

Iliad

Genre - Epic

Literary works are divided into various categories called genres in accordance with their characteristic form and content. The *Iliad*¹ belongs to the genre of epic. An epic is a long poem which tells a story involving gods, heroes and heroic exploits. Since the epic is by its very nature lengthy, it tends to be rather loosely organized. Not every episode is absolutely necessary to the main story and digressions are not uncommon. You will notice how different in this regard is the genre of drama, in which every episode tends to be essential to the plot and digressions are inappropriate. The events narrated in epic are drawn from legend rather than invented by the poet and are typically of great significance as in the case of the *Iliad*, which relates an important incident centering around the greatest hero of the Greeks in the Trojan War, the most celebrated war of Greek legend (see [Troy](#) for more information on the Trojan War). The epic poet tends to present his narrative impersonally, not drawing attention to himself except occasionally, as in the first line of the *Iliad* when [Homer](#) addresses the goddess who is the [Muse](#)² of epic poetry.

¹The word *Iliad* means "a poem about Ilion [another name for Troy]." ²In Greek myth a Muse is one of the nine daughters of [Zeus](#), who are goddesses of the arts. See line 604 of the first book of the *Iliad*.

Reading the *Iliad*

When you first read the *Iliad*, the beginning of the poem can present some difficulty because it assumes a general familiarity with the war between the Trojans and Greeks that most modern readers, unlike the ancient Greeks, do not possess (see [Troy](#) for more information on the Trojan War). You should have no trouble, however, if you keep a few facts in mind. The war had been occasioned by an offense given twenty years earlier to [Menelaos](#), the Greek king of Sparta, by the Trojan Prince, [Paris](#) (also called Alexandros). Paris, aided by the goddess [Aphrodite](#), whom he had judged the winner of a beauty contest over the goddesses [Athene](#) and [Hera](#), had stolen Menelaos's wife, [Helen](#). In order to recover Helen, Menelaos's brother, [Agamemnon](#), the powerful king of Mykenai, had gathered together a large force that included many prominent Greek warriors, themselves either princes or kings. The greatest of these was the hero, [Achilleus](#), the central character of the *Iliad*. The main story of the poem consists of the experiences of Achilleus within a rather limited period of time (fifty-four days) in the tenth year of the war.

Another problem you might encounter in your first reading of the poem is the language in which the story is told. After reading even a small portion of the *Iliad* one quickly becomes aware of Homer's distinctive style, which is characterized by the constant repetition of phrases, whole lines and even whole passages. The name Achilleus is frequently accompanied by the phrase "of the swift feet".³ [Apollo](#) is often described as he "who strikes from afar". Speeches are repeatedly introduced by phrases such as "Then in answer again spoke..." and summed up by "So he spoke". You could no doubt provide numerous other examples of this stylistic phenomenon. What is most unusual about the recurring descriptive words applied to the name of a god/goddess, hero/heroine, or inanimate things is that, although they are sometimes relevant to

their context, they most often are irrelevant and therefore seemingly unnecessary. For example, it is helpful to the reader to have Agamemnon identified once or twice as "lord of men" and Achilles called "brilliant" and "of the swift feet", but the frequent repetition of these descriptive words throughout the poem reveals that their purpose goes beyond identification. The description of Apollo in 1.213 as the one "who strikes from afar" has some relevance because the god will send a destructive plague into the [Achaian](#) camp by shooting arrows from his silver bow (1.48-51).⁴ But there are many more of these repeated descriptions which are totally irrelevant. The Achaian ships are often called "fast" when they are not in motion. [Odysseus](#) is twice called "crafty" in book one although he engages in no tricks. The sea is referred to as "barren" for no apparent purpose. But even the relevant epithets⁵ lose their relevance when they are constantly repeated, as is the case with Apollo, who continues to be referred to as he "who strikes from afar" throughout the rest of book one without any connection with the action. The problem is further complicated by the fact that other epithets are also applied to Apollo such as "King", "Phoibos", "radiant", "beloved of Zeus", "archer", "who works from afar", etc. with a similar lack of relevance.

³All quotations from the *Iliad* are from Richmond Lattimore's translation (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1961). ⁴References to the *Iliad* will be given by the book number (before the period) and line numbers (after the period). ⁵An *epithet* is a descriptive word or phrase that is linked with the name of a person or thing. Remember that you can also consult the Glossary for terms, as well as characters, events and places

The reason for the constant repetitions in the *Iliad* is that Homer composed in an oral style, which involved the improvisation of poetry without the aid of writing. In order to facilitate the adaptation of his words to the requirements of the dactylic hexameter, the traditional meter of Greek epic poetry, the oral poet used stock phrases called formulas, which aided him in filling out various metrical portions of the line. A character or object in the *Iliad* generally has a number of epithets of varying metrical size used in conjunction with it. The reason for this is that sometimes a longer epithet is needed to suit the meter, while on other occasions a shorter one is needed. For example, in lines 58, 84, 364, 489 of book 1 a metrically longer epithet is required to describe Achilles; therefore he is referred to as Achilles "of the swift feet". But in lines 7 and 292 of the same book a metrically shorter epithet is needed; therefore he is called "brilliant".

