CLASSICS LIBRARY · STORY MAP

The Mahabharata

Vyasa · *Traditional, centuries BC; English verse 1898/1899 · Romesh Chunder Dutt, condensed English verse (1898/1899)*

Dutt's one-volume English verse retells the central story of the Sanskrit epic, not the complete poem. The five Pandavas and their Kaurava cousins come to rivalry, a reckless game of dice, exile, and a war of kinsmen. Krishna speaks to Arjuna of duty; that discourse is only abridged here. The brothers win a kingdom emptied by the dead.

THE CENTRAL QUESTION

What is a king's duty when a wager has ruined a house, and when duty seems to require war against his own kin?

"The madness increased, and Yudhishthir staked his brothers, and then himself, and then the fair Draupadi, and lost!"
Dutt's prose head-note to the dice episode

Yudhishthira's dice game costs a kingdom and a wife's honor. Exile follows, then a war in which Krishna teaches Arjuna on the field. Dutt gives that teaching only in brief; the library's Bhagavad-gita should be read beside it. The victory is real, and so is its grief. This is a Hindu epic, not a church book.

KEY CHARACTERS

Yudhishthira
Eldest Pandava, a man of truth who stakes a kingdom and a wife at dice.

Arjuna
The archer who wins Draupadi and hears Krishna's teaching on the field.

Draupadi
Wife of the Pandavas, staked and insulted in the hall.

Duryodhana
Eldest Kaurava, who will not yield the kingdom.

Karna
Peerless warrior, bound to Duryodhana, set against Arjuna.

Bhishma
Elder of the Kurus, commander until his fall.

Krishna
Arjuna's charioteer, who speaks the teaching known as the Gita.

DUTY AND THE ABRIDGMENT

> *"Yudhishthir, the eldest son of Pandu, was a man of truth and piety; Bhima, the second, was a stalwart fighter; and Arjun, the third son, distinguished himself above all the other princes in arms."*
> Introduction to Book I

> *"It was on this occasion that Krishna explained to him the great principles of Duty in that memorable work called the _Bhagavat-gita_ which has been translated into so many European languages."*
> Prose head-note before the war books

Grades 10–12
Read the full text free at classicslaunch.org.

01

The princes

BOOK I, THE TOURNAMENT

The sons of Pandu and of Dhritarashtra are trained in arms. A public tournament shows Arjuna's skill and brings Karna, bound to Duryodhana, into rivalry.

- Yudhishthira, Bhima, and Arjuna are named as men of piety, strength, and arms.
- The tournament divides the crowd between Arjuna and Karna.
- Duryodhana fastens Karna to his side.

> *"'Arjun is the gallant victor!" "Valiant Karna's won the day!" "Prince Duryodhan is the winner!" Various thus the people say."*
> Book I, after the tournament

02

Draupadi and the city

THE ESCAPE AND THE BRIDEGROOM-CHOICE

The Pandavas escape a plot against their lives. Arjuna wins Draupadi. The brothers receive a share of the realm and raise Indraprastha.

- A house is prepared to destroy the Pandavas; they escape.
- Arjuna wins Draupadi at her bridegroom-choice.
- The brothers raise a great city and a share of the kingdom.

03

The fatal dice

THE GAME AND THE EXILE

Yudhishthira is drawn into a game of dice and stakes wealth, brothers, himself, and Draupadi. She is insulted in the hall. The Pandavas go into exile.

- Game after game is lost; the stakes increase.
- Yudhishthira stakes his brothers, himself, and Draupadi, and loses.
- They are spared actual slavery, and go into the forest as exiles.

> *"The madness increased, and Yudhishthir staked his brothers, and then himself, and then the fair Draupadi, and lost!"*
> Prose head-note to the dice episode

04

The war

THE FIELD AND THE FALL OF THE ELDERS

When the Pandavas return and are refused their share, the armies meet. Krishna speaks to Arjuna of duty. Bhishma, Drona, and Karna fall in turn.

- Arjuna hesitates to fight his kin; Krishna speaks of duty.
- Dutt includes that teaching only in abridged form.
- Bhishma, then Drona, then Karna fall.

> *"It was on this occasion that Krishna explained to him the great principles of Duty in that memorable work called the _Bhagavat-gita_ which has been translated into so many European languages."*
> Prose head-note before the war books

05

Victory and the last journey

THE CLOSE OF DUTT'S RETELLING

The Pandavas win a kingdom emptied by the slaughter. Funeral rites, rule, and the final departure of the brothers close the book.

- The victory costs a field of fallen kinsmen.
- Funeral rites and a hard rule follow the war.
- The brothers' last journey ends Dutt's condensation.

A house divided · The wager · Duty on the field · Loyalty · A costly victory

What to watch for as you read

GRADES 10–12

1. This is Romesh Chunder Dutt's condensed English verse (Gutenberg #19630, 1898/1899), not the complete Sanskrit epic.
2. Dutt often states an episode in a prose head-note before the verse; both are part of the hosted text.
3. The Bhagavad-gita is only abridged here; use the library's separate Gita for the fuller English.
4. Dutt's spellings (Yudhishthir, Arjun) are the translator's and should be kept in quotations.
5. The book is a Hindu epic. Do not recast Krishna's teaching as a substitute for Scripture.

Quotations are verbatim from the Romesh Chunder Dutt, condensed English verse (1898/1899), Romesh Chunder Dutt, 1899; Project Gutenberg #19630, the public-domain text hosted at classicslaunch.org/works/the-mahabharata/. Citations give book and chapter (or canto and line) so every line can be checked.