

## from the *Iliad*

Epic Poetry by HOMER  
Translated by ROBERT FITZGERALD

### Comparing Literature of the World

## The Epic Hero Across Cultures



**Comparing *Beowulf* and the *Iliad*** The *Iliad* was written centuries before *Beowulf*. Nonetheless, there are many similarities between the two poems.

### Points of Comparison

As you read the following excerpt from the *Iliad*, compare the heroes Hector and Achilles with Beowulf. Consider the following characteristics of an epic hero as you make your comparisons:

- heroic actions that determine the fate of nations or groups of people
- heroic deeds and actions that reflect the values of the age
- the hero's interaction with supernatural beings and events

## Build Background

**When Greeks and Trojans War** The *Iliad* is an epic poem believed to be the work of a Greek poet named Homer in the eighth century B.C. The setting of the poem is the Trojan War, a conflict between Greeks and Trojans at the ancient city of Troy in Asia Minor. Most historians believe that some type of conflict involving Greeks and Trojans did in fact occur around 1200 B.C. According to Homer's poem, the Trojan War resulted when Paris, a prince of Troy, kidnapped Helen, the world's most beautiful woman, from her Greek home. This action naturally offended her husband, King Menelaus (mĕn'ē-lā'ēs), who gathered an army of Greeks and set out to invade Troy and bring Helen home. Under the leadership of his brother Agamemnon (äg'ē-mĕm'nŏn'), the Greeks laid siege to the walled city of Troy for ten years before finally achieving victory. The *Iliad* relates events that took place in the final year of that siege. The excerpts in the following selection show the grim results of clashing loyalties.

### WORDS TO KNOW Vocabulary Preview

abstain	flouting
clamor	havoc
defile	ponderous
destitute	quell
elude	scourge
evade	vulnerable
evocation	whetted
exult	

## Focus Your Reading

### LITERARY ANALYSIS SIMILE AND EPIC SIMILE

A simile is a figure of speech that uses *like* or *as* to make a comparison between two things. For example, when the poet says, "Now like a lion at one bound Achilles left the room," he uses a simile to compare the Greek warrior to a lion in his speed and strength. An **epic simile** is a long figurative comparison in an epic poem that often continues for a number of lines. An example can be found in lines 89–92 of the *Iliad*. As you read this selection from the *Iliad*, look for other examples of similes and epic similes.

### ACTIVE READING CLASSIFYING CHARACTERS

The *Iliad* is a complex story involving many characters—both human and divine. In order to understand what is happening in the epic, it is important to keep track of these various characters.

**READER'S NOTEBOOK** Create a list of the following characters: Achilles, Hector, Thetis, Zeus, Patroclus, Pallas Athena, Apollo, Hermes, and Priam. As you read, use the notes that accompany the text to help you classify each character as a Greek, a Trojan, or a god. For each god, indicate whether he or she is helping the Greeks or the Trojans. Jot down the important actions and characteristics of each character.

from **THE**

# ILIAD

**HOMER**

While the Greeks are laying siege to Troy, a quarrel breaks out between Agamemnon and his greatest warrior Achilles (ə-kɪˈlɛz). As a result, the angry Achilles decides to remain in his tent and let the Greeks fight without him. With Achilles off the battlefield, the Trojans, under the leadership of Hector, are able to drive the Greeks back to the sea. During the battle, Hector kills Achilles' best friend, Patroclus (pə-trōˈkles). While grieving for his friend, Achilles is visited by his mother, Thetis (thēˈtɪs), a goddess of the sea.



from Book 18

## THE IMMORTAL SHIELD

Bending near  
her groaning son, the gentle goddess wailed  
and took his head between her hands in pity,  
saying softly:

“Child, why are you weeping?

5 What great sorrow came to you? Speak out,

Death of Hector, sixth-century b.c.  
Corinthian bowl painting

do not conceal it. Zeus  
did all you asked: Achaean troops,  
for want of you, were all forced back again  
upon the ship sterns, taking heavy losses  
10 none of them could wish.”

The great runner  
groaned and answered:

“Mother, yes, the master  
of high Olympus brought it all about,  
but how have I benefited? My greatest friend  
is gone: Patroclus, comrade in arms, whom I  
15 held dear above all others—dear as myself—  
now gone, lost; Hector cut him down, despoiled him  
of my own arms, massive and fine, a wonder  
in all men’s eyes. The gods gave them to Peleus  
that day they put you in a mortal’s bed—  
20 how I wish the immortals of the sea  
had been your only consorts! How I wish  
Peleus had taken a mortal queen! Sorrow  
immeasurable is in store for you as well,  
when your own child is lost: never again  
25 on his homecoming day will you embrace him!  
I must reject this life, my heart tells me,  
reject the world of men,  
if Hector does not feel my battering spear  
tear the life out of him, making him pay  
30 in his own blood for the slaughter of Patroclus!”

Letting a tear fall, Thetis said:

“You’ll be  
swift to meet your end, child, as you say:  
your doom comes close on the heels of Hector’s own.”

Achilles the great runner ground his teeth  
35 and said:

“May it come quickly. As things were,  
I could not help my friend in his extremity.  
Far from his home he died; he needed me  
to shield him or to parry the death stroke.  
For me there’s no return to my own country.