The term formula can also be used in reference to other elements larger than the name plus epithet. A whole line can be formulaic, such as the line which is regularly employed at the end of a meal:

After they had put away their desire for eating and drinking

Also formulaic are whole passages which are repeated in almost exactly the same language with a closely corresponding sequence of events, as is evident in the description of a sacrifice and a meal in 1.458-469 and 2.421-432. Messages tend to be repeated or stories retold in almost exactly the same language.

These repetitions are essential to the oral style of composition. They not only aided the poet in composing, but also helped the audience, who did not have the benefit of a text, to remember the details of the story. But if these repeated formulas had been just practical necessities, the *Iliad* would not have succeeded as poetry. In addition to their practical purpose, these formulas with their emphasis on particulars create an indelibly vivid impression of the characters and the Homeric world in general. Who can forget "swift-footed Achilles", "fair-cheeked [Briseis](#)," "Zeus who gathers the clouds" or "the glancing-eyed Achaians", "the infinite water"? Some formulas have an inherent poetic beauty: "Dawn with her rosy fingers", "Hera of the white arms", "the shadowy mountains and the echoing sea", etc. The formulaic line which is often used to describe the death of a hero has a power that survives its many repetitions:

He fell thunderously and his armor clattered upon him.

You will no doubt find your own favorites in the poem.

Be patient with this oral style of composition; you will soon become used to it. Also, don't be put off by the great variety of characters and actions. The *Iliad* is something like a very large painting which contains crowds of people and many insignificant events but focuses on a central action. These details are not important individually, but do create an impression of largeness and provide an imposing background for the main focus of the painting. Confronted for the first time with a poem with a large cast of characters and the seemingly countless details of the narrative, you might find yourself somewhat confused. But if you read carefully and are willing to reread, you will find that the main story of the *Iliad* is fairly simple and involves a relatively small number of major characters.

Heroic Code

The code which governs the conduct of the Homeric heroes is a simple one. The aim of every hero is to achieve honor, that is, the esteem received from one's peers. Honor is essential to the Homeric heroes, so much so that life would be meaningless without it. Thus, honor is more important than life itself. As you will notice in reading the *Iliad*, when a hero is advised to be careful to avoid a life-threatening situation in battle, his only choice is to ignore this warning. A hero's honor is determined primarily by his courage and physical abilities and to a lesser degree by his social status and possessions. The highest honor can only be won in battle. Here competition was fiercest and the stakes were the greatest. Two other heroic activities, hunting and athletics, could only win the hero an inferior honor. An even lesser honor was won by the sole non-physical heroic activity, the giving of advice in council (1.490; 9.443). Nestor, who is too old to fight, makes a specialty of giving advice since that is the only heroic activity left to him (1.254-284).

The heroic ideal in the *Iliad* is sometimes offensive to modern sensibility, but what is required here is not the reader's approval, but understanding of these heroic values. One can only

understand the *Iliad*, if one realizes what motivates action in the poem. Indeed, Homeric heroism is savage and merciless. Thus the hero often finds himself in a pressure-filled kill-or-be-killed situation. Success means survival and greater honor; failure means death and elimination from the competition for honor. But victory in battle is not enough in itself; it is ephemeral and can easily be forgotten. Therefore, the victor sought to acquire a permanent symbol of his victory in the form of the armor of the defeated enemy. As you will notice, furious battles break out over the corpse as the victor tries to strip the armor and the associates of the defeated warrior try to prevent it. Occasionally, prizes from the spoils of war are awarded for valor in battle as in the cases of Chryseis and Briseis, who belong respectively to Agamemnon and Achilles. The importance of these captive girls as symbols of honor is evident in the dispute which arises in Book 1. The Homeric hero is also fiercely individualistic; he is primarily concerned with his own honor and that of his household,⁶ which is only an extension of himself. As is particularly true of Achilles, the Homeric hero is not likely to be as concerned about his fellow warriors as he is about himself and the members of his household. Loyalty to the community or city had not yet achieved the importance it was going to have in later times.

⁶The household, or *oikos*, consisted not only of blood relatives, but also of retainers like [Phoinix](#) and [Sarpedon](#) (12.322-328):

Man, supposing you and I, escaping this battle would be able to live on forever, ageless, immortal, so neither would I myself go on fighting in the foremost nor would I urge you into the fighting where men win glory. But now, seeing that the spirits of death stand close about us in their thousands, no man can turn aside nor escape them, let us go on and win glory for ourselves or yield it to others.

The moral pressure which ensures compliance with this heroic code is simply what peers will think and say. The Homeric hero is supremely concerned with the reaction of his fellow heroes to his actions, since ultimately it is they alone who can bestow honor. When [Hektor's](#) wife urges him not to re-enter the war, he answers (6.441-443):

...yet I would feel deep shame before the Trojans, and the Trojan women with trailing garments, if like a coward I were to shrink aside from the fighting.

