



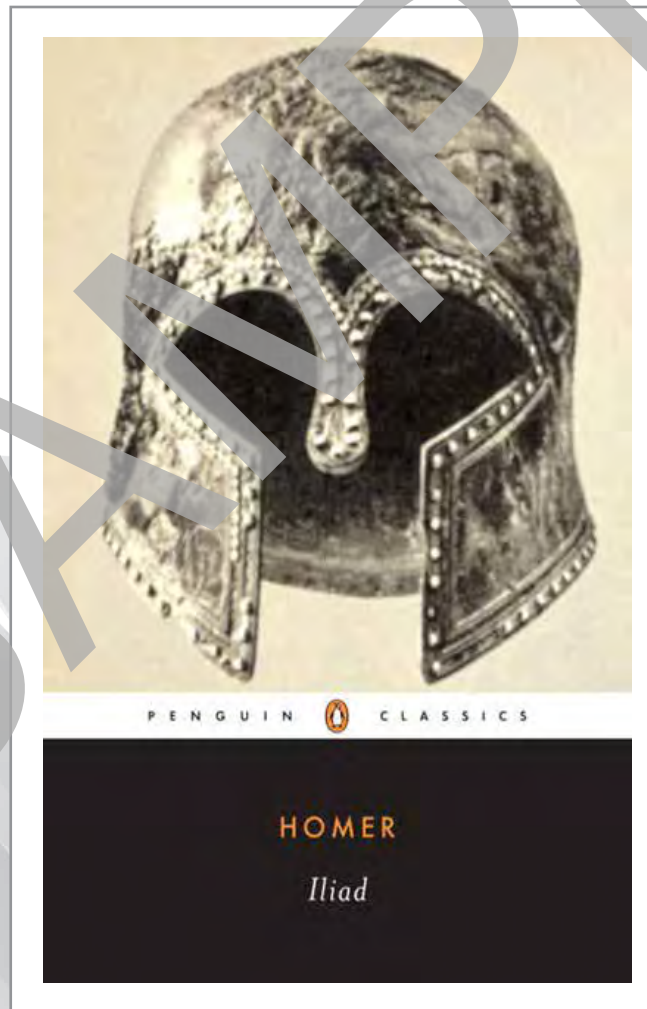
**TEACHER GUIDE**

**GRADES 9-12**

COMPREHENSIVE CURRICULUM BASED LESSON PLANS

# The Iliad

Homer



**READ, WRITE, THINK, DISCUSS AND CONNECT**

# The Iliad

Homer

## TEACHER GUIDE

**NOTE:**

The trade book edition of the novel used to prepare this guide is found in the Novel Units catalog and on the Novel Units website. Using other editions may have varied page references.

Please note: We have assigned Interest Levels based on our knowledge of the themes and ideas of the books included in the Novel Units sets, however, please assess the appropriateness of this novel or trade book for the age level and maturity of your students prior to reading with them. You know your students best!

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## Overview

The *Iliad* is considered one of the Western World's fountainheads of literature and culture. The *Iliad* and its sequel, the *Odyssey*, are the oldest epic poems in Western literature. Like the Bible, the *Iliad* is valued for both form and content—for its powerful language and its compelling story. The *Iliad* focuses on a few days toward the end of the ten-year Trojan War between the Greeks and the Trojans. (The *Odyssey* is about one soldier's homecoming, after the end of that war).

It is crucial for readers to remember that the *Iliad* was originally intended to be heard, not read. Whether or not Homer was a real man is up for debate—although most people believe that he was a real, possibly blind bard who lived around the 8th century B.C. We do know that the *Iliad* was originally recited orally—by Homer or by a legendary figure or group of people. We aren't sure when it was first written down. Not many people in Homer's time were literate, but it is possible that Homer may have written out the poem himself or had a scribe do it—or it may have been written down only after many years of oral transmission.

We do know that some of what is depicted in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* really happened. Archeologists have discovered that ancient Troy did exist (in modern-day Turkey) and that a Trojan War did take place, sometime in the early 1100s B.C. The *Iliad*, like Arthurian legend, purports to tell of a much earlier age, a few hundred years earlier—not the time period when Homer lived.

Homer took a lot of traditional material—developed by bards over many centuries—and cast it in a unique form. He used a great deal of repetition and formulaic phrasing—largely as a memory aid in the telling of this lengthy poem.