## GUIDE FOR READING

**6–7** Previously Achilles asked Thetis to persuade Zeus (zōōs), ruler of the gods, to turn the tide of battle against the Greeks so that they would see how much they needed him.

**7** **Achaean** (ə-kē’ən): Greek.

**12** **Olympus** (ə-līm’pəs): the highest mountain in Greece, on whose peak the Greek gods and goddesses were thought to dwell.

**16–17** Patroclus wore Achilles’ armor to frighten the Trojans. “Despoiled him of my own arms” refers to Hector’s taking the armor from Patroclus’ corpse.

**18** **Peleus** (pē’lē-əs): Achilles’ human father.

**38** **parry**: to turn aside the thrust of a sword.

40 Not the slightest gleam of hope did I  
afford Patroclus or the other men  
whom Hector overpowered. Here I sat,  
my weight a useless burden to the earth,  
and I am one who has no peer in war  
45 among Achaean captains—

though in council

there are wiser. Ai! let strife and rancor  
perish from the lives of gods and men,  
with anger that envenoms even the wise  
and is far sweeter than slow-dripping honey,  
50 clouding the hearts of men like smoke: just so  
the marshal of the army, Agamemnon,  
moved me to anger. But we'll let that go,  
though I'm still sore at heart; it is all past,  
and I have quelled my passion as I must.

55 Now I must go to look for the destroyer  
of my great friend. I shall confront the dark  
drear spirit of death at any hour Zeus  
and the other gods may wish to make an end.

Not even Heracles escaped that terror  
60 though cherished by the Lord Zeus. Destiny  
and Hera's bitter anger mastered him.  
Likewise with me, if destiny like his  
awaits me, I shall rest when I have fallen!  
Now, though, may I win my perfect glory  
65 and make some wife of Troy break down,  
or some deep-breasted Dardan woman sob  
and wipe tears from her soft cheeks. They'll know then  
how long they had been spared the deaths of men,  
while I abstained from war!

70 Do not attempt to keep me from the fight,  
though you love me; you cannot make me listen.”

**46 rancor** (rǎng'kər): bitter, long-lasting ill will.

**48 envenoms** (ĕn-vĕn'əmz): fills with poison.

**59–61 Heracles** (hĕr'ĕ-klĕz'): the greatest legendary hero of ancient Greece, son of Zeus and a mortal woman named Alcmena (ǎlk-mĕ'nĕ). Zeus' wife, the goddess Hera (hĭr'ĕ), hated and persecuted Heracles until his death.

**62–63** How has Achilles' loyalty to Patroclus affected his attitude toward his own life?

**66 Dardan** (dār'dn): Trojan.

**Achilles seeks to avenge Patroclus by slaughtering Trojans. Apollo, a god who protects Troy, opens the gates of the city so that the Trojans can rush to safety inside the walls. Only Hector is left outside. Achilles chases him around the walls of Troy three times. Finally the goddess Pallas Athena (pǎl'ĕs ĕ-thĕ'nĕ), disguised as Hector's brother Deiphobus (dĕ-ĭf'ĕ-bĕs), appears to Hector and persuades him to fight Achilles.**

WORDS  
TO  
KNOW

**quell** (kwĕl) *v.* to quiet; suppress  
**abstain** (ǎb-stān') *v.* to hold oneself back deliberately

## DESOLATION BEFORE TROY

And when at last the two men faced each other,  
Hector was the first to speak. He said:

“I will no longer fear you as before,  
75 son of Peleus, though I ran from you  
round Priam’s town three times and could not face you.  
Now my soul would have me stand and fight,  
whether I kill you or am killed. So come,  
we’ll summon gods here as our witnesses,  
80 none higher, arbiters of a pact: I swear  
that, terrible as you are,  
I’ll not insult your corpse should Zeus allow me  
victory in the end, your life as prize.  
Once I have your gear, I’ll give your body  
85 back to Achaeans. Grant me, too, this grace.”

But swift Achilles frowned at him and said:

“Hector, I’ll have no talk of pacts with you,  
forever unforgiven as you are.  
As between men and lions there are none,  
90 no concord between wolves and sheep, but all  
hold one another hateful through and through,  
so there can be no courtesy between us,  
no sworn truce, till one of us is down  
and glutting with his blood the wargod Ares.  
95 Summon up what skills you have. By god,  
you’d better be a spearman and a fighter!  
Now there is no way out. Pallas Athena  
will have the upper hand of you. The weapon  
belongs to me. You’ll pay the reckoning  
100 in full for all the pain my men have borne,  
who met death by your spear.”