Hektor is not free to walk away from the war. His fear of adverse public opinion forces him to ignore the pleas of his wife and risk his life for the sake of honor. Therefore, one must fight courageously, whatever the cost. As Odysseus says (11.408-410):

...I know that it is the cowards who walk out of the fighting, but if one is to win honour in battle, he must by all means stand his ground strongly, whether he be struck or strike down another.

Gods

The religion of the ancient Greeks was polytheistic⁷ and consisted of the worship of various gods who presided over different aspects of the physical world and human experience: [Zeus](#), god of the sky; Aphrodite, goddess of sex; [Ares](#), god of war, etc. The Greek gods are not spiritual

beings but are anthropomorphic.⁸ They resemble human beings and tend to act in a human way, displaying all human emotions, virtues and vices. Their anthropomorphism is further illustrated by the patriarchal organization of the divine family, which imitates the patriarchy⁹ of human society. [Zeus](#) is the patriarch of the gods, who demands (but does not always get) the obedience of the other gods. The importance of both divine and human patriarchy in the Homeric world can be seen in the frequent use of patronymics¹ in the *Iliad*, (e.g., [Zeus](#), son of Kronos; Achilles, son of Peleus). One of the most important things that can be said about a god or mortal is the identity of the father.

To learn more about Zeus, the patriarch of the gods, see the [Zeus Knowledge Builder](#).

⁷'Characterized by the worship of many gods'. ⁸'Having human characteristics'. ⁹'Father-rule'.
¹⁰'A name inherited from a paternal ancestor'.

It should be noted that Homer's depiction of the gods in the *Iliad* is more the result of the poet's inventive imagination than a literal representation of the gods of actual ancient Greek religious observance. Homer is more concerned with making the gods suit the thematic needs of his poem than inspiring religious piety in his audience. It is quite clear that the gods in the *Iliad* on one level act as a foil¹¹ for humanity by accenting the troubles and sufferings experienced by men through the contrast with the joys and general ease of divine existence. For this reason, appearances of the gods in the *Iliad* are sometimes characterized by comedy in order to emphasize human misfortune by contrast. In fact, [Herodotus](#), the fifth century historian, says that Homer and [Hesiod](#), an epic poet contemporary with Homer, first named the gods, determined their honors and functions and devised their physical appearance (2.53).

¹¹'A person or thing that emphasizes, through contrast, the distinctive traits of another person or thing'.

In the *Iliad* the gods are very much concerned with human affairs. One reason for this involvement is the fact that many gods and goddesses who have mated with mortals have human children or human favorites participating in the war. The gods take sides in the war in accordance with their like or dislike of one side or the other. For example, Athene and Hera, who lost a beauty contest judged by the Trojan prince Paris, are fiercely anti-Trojan, while the winner Aphrodite dotes on Paris and favors the Trojans in the war.

The interest and involvement of the gods in human affairs have an important effect on the action of the *Iliad*. The gods *universalize* the action of the poem. Because the gods take interest in human affairs, the events described in the *Iliad* are not just particular actions of little significance, but take on a universal meaning and importance that would have been missing without the gods. On the one hand, the involvement of the gods exalts human action. When Achilles in Book 1 considers killing Agamemnon, his decision not to kill could have been presented on a purely human level without the intervention of a deity, but we are shown exactly

just how critical a decision it is by the involvement of Athene. Throughout the *Iliad* there is a tendency to present action consistently on two planes, the human and the divine. On the other hand, the gods also serve to emphasize the limitations of man, how short his life is and, quite paradoxically in view of the previously stated purpose, how ultimately meaningless human affairs are.

Exercise for Reading Comprehension and Interpretation

Book 1 First of all, in order to understand the *Iliad* you must try to identify the main theme¹² of the poem. Once identified the main theme will help you separate the essential action of the *Iliad* from the action which is not crucial to the central plot. The main theme is presented by Homer in the first line of the poem. What is the main theme? Here is the first line in Greek followed first by a transliteration and then by a word-for-word translation:

Menin aeide thea Peleiadeo Achilleos

Anger sing of, goddess, of Peleus's son Achilleus

Note the difference between the word order at the beginning of the line and the normal English arrangement. How does the Greek word order help you identify the main theme?

¹²A *theme* in literature is a central idea that gives a literary work logical unity.

After the introduction of the poem (1-7), Homer tries to create immediate interest by thrusting his audience *in medias res*, 'into the middle of things'. This Latin phrase is used in literary criticism to refer to the epic poet's practice of beginning his story without an introduction to the main characters and an explanation of the situation which forms the background of the story (i.e., without any exposition). The first action of the poem is a supplicancy, that is, a ritual act, in which the suppliant, while sitting or kneeling, grasps the knees of the person supplicated and touches his chin or kisses his hands (see 1.500-501 and 24.478). This act of self-humiliation was an attempt to forestall any unfavorable reaction on the part of the supplicated. Once the supplication was properly performed, the suppliant was under the protection of Zeus; anyone who rejected a supplication risked the anger of that god. What request does Chryses make of Agamemnon (20)? What is the reaction of the Achaians¹³(22-23)? What is Agamemnon's response (26-32)? Why does Chryses pray to Apollo and what prayer does he make (36-42)? How does Apollo answer his prayer (43-52)?

