CLASSICS LIBRARY · STORY MAP

The Iliad

Homer · *c. 8th century BC* · *Samuel Butler prose translation*

In the tenth year of the Trojan War, the great warrior Achilles quarrels with his king and withdraws from the fighting. His wrath costs the Greeks dearly and kills his dearest friend. Only when the old king Priam comes to beg for his son's body does Achilles show mercy.

THE CENTRAL QUESTION

Where does wrath lead, and what can turn a proud heart toward mercy?

"Sing, O goddess, the anger of Achilles son of Peleus, that brought countless ills upon the Achaeans."

The poet's opening · Book I

Achilles' anger destroys friend and foe alike; it yields only when a grieving father humbles himself before him. Homer shows the glory and the cost of pride. Christian readers will see how far short of mercy for enemies that glory falls.

KEY CHARACTERS

Achilles
unmatched strength, ungoverned wrath

Agamemnon
a king's pride and greed

Hector
duty to city, wife and son

Andromache
a wife's faithful grief

Priam
a father's humility

Patroclus
the gentle friend

Odysseus
counsel and cunning

Paris & Helen
the fault behind the war

Thetis
the hero's divine mother

A FATHER'S PRAYER

> *"Then may one say of him as he comes from battle, 'The son is far better than the father.'"*
>
> **Hector, praying over his infant son** · Book VI

> *"Thus, then, did they celebrate the funeral of Hector tamer of horses."*
>
> **The poem's last line** · Book XXIV

Grades 9–12
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01 The Quarrel

BOOK I

A king's pride, a hero's rage.

- Apollo sends a plague because **Agamemnon** will not return the priest's daughter Chryseis
- Agamemnon gives her up, then takes **Achilles**' prize, Briseis
- Achilles withdraws from the war in fury
- His mother **Thetis** begs Jove to give the Trojans victory until the Greeks honor her son

02 War Without Achilles

BOOKS II–VIII

Courage, cowardice and courtesy on the plain of Troy.

- **Paris** fights **Menelaus** for Helen and is spirited away by Venus
- Diomed fights even gods
- Glaucus and Diomed find they are guest-friends, and exchange armor instead of blows
- **Hector** says farewell to his wife **Andromache** and their baby son

> *"Men come and go as leaves year by year upon the trees."*
>
> **Glaucus to Diomed** · Book VI

03 The Embassy Refused

BOOK IX

Offered everything, Achilles still says no.

- Driven back to their ships, the Greeks despair
- Agamemnon offers rich gifts and Briseis' return
- Odysseus, old Phoenix and Ajax plead with Achilles
- He refuses; his pride now outweighs his friends' need

> *"My mother Thetis tells me that there are two ways in which I may meet my end. If I stay here and fight, I shall not return alive but my name will live for ever"*
>
> **Achilles to the envoys** · Book IX

04 The Ships Burn

BOOKS X–XV

The Trojans break through.

- A night raid on the Trojan camp
- The Greek leaders are wounded one by one
- Hector breaks the Greek wall
- Juno distracts Jove, and the Greeks briefly rally
- Hector fights his way to the ships, calling for fire

> *"There is one omen, and one only—that a man should fight for his country."*
>
> **Hector** · Book XII

05 Patroclus and Hector

BOOKS XVI–XXII

Wrath turned on a new enemy.

- **Patroclus** fights in Achilles' armor and is killed by Hector, with Apollo's help
- Achilles' grief is terrible; Vulcan forges him new armor and a great shield
- He makes peace with Agamemnon and returns to battle
- He kills Hector before the walls of Troy
- He drags Hector's body behind his chariot

06 The Ransom

BOOKS XXIII–XXIV

Two enemies weep together.

- Achilles holds funeral games for Patroclus
- The gods send **Priam** by night to Achilles' tent with a ransom
- Priam kisses the hands that killed his son and asks him to remember his father
- Achilles weeps, returns Hector's body and grants a truce
- Troy mourns and buries Hector

> *"and have raised to my lips the hand of him who slew my son."*
>
> **Priam to Achilles** · Book XXIV

Wrath & Pride | Honor & Glory | Duty & Courage | Friendship | Fathers & Sons | Mercy

What to watch for as you read

GRADES 9–12

1. Follow the word "anger" from the first line. Whose anger moves the plot at each stage?
2. Compare Hector and Achilles. One fights for his city and family, the other for his name. Which does Homer honor, and which would you?
3. Notice moments of courtesy in the middle of war (Glaucus and Diomed, Priam and Achilles). What makes them possible?
4. Watch the gods. Do they act as judges of right and wrong, or as rivals? How does that differ from the God of Scripture?
5. Track what each man is offered and what he refuses: gifts, ransom, glory, a long life.
6. Ask why the poem ends with Hector's funeral and not the fall of Troy.

Quotations are verbatim from the Samuel Butler prose translation, Project Gutenberg #2199, the public-domain text hosted at classicslaunch.org/works/the-iliad/. Citations give book and chapter (or canto and line) so every line can be checked.