**Background Knowledge**

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| Once upon a time, around [**1250 BC**](http://www.historyforkids.org/learn/timelines/2000bc.htm), toward the [end of the **Bronze Age**](http://www.historyforkids.org/learn/greeks/history/latebronze.htm) in Greece, three [**goddesses**](http://www.historyforkids.org/learn/greeks/religion/gods.htm)were having an argument (said the Greeks). The goddesses [**Aphrodite**](http://www.historyforkids.org/learn/greeks/religion/aphrodite.htm), [**Athena**](http://www.historyforkids.org/learn/greeks/religion/athena.htm), and [**Hera**](http://www.historyforkids.org/learn/greeks/religion/hera.htm) were arguing about which one of them was the most beautiful. They agreed to choose a human man and let him decide. More or less at random, the goddesses picked **Paris**, the youngest son of King **Priam** of [**Troy**](http://www.historyforkids.org/learn/westasia/history/troy.htm), to be their judge.  Each of the goddesses offered Paris a bribe to get him to vote for her. [**Athena**](http://www.historyforkids.org/learn/greeks/religion/athena.htm) offered him wisdom. [**Hera**](http://www.historyforkids.org/learn/greeks/religion/hera.htm)offered him power. But [**Aphrodite**](http://www.historyforkids.org/learn/greeks/religion/aphrodite.htm) offered him the most beautiful woman in the world, and Paris voted for her.  So Aphrodite had to come through on her promise. She sent Paris to go visit the Greek king of [**Sparta**](http://www.historyforkids.org/learn/greeks/government/sparta.htm), [**Menelaus**](http://www.historyforkids.org/learn/greeks/religion/myths/menelaus.htm)(men-uh-LAY-us). Menelaus was married to [**Helen**](http://www.historyforkids.org/learn/greeks/religion/myths/helen.htm)**,** who was the most beautiful woman in the world. Menelaus and Helen welcomed Paris kindly, and gave him [dinner](http://www.historyforkids.org/learn/greeks/food/greekfood.htm) and let him stay the night in their [house](http://www.historyforkids.org/learn/greeks/architecture/latebronze.htm). But during the night Paris convinced Helen to run away with him (because [**Aphrodite**](http://www.historyforkids.org/learn/greeks/religion/aphrodite.htm) made her agree). He took her back to Troy with him and married her, even though she was already married to Menelaus. **Menelaus** and his brother King **Agamemnon** took their armies and set sail for **Troy** to get **Helen** back. |

The story of [**Homer**](http://www.historyforkids.org/learn/greeks/literature/homer.htm)**'s** ***Iliad*** begins in the middle of the **Trojan War**. (We don't know if there ever really was a Trojan War, but even if there was, this is a story about it, not real facts from it.) The Greeks believed that the **Trojan War** lasted for ten years, and this story happens in the **10th** year of the war, when both sides were really sick of being at war, and the Greeks were sick of being away from home.

The ***Iliad*** begins with a fight between the leader of the Greeks, King [**Agamemnon**](http://www.historyforkids.org/learn/greeks/literature/agamemnon.htm)of [Mycenae](http://www.historyforkids.org/learn/greeks/architecture/latebronze.htm), and the Greeks' best fighter, King [**Achilles**](http://www.historyforkids.org/learn/greeks/religion/myths/achilles.htm) (uh-KILL-eez). (The Greeks lived in a lot of little [**city-states**](http://www.historyforkids.org/learn/government/polis.htm), and in the [**Bronze Age**](http://www.historyforkids.org/learn/greeks/history/latebronze.htm) each one had its own [king](http://www.historyforkids.org/learn/government/monarchy.htm), but **Agamemnon** was leading them all during the war).

The Greeks had won a battle and were splitting up the booty (the stuff they had captured). Everybody had a pile of stuff. Achilles had gotten a woman among his stuff, to be his [**slave**](http://www.historyforkids.org/learn/people/slaves.htm), whose name was **Briseis** (brih-SAY-iss). But Agamemnon decided that HE wanted the pretty Briseis, and he just took her from Achilles, saying that he was the head of the army so he would do what he liked. Well, **Achilles** was so angry that **Agamemnon** took Briseis from him that he refused to fight for the Greeks anymore and just sat in his [tent](http://www.historyforkids.org/learn/clothing/wool.htm) and sulked. Without their best fighter, the Greeks started losing battles.

Finally Achilles' [best friend](http://www.historyforkids.org/learn/greeks/people/friends.htm) **Patroclos** thought of an idea. He put on Achilles' famous[**armor**](http://www.historyforkids.org/learn/arts/bronze.htm) and went out to fight. Both the Greeks and the Trojans thought Achilles had come back to the battle and the Greeks won a big victory, but **Patroclos** was killed in the fighting: he might dress like Achilles but he could not fight like him.

When Achilles heard that **Patroclos** was dead, he was ashamed of how he had been sulking. He agreed to fight again. Now the Greeks really started to win. So the best Trojan fighter, Prince **Hector**, came out from Troy to fight Achilles. They fought for a long time, but finally Achilles killed **Hector.** Hector's father, King **Priam**, came to Achilles at night to ask for his son's body back, and Achilles gave it to him.

The ***Iliad*** ends here, but this is not the end of the story. Later events about a great wooden horse were added to the story. The **Greeks** built the horse as a peace offering for the **Trojans**. The Trojans took the horse into their walled city. The Greeks were hiding inside the horse. That night while the Trojans were asleep the Greek climbed out the horse, captured the city, killed many people and took **Helen** back to Sparta.

Assignment: Ancient Book Cover Design

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| Select one epic from Greece (*Iliad* or *Odyssey*).  Design a book cover for the epic.  Be sure to include the following.   * Author: Homer * Date written * Published in Ancient Greece * Illustration * Illustrated by: Your name * Setting * List of main characters * 2 Facts |

  

 