¹³Homer uses three names, with no apparent difference in meaning, to refer to the people whom we call Greeks: *Achaians*, *Danaans*, and *Argives*.

What advice does Achilles give to Agamemnon in the midst of the plague (59-67)? What does Kalchas fear (74-83)? What effect is Achilles's assurance of protection to Kalchas (85-91) likely to have on Agamemnon? What explanation does Kalchas give of the plague (93-100)? What is Agamemnon's reaction (106-120)? Why does Achilles say that Agamemnon should not demand an immediate replacement for Chryseis (122-129)? What is Agamemnon's answer to Achilles (131-139)? Why does Achilles take Agamemnon's vague threat so personally (149-171)? What specific threat does Agamemnon make to Achilles (181-187)? What is Achilles's reaction to this threat (188-194) and what is the result of Athene's intervention (216-221)? What is the meaning of Achilles's dashing the sceptre to the ground (233-246)? What is the purpose of [Nestor's](#) speech (254-284)? What are the reactions of Agamemnon and Achilles to this speech (286-303)?

What is Achilles's conduct toward the heralds of Agamemnon who come to get Briseis (334-344)? What important fact do we find out about Achilles when he calls to his mother (352-356)? What request does Achilles ask [Thetis](#) to make of Zeus (407-412)?

What is the purpose of the prayer and sacrifice that Chryses makes to Apollo in 451-474?

Describe the feelings of Achilles after his decision to withdraw from the war (488-492). What request does Thetis make of Zeus (505-510)? What is Zeus's answer and why is he disturbed by the request (518-527)? What complaint does Hera make to Zeus (540-543)? Why is she disturbed by Thetis's supplication of Zeus (555-559)? What is Zeus's reaction to her complaints (545-550; 561-567)? What is [Hephaistos's](#) advice to Hera (573-583)? Why do the gods laugh (599-600)? How do the events on [Mt. Olympos](#) reflect events on earth in book 1? Compare the result of the quarrel between Achilles and Agamemnon and that between Zeus and Hera. What is the main difference between the quality of human and divine life?

Character Analysis

First, you should note that the word 'character' is used in literary criticism in two different ways. It can mean a personage in a literary work (e.g., Achilles in the *Iliad*), or the personal traits which make such a personage a well defined individual (e.g., Achilles's tendency to anger and his other distinctive characteristics). The term "character analysis" refers to the examination of the character's personal traits.

When you attempt a character analysis, there are a number of things that you must take into consideration. The personality of any character is revealed in what the character says, thinks and does, and what other characters and the author in his own person say about that character. Although the evaluation of the personality of a character is most important in a character analysis, you should not neglect physical appearance and condition, which also can have an important effect on character and action (e.g., Helen's beauty, Nestor's and [Priam's](#) old age).

Book 3 is especially rich in characterization, particularly in reference to the two people whose actions were the cause of the war - Paris and Helen. Paris's character is revealed not only by his words and actions, but also by implicit contrast with his brother Hektor. Helen is presented as a

complex character, who realizes the wrong she has done and despises Paris, but yet seems unable to give up her sexual relationship with him. The analysis of her ambivalent character is further complicated by the control that Aphrodite exercises over her. One general rule, however, should be kept in mind with regard to divine influence on human behavior: the gods tend to influence characters to act in a way consistent with their personalities. For example, the close relationship of Aphrodite, the goddess of sexual love, with Paris and Helen, is probably an indication that sexual desire is a predominant drive in their psychological make-up. Conversely, Aphrodite never exerts influence on Hektor, whose personality makes him primarily a fighter rather than a lover.

As you read the *Iliad*, make note of the evidence in the text which gives insight into the personalities of important characters. The better you understand the characters of the *Iliad*, the better you will understand their actions. One note of warning: characters in a literary work are not real human beings, but have been created by the author to suit the needs of the story. Always keep this in mind in character analysis.

Irony

Irony is a frequently used device in literature, which can be employed in various ways. One kind of irony is evident when literary characters in word or deed make assumptions which the reader or audience know to be false or say things which the characters cannot know the significance of till later in the work. This kind of irony is often referred to as "dramatic irony", which is so called because of its frequent use in drama, but this term is also loosely applied to the same phenomenon in narrative works like the *Iliad*. Dramatic irony underlines the frustration suffered by central characters in literature in the pursuit of their own happiness. A classic example of dramatic irony occurs in [Sophocles](#)'s play *Oedipus the King*, in which the hero [Oedipus](#) curses the killer of his predecessor in the kingship, not knowing that he himself is the murderer. Watch out for examples of dramatic irony in the *Iliad*; they are important for a proper understanding of the poem.