He twirled and cast  
his shaft with its long shadow. Splendid Hector,  
keeping his eye upon the point, eluded it  
by ducking at the instant of the cast,

**76 Priam** (prī’əm): the king of Troy.

**80 arbiters** (är’bĭ-tərz): judges; referees.

**84–85** The Greeks and Trojans generally returned the bodies of the slain to their commanders or companions.

**90 concord** (kŏn’kôrd’): peace or harmony.

**94 glutting with his blood the wargod Ares** (âr’ēz): satisfying Ares, the god of war, by bleeding to death.

**97–98** Pallas Athena, the goddess of wisdom, favors the Greeks.

WORDS  
TO **elude** (ĭ-lōd’)  
KNOW *v.* to avoid or escape

105 so shaft and bronze shank passed him overhead  
and punched into the earth. But unperceived  
by Hector, Pallas Athena plucked it out  
and gave it back to Achilles. Hector said:

“A clean miss. Godlike as you are,  
110 you have not yet known doom for me from Zeus.  
You thought you had, by heaven. Then you turned  
into a word-thrower, hoping to make me lose  
my fighting heart and head in fear of you.  
You cannot plant your spear between my shoulders  
115 while I am running. If you have the gift,  
just put it through my chest as I come forward.  
Now it’s for you to dodge my own. Would god  
you’d give the whole shaft lodging in your body!  
War for the Trojans would be eased  
120 if you were blotted out, bane that you are.”

With this he twirled his long spearshaft and cast it,  
hitting his enemy mid-shield, but off  
and away the spear rebounded. Furious  
that he had lost it, made his throw for nothing,  
125 Hector stood bemused. He had no other.  
Then he gave a great shout to Deiphobus  
to ask for a long spear. But there was no one  
near him, not a soul. Now in his heart  
the Trojan realized the truth and said:

130 “This is the end. The gods are calling deathward.  
I had thought  
a good soldier, Deiphobus, was with me.  
He is inside the walls. Athena tricked me.  
Death is near, and black, not at a distance,  
135 not to be evaded. Long ago  
this hour must have been to Zeus’s liking  
and to the liking of his archer son.  
They have been well disposed before, but now  
the appointed time’s upon me. Still, I would not  
140 die without delivering a stroke,  
or die ingloriously, but in some action  
memorable to men in days to come.”

Achilles dragging the body of Hector around the walls of Troy (about 520 B.C.), attributed to the Antiope Group. Attic black figure hydria, courtesy of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, William Francis Warden Fund.



**120 bane:** a cause of distress, death, or ruin.

**125 bemused** (bĭ-myōōzd’): dazed; confused.

**135–139** Zeus’ “archer son” is Apollo, god of the sun, whose arrows may represent the sun’s rays. Until now, Zeus and Apollo have assisted the Trojans.

WORDS  
TO  
KNOW

**evade** (ĭ-vād’) *v.* to escape by cleverness or deception

With this he drew the whetted blade that hung  
upon his left flank, **ponderous** and long,  
145 collecting all his might the way an eagle  
narrows himself to dive through shady cloud  
and strike a lamb or cowering hare: so Hector  
lanced ahead and swung his whetted blade.  
Achilles with wild fury in his heart  
150 pulled in upon his chest his beautiful shield—  
his helmet with four burnished metal ridges  
nodding above it, and the golden crest  
Hephaestus locked there tossing in the wind.  
Conspicuous as the evening star that comes,  
155 amid the first in heaven, at fall of night,  
and stands most lovely in the west, so shone  
in sunlight the fine-pointed spear  
Achilles poised in his right hand, with deadly  
aim at Hector, at the skin where most  
160 it lay exposed. But nearly all was covered  
by the bronze gear he took from slain Patroclus,  
showing only, where his collarbones  
divided neck and shoulders, the bare throat  
where the destruction of a life is quickest.  
165 Here, then, as the Trojan charged, Achilles  
drove his point straight through the tender neck,  
but did not cut the windpipe, leaving Hector  
able to speak and to respond. He fell  
aside into the dust. And Prince Achilles  
170 now exulted:

“Hector, had you thought  
that you could kill Patroclus and be safe?  
Nothing to dread from me; I was not there.  
All childishness. Though distant then, Patroclus’  
comrade in arms was greater far than he—  
175 and it is I who had been left behind  
that day beside the deepsea ships who now  
have made your knees give way. The dogs and kites  
will rip your body. His will lie in honor  
when the Achaeans give him funeral.”

180 Hector, barely whispering, replied:

**153 Hephaestus** (hĭ-fĕs’tæs): the god of fire and blacksmith of the gods, who made Achilles’ new armor.

**160–161** Hector is wearing the armor of Achilles that he took from Patroclus’ body.

**177 kites**: hawklike birds of prey.

**178** “His [body]” refers to that of Patroclus.

**WORDS TO KNOW** **whetted** (hwĕt’ĭd) *adj.* sharpened **whet** *v.*  
**ponderous** (pŏn’dər-əs) *adj.* very heavy  
**exult** (ĭg-zũlt’) *v.* to feel great joy, especially in conquest or triumph

“I beg you by your soul and by your parents,  
do not let the dogs feed on me  
in your encampment by the ships. Accept  
the bronze and gold my father will provide  
185 as gifts, my father and her ladyship  
my mother. Let them have my body back,  
so that our men and women may accord me  
decency of fire when I am dead.”

Achilles the great runner scowled and said:

190 “Beg me no beggary by soul or parents,  
whining dog! Would god my passion drove me  
to slaughter you and eat you raw, you’ve caused  
such agony to me! No man exists  
who could defend you from the carrion pack—  
195 not if they spread for me ten times your ransom,  
twenty times, and promise more as well;  
aye, not if Priam, son of Dardanus,  
tells them to buy you for your weight in gold!  
You’ll have no bed of death, nor will you be  
200 laid out and mourned by her who gave you birth.  
Dogs and birds will have you, every scrap.”