Students today—almost 2,000 years after Homer's time—can still find this story an exciting one that is relevant to their lives. This guide is intended to help you help them find common threads between their world (with its Power Rangers, global and ethnic conflicts, gender issues, etc.) and the one that Homer describes.

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## Book One: Quarrel, Oath, and Promise

**Vocabulary** (*numbers after words refer to line numbers*)

pyres (60)      hekatombs (77)      faction (206)      poltroon (344)  
ambrosial (607)

A recommended strategy for introducing these and other vocabulary words in the *Iliad*:  
Before students have read Book One—

- 1) List the words and line numbers on the board. (Present the words in isolation.)
- 2) Have students predict what the words mean.
- 3) Have student volunteers read aloud the passage in which the word appears. (Present the words in context.)
- 4) Again have students predict what the words mean—and justify their guesses.
- 5) Have student volunteers consult a dictionary and read the definition aloud. (In other words—use a dictionary for verification. Students may need to do additional research to learn the definitions of certain terms such as “hekatombs”—lavish sacrifices to the gods.)

### Discussion Questions

1. Why did Akhilleus quarrel with Agamémnon? (Agamémnon refused to return a captive girl, Khryseis, to her father. Apollo took the father’s side and punished the Greeks. When Agamémnon finally let Khryseis go, he then took lovely Briséis from Akhilleus.) Whose side would you take in this quarrel? How did their quarrel affect others? Have you ever been involved in an argument like theirs? Can you think of an argument that might take place today—that is somehow similar to the one in the *Iliad*? (For example, the coach of a basketball team quarrels with one of his key players.)
2. What sort of help did Akhilleus ask his mother for? (He asked Thetis to talk to Zeus about making Agamémnon “pay” by taking the Trojan side in the war against the Greeks.) Have you ever heard of a parent helping a child get revenge? Was that parent being a good parent—or being childish as well? Are you surprised that a goddess would get involved in “making someone pay”? What does this show you about the way the Greeks thought about their gods and goddesses?
3. “Odysseus, the great tactician, led her to the altar, putting her in her father’s hands...” (lines 505-507). What is your impression of Odysseus? (good mediator, strategist) How did the priest finally get his daughter, Khryseis, back from Agamémnon? (She was launched on a ship loaded with sacrificial beasts and wealth to appease Apollo.) How do you picture the reunion? Do you think the outcome would have been different if the priest hadn’t been on Apollo’s good side?

- 
4. “Dear Mother, patience, hold your tongue,/no matter how upset you are. I would not see you battered, dearest” (lines 677-679). Why did Hêphaistos give this advice to his mother? (He didn’t want Hêra to anger Zeus and get hurt.) What traits does Homer give the gods and goddesses? Are they like or unlike mortals in the way they relate to each other?
  5. Which lines in Book One did you most enjoy reading aloud? Why?

**Writing Activity:** Write three newspaper headlines about events in Book One. Choose one headline and write the accompanying article. (For example: Plague Kills Hundreds of Greeks.)

**Research:** Why does Nestor mention the centaurs (line 317)? Find out more about centaurs. What did they look like? Why did Theseus and others want to “break” centaurs?

**Literary Analysis: *In Media Res***

Explain that the phrase *in media res* means “in the middle of things” and describes how the *Iliad*—and most epics—begin. An epic is a long narrative poem in elevated style that presents a series of episodes important to the history of a nation or race. The *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* are two of the most important folk epics.

Ask students to put the opening lines (1-8) in their own words. (Sample: “I’m asking you, inspiring Muse, to sing a story about Akhilleus and how his anger caused such a mess for the Greeks.”) The story starts with a description of the argument between Akhilleus and Agamémnon. Ask students to describe the action the poem opens in the middle of. (The speaker is giving the listener the background of the quarrel between Agamémnon and Akhilleus—and explaining how Apollo got involved.)

**Book Two: Assembly and Muster of Armies**

**Vocabulary**

baldric (53)	harangue (84)	duplicity (131)	strategems (193)
beleager (283)	portent (357)	siege (431)	kites (462)
chines (503)	mien (559)	guise (954)	sortie (968)

**Discussion Questions**

1. How did Zeus act on Thetis’s request to help Akhilleus? (He sent Agamémnon a false dream about the imminent fall of Troy so that Agamémnon was encouraged to go into battle without Akhilleus.) Why do you think Zeus listened to Thetis? Was he sympathetic? afraid of her? trying to placate her?