Simile and Metaphor

A simile is a comparison of two unlike things introduced by "like" or "as". For example, Menelaos is compared to a wild beast because of his eagerness to find Paris, who had been rescued by Aphrodite: "Menelaos was wandering through the throng like a wild beast..." (3.449). The basic purpose of this or any simile is to present a word-picture which will make the reader experience in a more vivid way what is being described. In the above example Menelaos's movement in search of Paris is brought to life by the picture of a wild beast, which suggests the frantic agitation of a man who has been frustrated in his desire for revenge. The simile is an important feature of Homer's style. He uses both short similes like the one above and extended ones which became a standard feature of the epic tradition after Homer. The first 35 lines of Book 3 contain four extended similes.

Akin to the simile is a figure of speech called a metaphor, a comparison between two different things *without* the use of "like" or "as". The simile describing Menelaos stated that he was "like a

wild beast". That simile could be stated as a metaphor: "Menelaos is a wild beast". This, of course, does not mean that Menelaos is literally a wild beast, but that at this time he shares some characteristics with a wild beast. Metaphors are not as common in the *Iliad* as similes, but they do occur as in the formulaic phrase, "winged words" (1.201). Obviously, words do not have wings, birds do. But words do fly out of the mouth like birds, and once they have been said, they are as hard to take back as birds are to capture.

Book 3 What contrast is suggested by the description of the Trojans and the Achaians in 1-9? by the description of Menelaos and Alexandros (Paris) (15-37)? Why is Hektor upset by Paris's behavior (38-57)? What difference does Paris see between himself and Hektor (59-66)? What proposal does Paris make (67-75)? What is Helen doing when she first appears in the narrative (125-127)? What is the symbolic significance of her action? Why is Helen summoned by [Iris](#) (130-138)? How does Homer depict Helen's beauty (156-160)? What does Helen do for Priam (161-242)? Do you find anything strange in the questions asked of Helen by Priam at this point in the war (the tenth year)? What purpose does the information given by Helen serve in the *Iliad*? What literary device is Homer employing in 236-244?

What are the terms of the duel (281-291)? What crime of Paris does Menelaos mention in his prayer to Zeus (351-354)? What does Aphrodite's intervention prevent (373-382)? Why does Aphrodite want Helen to go to Paris's chamber (390-394)? What is Helen's reaction to the goddess's invitation (399-412)? What threat does Aphrodite make to Helen (414-417)? What criticism does Helen make of Paris (428-436)? What is Paris's reaction to this criticism (438-446)? Helen's actions in this scene are obviously inconsistent with her feelings. What is the reason for her inconsistency?

What purpose does book 3 serve? Does it advance the story begun in book 1 at all? Explain your answer.

Foreshadowing

Homer often gives his audience hints about what is going to happen later in the story. This technique is called foreshadowing and conveys a sense of the inevitability of important events. An example of foreshadowing occurs in book 6 when Hektor leaves [Andromache](#) to return to battle while her handmaidens mourn for him as if he were already dead (500-502). Note also Hektor's pessimism which he expresses to Andromache (447-465). This foreshadowing prepares us for Hektor's death in book 22. Achilles's approaching death (which does not occur in the *Iliad*) is also foreshadowed as early as book 1 by himself and his mother (352; 416).

The above examples are only the most obvious instances of foreshadowing in the *Iliad*. Try to find other more subtle instances of anticipation of future events.

Book 6 Book six begins with the deaths of minor figures on the Trojan side, many of whom Homer brings briefly to life with a few words before they are killed. What is the intended effect of Homer's description of Axylos (12-15)? Evaluate the words and actions of Agamemnon in the case of Adrestos in the light of Homeric morality (44-60).

What order does Helenos give to Hektor (86-95)? What is unusual about this order? Why does Diomedes (the son of Tydeus) ask Glaukos to identify himself (123-143)? What comment does Glaukos's simile in 146-150 make on humanity? The story which Glaukos tells about his grandfather Bellerophon has little or no connection with the plot, but has an interest of its own as a heroic tale. The typically loose organization of the epic form easily accommodates such a digression, which would be intolerable in a smaller and more tightly structured form like drama. What discovery does [Diomedes](#) make when Glaukos mentions his grandfather (215-231)? What is the result of Diomedes's discovery (232-236)?

After he delivers Helenos's message to his mother [Hekabe](#), what does Hektor tell her he intends to do (280)? What is Hektor's attitude toward Paris (281-285)? What is Athene's reaction to the prayers and gift of the Trojan women (311)? What literary device is Homer employing here? Explain your answer.

What does Hektor encourage Paris to do (326-331)? How does Paris react to Hektor's words (333-341)? What is Helen's view of herself and Paris (343-353)? Where does Hektor go next (365)? What does Andromache fear (405-410)? Note carefully Andromache's story about the death of her father at the hands of Achilles (414-428). It is a foreshadowing of Achilles's behavior in the last book of the *Iliad*. What does Andromache think is most notable about Achilles's conduct with regard to her father? What request does Andromache make of Hektor (431-434)? In Hektor's mind what prevents him from doing what his wife asks (440-446)? What does Hektor foresee for the Trojans and his wife (447-465)? What is the intended effect of the laughter of Hektor and Andromache at their son's terror in the context this sorrow-filled situation (466-471)? What hopes does Hektor have for his son (476-481)? What literary device is evident in this expression of Hektor's hopes? What is Hektor's state of mind as he leaves his family (486-493)? What literary device is evident in 500? What do we learn about Hektor's character from his meetings with Hekabe, Paris, Helen and Andromache?

