



*Homeric Epithet

- * An **epithet** is a descriptive word or a phrase that a writer frequently connects to a certain character.
- * In other words ----- a descriptive nickname
- * In epic poems such as the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, it adds description and also helps the poet complete the number of syllables needed for that line of poetry.
- * Sometimes epithets are hyphenated in English because just one English word can't translate the original Greek word

*What is an Epithet?



swift-footed
Achilles



wide-ruling
Agamemnon



red-haired
Menelaus



Hector,
breaker
of horses



white-armed
Andromache



Paris,
son of Priam



lovely-haired
Helen



great-hearted
Odysseus



wide-seeing
Zeus



ox-eyed
Hera



gray-eyed
Athena



silver-footed
Thetis

stallion-breaking Trojans



long-haired strong-greaved
Achaeans Achaeans



bronze-
cloaked
Achaeans

Achaeans = “Greeks”

1) Begin by brainstorming epithets for yourself from each category:

- * Epithets related to your **origin**
- * Epithets related to your **family**
- * Epithets related to your **appearance**
- * Epithets related to your **skills** (what are you good at or known for?)
- * Epithets related to your **position** in life
- * Epithets related to your **heroic qualities**

* **Create your own
epithet!**

2) Choose the one that fits you most.

*Even the characters in *The Odyssey* who have numerous epithets have one that is more common than the other and which is immediately recognizable (like “red-haired Menelaus” or “bright-eyed goddess Athena”).

*Create your own
epithet!

* Deeper meanings?

- * In Book 4, Menelaus's epithet, "the red-haired king," describes his appearance, position, AND temperament.
 - * Red hair would have made him distinct among the dark-haired Greeks, and his position as king of the great city of Sparta was one of great distinction.
 - * Red hair also represents his fiery temper, which would serve him well a warrior.

Menelaus's most common epithet, "the red-haired king," not only describes his appearance but also symbolizes his fiery temperament and position of military power. When Telemachus and Boethous arrive from Nestor's house in search of news about Odysseus, Menelaus becomes upset when one of his lords almost sends the guests away with the excuse that the house is full. The poet describes, "The red-haired king took great offense that that:/ 'Never a food before, Eteoneus, son of Boethous,/ now I see you're babbling like a child!" (4.35-37). Here, Homer connects Menelaus's red hair with his temper in order to remind the listener that this man is the great warrior who lead the Achaeans in the Trojan War.

* Analytical Paragraph

- * Using the handout, meet briefly with your partner.
- * Gather the information you need and then create an original epithet for them!
- * Do not share your epithet...YET!

*** Find your partner!**