Then at the point of death Lord Hector said:

“I see you now for what you are. No chance  
to win you over. Iron in your breast  
205 your heart is. Think a bit, though: this may be  
a thing the gods in anger hold against you  
on that day when Paris and Apollo  
destroy you at the Gates, great as you are.”

Even as he spoke, the end came, and death hid him;  
210 spirit from body fluttered to undergloom,  
bewailing fate that made him leave his youth  
and manhood in the world. And as he died  
Achilles spoke again. He said:

215 “Die, make an end. I shall accept my own  
whenever Zeus and the other gods desire.”

At this he pulled his spearhead from the body,  
laying it aside, and stripped

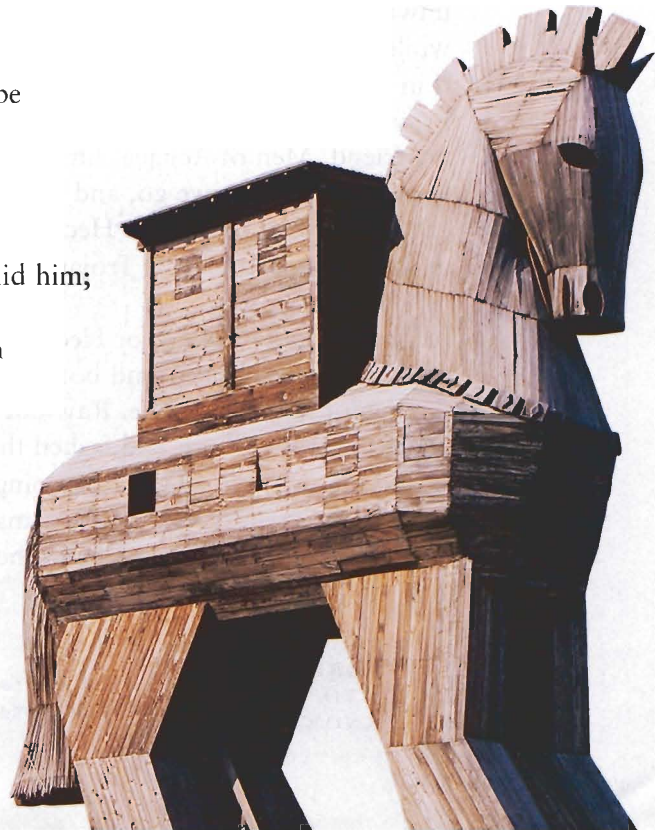
**185–186** Hector’s father is Priam, and his mother is Hecuba (hĕk’yə-bə).

**188** Burning the bodies of the dead was customary. Truces were often arranged for this purpose.

**194** **carrion** (kăř’ĕ-ən) **pack**: the wild animals that feed on dead flesh.

**197** **Dardanus** (dăř’dn-əs): the founder of the line of Trojan kings. Here “son” means “descendant.”

**205–208** Although Achilles is still alive as the *Iliad* ends, other tales of the Trojan War tell how he is eventually killed by Hector’s brother Paris, with the aid of Apollo.



Replica of Trojan Horse

the bloodstained shield and cuirass from his shoulders.  
Other Achaeans hastened round to see  
220 Hector's fine body and his comely face,  
and no one came who did not stab the body.  
Glancing at one another they would say:

**218 cuirass** (kwĭ-rās'): an armored breastplate.

“Now Hector has turned vulnerable, softer  
than when he put the torches to the ships!”

**224** Hector's torching of the ships occurred when the Trojans forced the Greeks (fighting without Achilles) back to the sea.

225 And he who said this would inflict a wound.  
When the great master of pursuit, Achilles,  
had the body stripped, he stood among them,  
saying swiftly:

“Friends, my lords and captains  
of Argives, now that the gods at last have let me  
230 bring to earth this man who wrought  
havoc among us—more than all the rest—  
come, we'll offer battle around the city,  
to learn the intentions of the Trojans now.  
Will they give up their strongpoint at this loss?  
235 Can they fight on, though Hector's dead?

**228–229 captains of Argives** (ār'jīvz'): Greek officers.

But wait:

why do I ponder, why take up these questions?  
Down by the ships Patroclus' body lies  
unwept, unburied. I shall not forget him  
while I can keep my feet among the living.  
240 If in the dead world they forget the dead,  
I say there, too, I shall remember him,  
my friend. Men of Achaea, lift a song!  
Down to the ships we go, and take this body,  
our glory. We have beaten Hector down,  
245 to whom as to a god the Trojans prayed.”

**240** The “dead world” is the house of Hades, or the underworld, where the Greeks believed the shades of the dead to reside.

