

English 1AS Summer Reading – San Mateo High School

Welcome to SMHS, where we read voraciously, write continually, think deeply, speak confidently and work long and hard in order to learn everything we can about literature, and life. Your summer reading text is *The Iliad*, by Homer (translation by Robert Fagles). The translator is very important! Do not use an alternate translation. While reading this epic poem, answer the questions listed below. Bring your work, typed, to the first day of school.

Iliad 1-4

1. How are the gods represented, and how does the divine condition compare to the human? How influential are the gods on human action? Compare especially the council of heroes in Book 1 with that of the gods; the dream sent by Zeus and Agamemnon's response in Book 2; Aphrodite's interventions and Paris and Helen's responses in Book 3.
2. Are there distinctions drawn between Greeks and Trojans? Does Homer take sides in his representation of the heroes? Which group is portrayed more favorably?

Iliad 5-8

3. How are women represented, and what are the positions of women in the poem. See especially Helen in 3 and 6, and Andromache in 6. Is there any psychological or symbolic linkage to be made between the actions and attitudes of the women and of the goddesses Thetis, Hera, Athena, Aphrodite?
4. Study Hector's meeting with Andromache and their child Astyanax (6. 462-600). Is Hector fighting for something different from the other heroes? What is the importance and role of family in the heroic world?
5. Study the attitude and activity of Zeus at the end of Book 7 and the beginning of Book 8. Is there any consistency or design to the actions of the king and father of gods?

Iliad 9-12

6. What is Agamemnon's offer of recompense to Achilles in Book 9, and how (and why) does Odysseus modify it? Why does Achilles refuse Agamemnon's offer? How does Homer shape your response to this critical rejection? What is your attitude toward Achilles at this point in the narrative?
7. In Book 11, note the successive wounding of the various Greek heroes, and the entrance of Patroclus. How has Patroclus's relationship to Agamemnon been represented thus far, and what's the narrative effect of the poet's announcing, "from that moment on his doom was sealed" (11. 714). Iliad 13-16
8. Hera's seduction of Zeus in 14 provides a digression from the primary narrative of human warfare. What is the tone and the thematic or symbolic point of the digression?
9. Homer employs the same stallion simile to describe Hector (15. 313-18) as had earlier described Paris (6. 604-09): Compare and contrast Hector and Paris as characters.
10. What is the effect of Patroclus dying the way he does, and why is Apollo so actively involved in it (16. 903 ff.)?

Iliad 17-20

11. Why are so many willing to battle and die over Patroclus's corpse?
12. What is at stake for Achilles in Patroclus's death, and why does it change his mind?
13. Study the symbolism and the thematic function of the shield which Hephaestus forges for Achilles (18. 558-709).
14. Briseis's only words in the epic are her lament for Patroclus (19. 333-56). Why?

Iliad 21-24

15. What ironies frame Hector's death? Does he die a "heroic" death?
16. Why are the funeral games for Patroclus included so late in the narrative? What is their purpose in the story as a whole?
17. Reflect carefully on Achilles's change of heart in Book 24. What brings it about? Does it seem plausible to you?

Short Answer

18. What is your final assessment of Achilles as "best of the Achaeans"?
19. What is heroism as it is depicted in *The Iliad*? According to this definition, who lives up to that definition the most? The least?