

## The Epic Poetry

# of Homer

### GUIDED READING

#### WORD HELP

**main** strength  
**resolute** determined  
**imploring** begging

1 To what is Achilles being compared?

2 Priam, Hector's father, knows that the gods have protected and strengthened Achilles.

3 Achilles' armor was made by the god of metalworking.

Why might the very sight of this armor make Priam afraid?

### from the *Iliad*

as translated by Robert Fitzgerald

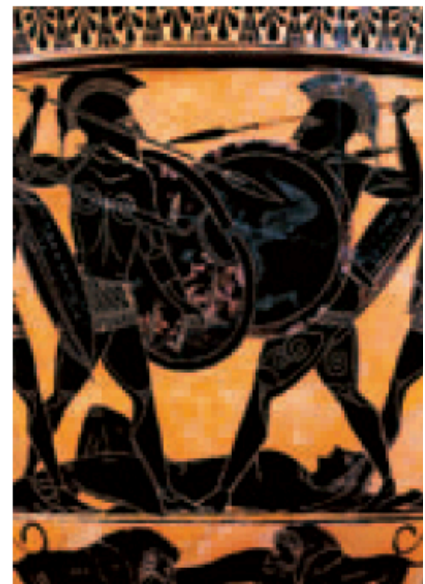
**About the Reading** *The Iliad* describes one part of a ten-year war between the Greeks and the city of Troy. As the poem opens, the Greek hero Achilles (uh-KIL-eez) has left the battle to wait for help from the gods. When he learns that his best friend Patroclus is dead, however, Achilles springs back into action. In this passage, the angry Achilles sprints across the plain toward Troy—and Hector, the Trojan warrior who has killed his friend.

**AS YOU READ** Look for words and actions that tell you Achilles is a hero.

Then toward the town with might and main  
 he ran magnificent, like a racing chariot horse  
 that holds its form at full stretch on the plain. 1  
 So light-footed Achilles held the pace.  
 And aging Priam was the first to see him  
 sparkling on the plain, bright as that star  
 in autumn rising, whose unclouded rays  
 shine out amid a throng of stars at dusk—  
 the one they call Orion's dog, most brilliant... 2  
 So pure and bright  
 the bronze gear blazed upon him as he ran.  
 The old man gave a cry. 3 With both his hands  
 thrown up on high he struck his head, then  
 shouted, groaning, appealing to his dear son.  
 Unmoved, Lord Hector stood in the gateway,  
 resolute to fight Achilles.

Stretching out his hands,  
 old Priam said, imploring him:

“No, Hector!  
 ... don't try to hold your ground against this man,  
 or soon you'll meet the shock of doom...”



The painting on this vase shows people fighting in the Trojan War.

## from the *Odyssey*

**About the Reading** *The Odyssey takes place after the Trojan War has ended. It describes the adventures of another hero, Odysseus (oh-DIS-ee-uhs), as he makes his way home to his kingdom of Ithaca.*

*His voyage is full of obstacles—including the two sea monsters described in this passage. The idea for these monsters probably came from an actual strait in the Mediterranean Sea, where a jagged cliff rose on one side and dangerous whirlpools churned on the other.*

**AS YOU READ** Try to picture the action in your mind.

And all this time,  
in travail, sobbing, gaining on the current,  
we rowed into the strait—Scylla to port  
and on our starboard beam Charybdis, dire  
gorge of the salt sea tide. ❶ By heaven! when she  
vomited, all the sea was like a cauldron  
seething over intense fire, when the mixture  
suddenly heaves and rises.

The shot spume  
soared to the landside heights, and fell like rain.  
But when she swallowed the sea water down  
we saw the funnel of the maelstrom, heard  
the rock bellowing all around, and dark  
sand raged on the bottom far below. ❷  
My men all blanched against the gloom, our eyes  
were fixed upon that yawning mouth in fear  
of being devoured.

Then Scylla made her strike,  
whisking six of my best men from the ship.  
I happened to glance aft at ship and oarsmen  
and caught sight of their arms and legs, dangling  
high overhead. Voices came down to me  
in anguish, calling my name for the last time . . . ❸

We rowed on.

The Rocks were now behind; Charybdis, too,  
and Scylla dropped astern.

## GUIDED READING

### WORD HELP

**travail** pain  
**dire gorge** terrible throat  
**spume** foam or froth  
**maelstrom** whirlpool  
**blanched** grew pale  
**anguish** great suffering

❶ Odysseus is the speaker. He is referring to himself and his crew.

*Why might the crew be sobbing?*

❷ Three times a day, the monster Charybdis (cuh-RIB-duhs) takes in water and then spits it out.

❸ Like many Greek monsters, Scylla (SIL-uh) is part human and part animal. She has the body of a woman, six heads with snake-like necks, and twelve feet.

## CONNECTING LITERATURE TO HISTORY

1. **Comparing** Many Greek myths were about heroes who had special abilities. What heroic abilities or traits do Achilles, Hector, and Odysseus share?

2. **Analyzing** The Greeks used myths to explain the natural world. How does the *Odyssey* passage illustrate this?