Indeed, he had in mind for Hector's body  
outrage and shame. Behind both feet he pierced  
the tendons, heel to ankle. Rawhide cords  
he drew through both and lashed them to his chariot,  
250 letting the man's head trail. Stepping aboard,  
bearing the great trophy of the arms,  
he shook the reins, and whipped the team ahead

WORDS  
TO  
KNOW

**vulnerable** (vūl'nār-ə-bəl) *adj.* open to attack; easily hurt  
**havoc** (hāv'ək) *n.* widespread destruction

into a willing run. A dustcloud rose  
above the furrowing body; the dark tresses  
255 flowed behind, and the head so princely once  
lay back in dust. Zeus gave him to his enemies  
to be defiled in his own fatherland.  
So his whole head was blackened. Looking down,  
his mother tore her braids, threw off her veil,  
260 and wailed, heartbroken to behold her son.  
Piteously his father groaned, and round him  
lamentation spread throughout the town,  
most like the clamor to be heard if Ilion's  
towers, top to bottom, seethed in flames.  
265 They barely stayed the old man, mad with grief,  
from passing through the gates. Then in the mire  
he rolled, and begged them all, each man by name:

**263 Ilion** (ɪl'ē-ən): another name for Troy.

“Relent, friends. It is hard; but let me go  
out of the city to the Achaean ships.  
270 I'll make my plea to that demonic heart.  
He may feel shame before his peers, or pity  
my old age. His father, too, is old.  
Peus, who brought him up to be a scourge  
to Trojans, cruel to all, but most to me,  
275 so many of my sons in flower of youth  
he cut away. And, though I grieve, I cannot  
mourn them all as much as I do one,  
for whom my grief will take me to the grave—  
and that is Hector. Why could he not have died  
280 where I might hold him? In our weeping, then,  
his mother, now so destitute, and I  
might have had surfeit and relief of tears.”

**268–270** Think about Priam's decision to approach Achilles. What does this reveal about his sense of honor and loyalty?

**282 surfeit** (sūr'fīt): more than enough for satisfaction.

**Achilles and his warriors return to their camp and carry out the burial rites for Patroclus. Three times, Achilles drags Hector's body behind his chariot around Patroclus' grave. Afterwards, the gods cleanse and restore the body, and Zeus asks Thetis to tell Achilles to return the body to the Trojans. Priam sets out for the Greek camp, accompanied only by an old servant, to ask Achilles to return the body. He is not aware that the god Hermes (hūr'mēz) helps him by putting the sentries to sleep and opening the gates. Hermes leads Priam to Achilles' tent and then vanishes.**

**WORDS TO KNOW**  
**defile** (dī-fīl') *v.* to make filthy; violate the honor of  
**clamor** (klām'ər) *n.* a loud, confused noise or outcry  
**scourge** (skūrj) *n.* a source of great suffering or destruction  
**destitute** (dēs'tī-tōōt') *adj.* lacking in resources; bereft

from Book 24

## A GRACE GIVEN IN SORROW

Priam,  
the great king of Troy, passed by the others,  
285 knelt down, took in his arms Achilles' knees,  
and kissed the hands of wrath that killed his sons.

When, taken with mad Folly in his own land,  
a man does murder and in exile finds  
refuge in some rich house, then all who see him  
290 stand in awe.  
So these men stood.

Achilles  
gazed in wonder at the splendid king,  
and his companions marveled too, all silent,  
with glances to and fro. Now Priam prayed  
295 to the man before him:

“Remember your own father,  
Achilles, in your godlike youth: his years  
like mine are many, and he stands upon  
the fearful doorstep of old age. He, too,  
is hard pressed, it may be, by those around him,  
300 there being no one able to defend him  
from bane of war and ruin. Ah, but he  
may nonetheless hear news of you alive,  
and so with glad heart hope through all his days  
for sight of his dear son, come back from Troy,  
305 while I have deathly fortune.

Noble sons  
I fathered here, but scarce one man is left me.  
Fifty I had when the Achaeans came,  
nineteen out of a single belly, others  
born of attendant women. Most are gone.  
310 Raging Ares cut their knees from under them.  
And he who stood alone among them all,  
their champion, and Troy's, ten days ago  
you killed him, fighting for his land, my prince,  
Hector.

It is for him that I have come  
315 among these ships, to beg him back from you,  
and I bring ransom without stint.

316 **stint:** limitation.

Achilles,

be reverent toward the great gods! And take  
pity on me, remember your own father.  
Think me more pitiful by far, since I  
320 have brought myself to do what no man else  
has done before—to lift to my lips the hand  
of one who killed my son.”

Now in Achilles

the evocation of his father stirred  
new longing, and an ache of grief. He lifted  
325 the old man’s hand and gently put him by.  
Then both were overborne as they remembered:  
the old king huddled at Achilles’ feet  
wept, and wept for Hector, killer of men,  
while great Achilles wept for his own father  
330 as for Patroclus once again; and sobbing  
filled the room.

But when Achilles’ heart

had known the luxury of tears, and pain  
within his breast and bones had passed away,  
he stood then, raised the old king up, in pity  
335 for his grey head and greybeard cheek, and spoke  
in a warm rush of words:

“Ah, sad and old!

