stand out. Two recent anthologies of interpretive essays are Irene J. F. de Jong, ed., *Homer: Critical Assessments* (London and New York, 1999), and Douglas L. Cairns, ed., *Oxford Readings in Homer's Iliad* (Oxford, 2002).



Reading Group Gold

Further Reading

Three very different books that consider *The Iliad* in the light of modern warfare are Simone Weil's classic essay, *The Iliad or the Poem of Force* (available in translations by both Mary McCarthy [Wallingford, Penn., 1956] and James P. Holoka [New York, 2003]); Jonathan Shay, *Achilles in Vietnam: Combat Trauma and the Undoing of Character* (New York, 1994); and James Tatum, *The Mourner's Song: War and Remembrance from the Iliad to Vietnam* (Chicago, 2003). Shay has now followed his first book with *Odysseus in America: Combat Trauma and the Trials of Homecoming* (New York, 2002). Another remarkable essay on the poem from the time of World War II is Rachel Bepaloff, *On the Iliad* (trans. by Mary McCarthy [New York, 1948]).

All of the above naturally lead the user to yet other books and articles.

This teacher's guide was written by Ralph Hexter, who has degrees in English, Classics, and Comparative Literature from Harvard, Oxford, and Yale Universities. The author of several studies of ancient and medieval literature, including *A Guide to the Odyssey* (Vintage Books, New York, 1993), he is Professor of Classics and Comparative Literature, Dean of Arts and Humanities, and Executive Dean of the College of Letters and Science at the University of California, Berkeley.