What comment does the simile in 506-511 make on the character of Paris? What are Hektor's feelings about Paris (521-525)?

What purpose does book 6 serve? Does it advance the story begun in book 1 at all? Explain your answer.

Book 9 How are the Achaians doing in the war at this point in the story (1-8)? Note the capitalization of the first letters of Panic and Terror (2; see Hate in 11.4). The reason for this is that these two human emotions are personified as minor divinities by Homer. What recommendation does Agamemnon make to the Achaians (17-28)? What criticism does Diomedes make of Agamemnon (38-39)? What is Diomedes's attitude with regard to the war (45-49)? What advice does Nestor give to Agamemnon (96-113)? How does Agamemnon react to this advice (115-161)? What Achaians does Nestor suggest should go to Achilles (168-170)? Why doesn't Agamemnon go himself?

What is Achilles doing when these men arrive at his hut (186-189)? How does Achilles behave toward them (197-204)? What is Patroklos's role in this scene (201-220)? Then each ambassador delivers a speech which is in turn answered by Achilles. You no doubt have noted

that Homer frequently employs speeches in his narrative. Throughout ancient times speech-making was the primary means of mass communication. Writing did exist, but without a printing press, publication of written material was very limited. Thus it is natural that speeches are prominent in the *Iliad*. The speeches also give a lively dramatic quality to the poem. This quality often leads students to make the mistake of calling the *Iliad* a play, that is, a dramatic performance in which actors impersonate characters, when it is really a narrative poem, that is, a genre in which a story teller or narrator relates the whole story. [Odysseus](#) is spokesman for Agamemnon and therefore speaks first because of his rhetorical skills (see 3.216-223). Although Odysseus repeats word for word most of Agamemnon's earlier speech (115-161), he makes purposeful additions and omissions. Read Odysseus's speech (225-306) carefully and identify these additions and omissions. Explain the reason for each addition and omission.

To whom do you think Achilles is referring in 312-313? Achilles then presents his reasons for rejecting Agamemnon's offer (315-420). Briefly summarize these reasons. Do you find them convincing? Explain your answer. What does Achilles say he will do now that he has refused to accept the gifts (357-363; 426-429)?

The speech of [Phoinix](#) is divided into three sections: Phoinix's relationships with his father, Peleus and Achilles (447-495), the parable of the prayers (502-512), and the example of Meleagros (529-599). What effect does Phoinix hope lines 485-496 will have on Achilles? What is Phoinix's basic message to Achilles (496-501)? Phoinix's story of the spirits of Prayer is a parable: a story illustrating a moral lesson. In this story what we would regard as psychological phenomena internal to a human being are personified as minor divinities. Ruin represents the tendency to give offense to others and the spirit of prayers, the desire to make amends by asking forgiveness. What point does this parable make? The story of Meleagros is an instance of the technique commonly used by Homeric characters of giving a mythological example to make an argument more persuasive. Although this story is long and detailed, its essential message is clear and simple. What is this message (600-605)? What is Achilles's response to Phoinix's speech (607-619)?

What is the main point of [Aias](#)'s brief speech (624-642)? What is Achilles's response to this speech (644-655)? What does Odysseus report to Agamemnon (677-692)? Is Odysseus's report entirely accurate? Explain your answer. What is Diomedes's reaction to this report (697-709)?

Describe Achilles's state of mind in book 9. Does he really believe everything he says to Odysseus? Explain your answer.

Book 11 What purpose does the wounding of Agamemnon, Diomedes, Odysseus and Eurypylos serve at this point in the story (1-590)? What significance do the disasters suffered by the Achaians have for Achilles (608-609)? What do lines 598-614 say about Achilles's feelings with regard to the war and the Achaians? What literary device is evident in 603? What order does Achilles give to [Patroklos](#) (610-614)?

How is Nestor's speech (655-802; cf. 1.254-284) typical of him? What suggestion does Nestor make to Patroklos (791-802)? What do you think is the effect of Eurypylos's words (822-835) on Patroklos?

Book 16 Why does Patroklos mention the wounding of the Achaian chieftains to Achilles (23-29)? Explain the meaning of the metaphors of the sea and rocks in 34-35. What request does Patroklos make of Achilles and what does he hope to accomplish, if Achilles consents (38-45)? Read 49-63 carefully. Explain why Achilles agrees to Patroklos's request. What warning does Achilles give to Patroklos (87-96)? Why does Achilles give this warning? What frustration does Achilles's prayer to the gods reveal (97-100)?