Trouble and pain you’ve borne, and bear, aplenty.  
Only a great will could have brought you here  
among the Achaean ships, and here alone  
340 before the eyes of one who stripped your sons,  
your many sons, in battle. Iron must be  
the heart within you. Come, then, and sit down.  
We’ll probe our wounds no more but let them rest,  
though grief lies heavy on us. Tears heal nothing,  
345 drying so stiff and cold. This is the way  
the gods ordained the destiny of men,  
to bear such burdens in our lives, while they  
feel no affliction. At the door of Zeus  
are those two urns of good and evil gifts  
350 that he may choose for us; and one for whom  
the lightning’s joyous king dips in both urns  
will have by turns bad luck and good. But one

**326 overborne:** overcome;  
overwhelmed.



Ajax and Achilles playing dice, Greek vase painting

**336–348** Compare the impression of Achilles you got from lines 87–94 with the impression you get from these lines.

**WORDS  
TO  
KNOW** **evocation** (ĕv’ə-kā’shiən) *n.* a bringing to mind

to whom he sends all evil—that man goes  
contemptible by the will of Zeus; ravenous  
355 hunger drives him over the wondrous earth,  
unresting, without honor from gods or men.  
Mixed fortune came to Peleus. Shining gifts  
at the gods' hands he had from birth: felicity,  
wealth overflowing, rule of the Myrmidons,  
360 a bride immortal at his mortal side.  
But then Zeus gave afflictions too—no family  
of powerful sons grew up for him at home,  
but one child, of all seasons and of none.  
Can I stand by him in his age? Far from my country  
365 I sit at Troy to grieve you and your children.  
You, too, sir, in time past were fortunate,  
we hear men say. From Macar's isle of Lesbos  
northward, and south of Phrygia and the Straits,  
no one had wealth like yours, or sons like yours.  
370 Then gods out of the sky sent you this bitterness:  
the years of siege, the battles and the losses.  
Endure it, then. And do not mourn forever  
for your dead son. There is no remedy.  
You will not make him stand again. Rather  
375 await some new misfortune to be suffered."

The old king in his majesty replied:

"Never give me a chair, my lord, while Hector  
lies in your camp uncared for. Yield him to me  
now. Allow me sight of him. Accept  
380 the many gifts I bring. May they reward you,  
and may you see your home again.  
You spared my life at once and let me live."

Achilles, the great runner, frowned and eyed him  
under his brows:

"Do not vex me, sir," he said.  
385 "I have intended, in my own good time,  
to yield up Hector to you. She who bore me,  
the daughter of the Ancient of the sea,  
has come with word to me from Zeus. I know  
in your case, too—though you say nothing, Priam—  
390 that some god guided you to the shipways here.

**358 felicity** (fĭ-lĭs'ĭ-tē): happiness; good fortune.

**359 Myrmidons** (mŭr'mə-dŏnz'): a people of Thessaly in Greece, subjects of Achilles' father, Peleus.

**363** "Of all seasons and of none" suggests that Achilles expects an early death for himself.

**367–368 Lesbos** (ləz'bŏs) . . . **Phrygia** (frĭj'ē-ə) . . . **the Straits:** Lesbos is an island off the western coast of Asia Minor; Phrygia was an ancient kingdom in western Asia Minor; the Straits are the Dardanelles.

**387** "The Ancient of the sea" is the sea god Nereus (nĭr'ē-əs), father of Thetis.

No strong man in his best days could make entry  
into this camp. How could he pass the guard,  
or force our gateway?

Therefore, *let me be.*

395 Sting my sore heart again, and even here,  
under my own roof, suppliant though you are,  
I may not spare you, sir, but trample on  
the express command of Zeus!”

**395 suppliant** (sŭp'lē-ənt): one who begs or pleads earnestly.

When he heard this,  
the old man feared him and obeyed with silence.  
Now like a lion at one bound Achilles  
400 left the room. Close at his back the officers  
Automedon and Alcimus went out—  
comrades in arms whom he esteemed the most  
after the dead Patroclus. They unharnessed  
mules and horses, led the old king's crier  
405 to a low bench and sat him down.  
Then from the polished wagon  
they took the piled-up price of Hector's body.  
One chiton and two capes they left aside  
as dress and shrouding for the homeward journey.  
410 Then, calling to the women slaves, Achilles  
ordered the body bathed and rubbed with oil—  
but lifted, too, and placed apart, where Priam  
could not see his son—for seeing Hector  
he might in his great pain give way to rage,  
415 and fury then might rise up in Achilles  
to slay the old king, flouting Zeus's word.  
So after bathing and anointing Hector  
they drew the shirt and beautiful shrouding over him.  
Then with his own hands lifting him, Achilles  
420 laid him upon a couch, and with his two  
companions aiding, placed him in the wagon.  
Now a bitter groan burst from Achilles,  
who stood and prayed to his own dead friend:

**401 Automedon** (ô-tŏm'ə-dn) . . .  
**Alcimus** (ăl'sə-məs).

**408 chiton** (kīt'n): a shirtlike garment; tunic.

“Patroclus,

425 do not be angry with me, if somehow  
even in the world of Death you learn of this—  
that I released Prince Hector to his father.  
The gifts he gave were not unworthy. Aye,  
and you shall have your share, this time as well.”

WORDS  
TO  
KNOW

**flouting** (flout'ing) *adj.* disregarding in a contemptuous way; scorning **flout** *v.*

The Prince Achilles turned back to his quarters.  
430 He took again the splendid chair that stood  
against the farther wall, then looked at Priam  
and made his declaration:

“As you wished, sir,  
the body of your son is now set free.  
He lies in state. At the first sight of Dawn  
435 you shall take charge of him yourself and see him.  
Now let us think of supper. We are told  
that even Niobe in her extremity  
took thought for bread—though all her brood had perished,  
her six young girls and six tall sons. Apollo,  
440 making his silver longbow whip and sing,  
shot the lads down, and Artemis with raining  
arrows killed the daughters—all this after  
Niobe had compared herself with Leto,  
the smooth-cheeked goddess.

She has borne two children,  
445 Niobe said, How many have I borne!  
But soon those two destroyed the twelve.

Besides,  
nine days the dead lay stark, no one could bury them,  
for Zeus had turned all folk of theirs to stone.  
The gods made graves for them on the tenth day,  
450 and then at last, being weak and spent with weeping,  
Niobe thought of food. Among the rocks  
of Sipylus' lonely mountainside, where nymphs  
who race Achelous river go to rest,  
she, too, long turned to stone, somewhere broods on  
455 the gall immortal gods gave her to drink.

Like her we'll think of supper, noble sir.  
Weep for your son again when you have borne him  
back to Troy; there he'll be mourned indeed.”

**436–455** The mortal woman Niobe (nī'ə-bē) claimed that having so many children made her superior to the goddess Leto (lē'tō), who had only two. Leto's son and daughter, Apollo and Artemis (ār'tə-mīs), punished Niobe by killing all her children. After many days of grieving, Niobe asked the gods to relieve her by turning her to stone.

**452 Sipylus** (sīp'ə-ləs): a mountain in west central Asia Minor.

**453 Achelous** (ək'ə-lō'əs): a river near Mount Sipylus.

**455 gall**: bitterness; bile.

**Priam and Achilles agree to an 11-day truce. During that time, the Trojans will mourn Hector's body before its burial.**

## Connect to the Literature

### 1. What Do You Think?

What is your impression of Achilles? Share your thoughts with a classmate.

### Comprehension Check

- What does Achilles refuse to promise the dying Hector?
- What does Achilles do with Hector after he kills him?
- Identify the character who pleads for the return of Hector's body.

## Think Critically

2. In your opinion, does Achilles' loyalty to his friend Patroclus justify the way he treats Hector? Explain your answer.

3. How would you describe the relationship between Achilles and Priam?



- Achilles' killing of Hector
- the dialogue between the two men
- why Achilles gives Hector's body to Priam

4. To what extent do Achilles and Hector correspond to your idea of a **hero**?



- the kind of warrior each man is
- Hector's speech that begins "This is the end. . . ." (line 130, page 71)
- Achilles' treatment of Hector's body
- Achilles' response to Priam

5. How might your impression of Achilles be different if he refused to give Hector's body to Priam?

6. **ACTIVE READING CLASSIFYING CHARACTERS** Look back at the list you made in your **READER'S NOTEBOOK** and compare Achilles, Hector, and Priam. In your opinion, which **character** is the most courageous? Why?

## Extend Interpretations

7. **Connect to Life** Achilles and Hector fight one-on-one. Do you think leaders of rival nations, tribes, or groups should settle differences between themselves without involving their followers? Is it possible or practical to settle conflicts this way? Support your responses.

8. **Points of Comparison** Compare and contrast Achilles and Beowulf. Consider their actions and the reasons for those actions. Think about how they are alike and how they are different. Who behaves more like a true **epic hero**?

## Literary Analysis


### **SIMILE AND EPIC SIMILE** A

**simile** is a figure of speech that makes a comparison between two things that are actually unlike yet have something in common. The comparison is expressed by means of the word *like* or *as*. "Silent as death" and "John went down like a stone" are examples of similes. **Epic similes** are long comparisons that often continue for a number of lines. The epic simile in lines 145–148 of this selection compares Hector to an eagle. (In a translation, the word *like* or *as* may not appear; in the lines cited, *as* could be substituted for "the way.") What does the simile suggest about Hector's character?

**Paired Activity** Now analyze the simile in lines 154–158. What two things are being compared in the simile? How do the epic similes in lines 145–148 and lines 154–158 contribute to the telling of the story? With a classmate, make a list of all the similes that you can find in the poem.

**REVIEW EPIC** As you may recall, an **epic** is a long narrative poem on a serious subject, presented in an elevated or formal style. It usually traces the adventures of a great hero. Both *Beowulf* and the *Iliad* are epics. What similarities and differences do you see between the two poems?

## Writing Options

**1. Letter of Commendation** As either a Greek or a Trojan general, write a letter of commendation for Achilles or Hector. Explain why you are awarding him your army's highest medal. Place the letter in your **Working Portfolio**. 

**2. Character Sketch** Think again about the relationship between Achilles and Priam. Then write a character sketch of Priam from Achilles' point of view.

**3. Alternative Outline** Imagine events as they might have occurred without the gods and goddesses. Write an outline for a version of the poem in which the human characters determine their own fate.

**4. Points of Comparison** Compare and contrast in an essay the attitudes toward fame and ambition in *Beowulf* and the *Iliad*. Support your comparisons with evidence from the selections.