What emergency critical to the fortunes of the Achaians arises (112-124)? After the formulaic scene of Patroklos's arming (130-144), Achilles prepares his men the [Myrmidons](#) for battle. Homer then presents a catalogue of the Myrmidons (168-197). Catalogue poetry is an important feature of the epic. In book two there is an elaborate catalogue of the Achaians at Troy and a smaller one of the Trojans. In book 18 there is also a catalogue of the daughters of Nereus who are mourning the death of Patroklos (39-49). What comment do the similes in 156-163 and 259-265) make on the character of the Myrmidons? What was their attitude with regard to Achilles's withdrawal from the war (200-209)? What prayer does Achilles make to Zeus (241-248)? What literary device is evident in 249-252?

Fate in the *Iliad* is not a force which predetermines all human actions. Fate primarily refers to ends, like the end of a man's life or of a city such as Troy. These ends are governed by fate and cannot be avoided. The relationship of the gods to fate is an issue in the conversation between Zeus and Hera. What action does Zeus consider in 435-438? What warning does Hera give to Zeus (440-449)? Is fate the same as the will of the gods? What control do the gods have over fate? What does Zeus's sorrow for Sarpedon's death add to the account of his son's death (459-461)?

What is Patroklos's first concern after killing Sarpedon (558-561)? What is the effect of the extended simile describing the battle over Sarpedon's armor (641-643)? What request does Zeus make of Apollo (667-675)? In what sense is Patroklos responsible for his own death (684-691;705;786-787)? What warning does Apollo give to Patroklos (707-709)? What aid does Apollo give to Hektor (715-725)? How is the simile in 752-753 an example of foreshadowing? How is Patroklos's death accomplished (791-821)? Why does Homer have Patroklos killed in this manner? What is the significance of Achilles's helmet which is struck off Patroklos's head and is picked up and worn by Hektor (796-800)? What prediction does the dying Patroklos make to Hektor (844-854)? What is Hektor's reaction to this prophecy (859-861)?

Book 18 How does Achilles react to the news of Patroklos's death (22-34)? What figure of speech is employed in 22? What ironical fact does Thetis point out to Achilles (72-77)? Explain the irony of her statement. What is Achilles determined to do as a result of Patroklos's death (90-93)? What does this action entail for Achilles (95-96)? How does Achilles view his anger which had led him to withdraw from the war (98-126)? What must Thetis do before Achilles can return to battle (130-137)? What message does Hera send to Achilles (197-201)? How does Achilles drive back the Trojans (203-231)? What does Achilles's rout of the Trojans enable the Achaians to do (231-238)? What help does Hera provide (239-242)?

Summarize briefly Poulydamas's speech to the Trojans (254-283). What is Hektor's reaction to this advice (285-309)? Is Hektor correct when he says that Zeus's intention in allowing him to

drive the Achaians back to their ships was to give him glory (293-295; see 1.407-410)? Explain your answer. What comment does Homer make on the Trojan reaction to the speeches of Poulydamas and Hektor (312-313)? What promise does Achilles make to the body of Patroklos (333-342)?

Explain Zeus's sarcasm to Hera in 357-359. How does Hera reply (361-367)? What obligation does Hephaistos owe to Thetis (394-409)? What request does Thetis make of Hephaistos (457-461)? How does Hephaistos react to this request (463-467)? What connections with the story of the *Iliad* do the pictures engraved on the shield suggest to you?

Imagery

When a series of related images appears in a literary work, the reader should be alert to the possibility that the author is expressing something important about his story and/or characters through the pattern of his imagery.¹⁴ The *Iliad* as a whole and, in particular, Book 22 give evidence of patterns of imagery which add significance to the narrative.

¹⁴*Imagery* is the employment of images (word pictures) in a given passage of a literary work, a whole work, or a group of works.

As Cedric Whitman in his book, *Homer and the Heroic Tradition* (New York, 1965, 128-147), has shown, there is a network of fire imagery, which extends throughout the *Iliad* and is connected with heroism, especially that of Achilles. The fire imagery of book 22 is a continuation of the image which accompanies Achilles's appearance in book 18 at the ditch to frighten the Trojans with his war cry and is designed to strengthen the impression of Achilles's destructive power. There Athene causes a flame to issue forth from a cloud around Achilles's head. This flame is in turn compared to a flare and signal fires originating from a besieged city (207-213). The image of the besieged city is a foreshadowing of what the city of Troy will soon experience when Achilles kills its champion Hektor. Also, the armor which is made for Achilles later in book 18 is created by Hephaistos, the god of fire, and on the shield are depicted images associated with fire: sun, moon, and stars. In book 22 the fiery brightness of Achilles's armor is compared to the destructive star Orion's Dog (Sirius), which rises in late summer when, as the ancients believed, oppressive heat caused disease (26-31) and later Achilles's spear is likened to the evening star Hesper, which seems to gleam especially brightly because of the darkening sky (317-318).

To learn more about the sounds of war and Ares, god of war, see the [Ares Knowledge Builder](#).

In book 22 there are many other related images which contribute important significance to the narrative. Take careful note of this imagery and its meaning as you read this book.

Tragedy

The word 'tragedy' primarily used of a dramatic work, that is, a play in which a central character called a tragic protagonist or hero suffers some serious misfortune which is not accidental and therefore meaningless, but is significant in that the misfortune is logically connected with the hero's actions. 'Tragedy' and its adjective 'tragic', however, can be used of any literary work containing a protagonist whose actions lead to disaster for himself and others (e.g., the *Iliad*).

In tragic literature, the actions of the protagonist, no matter how well-intentioned, lead to disaster. In the *Iliad*, a sense of the futility of human action is conveyed by the use of dramatic irony, especially when Homer depicts his characters unknowingly doing things which lead them to their own doom and contrasts their ignorance with the gods' knowledge of their fate. In reading the *Iliad* note carefully how the actions of Achilles and Hektor contribute to their own misfortunes and exactly when they become aware of the consequence of their actions.¹⁵

¹⁵More will be said on the nature of tragedy in the [introduction to Greek Tragedy](#).

Book 22 What does Apollo point out to Achilles about his pursuit of the god (7-13)? What is Achilles's reply (15-20)? What does the Orion's Dog simile emphasize about Achilles (26-31)? Why does Priam urge Hektor not to fight Achilles (38-76)? What is Hekabe's reason for making the same request (82-89)? What are Hektor's feelings about fighting Achilles (99-110)? What does Hektor think about the possibility of making peace with Achilles (111-130)?

What is Hektor's reaction to Achilles's approach (136-137)? Note carefully the images applied to Achilles and Hektor in 139-142, 189-192, 262-264, and 308-310. How are these images related and what comment do they make upon these two heroes and the situation in which they find themselves? Explain what the images of the race and dream contribute to the narrative (159-164;199-201). Why does Homer interrupt his account of the chase to describe the two springs(147-156)? What is the meaning of "Father" Zeus's balancing of the golden scales (209-213)? How does Athene help Achilles (224-246;276-277;293-303)? What request does Hektor twice make of Achilles (254-259;338-343)? How does Achilles answer him on both occasions (261-272; 345-354)? What does the dying Hektor predict to Achilles (356-360)? What is Achilles's reaction to this prediction (365-366)?

How do the Achaians and Achilles treat Hektor's body (367-371;396-404)? What comment does the simile in 410-411 make on Hektor's death? What does Priam decide he must do (418-422)? What did Hektor mean to Hekabe and the other Trojans (431-436)? Why does Homer take time to describe Andromache's headdress when she faints at her discovery of Hektor's death (466-472)? What effect will Hektor's death have on Astyanax (489-514)?

Book 24 Describe Achilles's psychological state in the beginning of the book (1-22). Why do Hera and Athene ("the girl of the grey eyes") hate Priam and his people (25-30)? How is Achilles's treatment of Hektor's corpse viewed by the gods in general (23-24)? by Apollo (33-54)? by Hera (56-63)? What role does [Iris](#) play in 77-88 and in 159-187 (as in 18.166-167)? What request does Zeus make of Thetis (104-119)? How has Achilles been living since

Patroklos's death (128-131)? What is Achilles's reaction to Zeus's message (139-140)?

What message does Zeus give to Iris to deliver to Priam (144-152)? What prediction does Zeus make about Achilles's reaction to Priam's supplication (158)? In what condition does Iris find Priam (162-165)? What does Hekabe think of Priam's intention to go to Achilles (201-216)? How does Priam answer Hekabe's objections (218-227)? How does Priam feel about his surviving sons (239-264)? What sign does Priam ask of Zeus (308-313)? How does Zeus answer his prayer (314-321)? What task does Zeus assign to Hermes (334-338)? Who does Hermes (Argeiphontes) pretend to be (390-400)? Where and in what condition is Hektor's body (411-423)?

What is the significance of the fact that Achilles has resumed eating and drinking (475-476)? What does Priam do first when he enters Achilles's dwelling (478-480)? What ritual act is Priam performing with these gestures? What is the irony of his kissing Achilles's hands (478-480)? What arguments does Priam use to persuade Achilles to return the body (486-506)? How does Achilles react to Priam's acts and words (507-524)? According to Achilles, what is the basic difference between divine and human life (525-526)? What is the moral of Achilles's story of the two urns (527-533)? How does the experience of Peleus illustrate this moral (534-541)? What is Achilles's reaction to Priam's impatience (560-570)?

In your opinion, why does Achilles give Hektor's body back to Priam? Is it only because Zeus so ordered? Explain your answer. Why does Achilles tell Priam the story of [Niobe](#) (601-620)? What connections can you find between the experiences of Niobe and Priam? How do Achilles and Priam feel about each other (629-632)? What additional favor does Achilles grant Priam (656-658)?

Why does Hermes urge Priam to leave Achilles's dwelling (683-688)?

What future does Andromache foresee for herself and her son (725-739)? What view of Hektor does Helen present (762-775)? Why does the poem end with the burial of Hektor? Do you find this an appropriate ending to the poem? Explain your answer.