### Writing

#### Handbook

See page 1367:  
Compare and Contrast.



## Activities & Explorations

**1. Dramatic Reading** With a classmate, give a dramatic reading of the encounter between Achilles and Priam. Use your voices and facial expressions to convey emotions such as sorrow, anger, desperation, compassion, and fear. ~ **SPEAKING AND LISTENING**

**2. Dance Interpretation** Create a dance interpretation of the battle between Hector and Achilles. Choose appropriate music to accompany it, and perform your dance for the class.

~ **DANCE / MUSIC**

**3. Heroic Mural** With a group of classmates, using large sheets of paper, sketch or paint a series of scenes from the *Iliad* and put them together to form a mural for your classroom. ~ **ART**

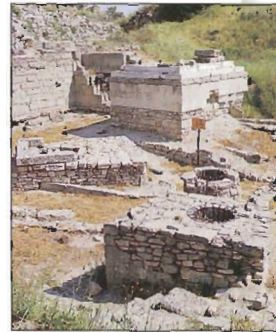
**4. Homeric Epithets** In line 10, the reference to Achilles as “the great runner” is an example of an **epithet**, a brief phrase that refers to a characteristic of a particular person or thing. Other examples are the references to Hector as “killer of men” and Priam as “great king of Troy.” With a group of classmates, have one member of the group call out the names of current sports figures or other celebrities and

then have the other members call out possible epithets for that person.

~ **SPEAKING AND LISTENING**

## Inquiry & Research

**1. Digging Up Troy** Find out more about the real city of Troy. Where was it located? What have archaeologists discovered about the city? Present your findings to the class in an outline for a television documentary about Troy.



**More Online: Research Starter**  
[www.mcdougallittell.com](http://www.mcdougallittell.com)

**2. Translations of Homer** There have been many translations of Homer into English. The 18th-century poet Alexander Pope, for example, translated both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. With classmates, find three modern translations of the *Iliad* in addition to the one you just read. Choose a brief passage and compare its treatment in the three versions. Then in class read the three translations of the passage aloud. Discuss the differences with your classmates.

## Vocabulary in Action

**EXERCISE: RELATED WORDS** Write the letter of the word that is not related in meaning to the other words in each set.

- (a) face, (b) meet, (c) evade, (d) confront
- (a) ponderous, (b) swift, (c) weighty, (d) hefty
- (a) clamor, (b) peacefulness, (c) silence, (d) calmness
- (a) dirty, (b) cleanse, (c) defile, (d) corrupt
- (a) strong, (b) vulnerable, (c) weak, (d) defenseless
- (a) dodge, (b) capture, (c) elude, (d) escape
- (a) destruction, (b) disaster, (c) havoc, (d) protection
- (a) whetted, (b) dull, (c) blunt, (d) rounded
- (a) disobey, (b) flout, (c) punish, (d) disregard
- (a) promise, (b) exult, (c) rejoice, (d) celebrate
- (a) defender, (b) guardian, (c) protector, (d) scourge
- (a) act, (b) abstain, (c) proceed, (d) perform
- (a) remembrance, (b) calendar, (c) reminder, (d) evocation
- (a) soothe, (b) quell, (c) scold, (d) hush
- (a) destitute, (b) needy, (c) deprived, (d) injured

WORDS  
TO  
KNOW

abstain  
clamor  
defile

destitute  
elude  
evade

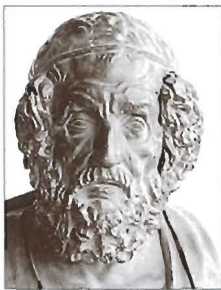
evocation  
exult  
flouting

havoc  
ponderous  
quell

scourge  
vulnerable  
whetted

### Building Vocabulary

For an in-depth lesson on how to expand your vocabulary, see page 1182.



## Homer

c. 850 B.C.

**Who Was Homer?** Little is known about the Greek poet Homer. In fact, for centuries scholars have debated whether such a man ever really existed. Today, most agree that the author of two equally famous epics, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, was indeed a man named Homer, who lived sometime between 800 and 600 B.C. Evidence of his life and authorship has been gathered indirectly from other writings of ancient Greece, from historical references, and from his poems. It seems likely that the mysterious poet was born either in western Asia Minor or on one of the nearby Aegean islands.

**The Blind Bard** According to legend, Homer was blind; however, some scholars believe that this legend is not likely to be literally true. They point

out that the typical ancient Greek portrayal of a sage or philosopher was of a blind man with exceptional inner vision. Ancient Greeks viewed the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* as works that revealed all-important truths about human beings and their place in the universe. Often, Greek children were required to memorize portions of the epics and to model their behavior on the heroic code set forth by their author. With the possible exception of Shakespeare, no other poet in the Western world has been quoted more often than Homer.

**Oral Poetry** Homer's poems probably had a long oral history before they were written down. It is believed that they were composed in verse partly because the meter made them easier to memorize. According to modern scholars, Homer was probably illiterate, living as he did at a time when writing was just being introduced among the Greeks. In his old age, the poet may have recited his epics for someone else to record.



**LaserLinks: Background for Reading**  
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