

# CLASSICAL MYTHS

## Unit 3. The Trojan War

### The Iliad

Homer's *Iliad* is an epic poem which explains only a part of the mythical facts which occurred during the last year of the Trojan War. Its subject is Achilles' wrath caused by Agamemnon.

**1b.** This is the correct sequence of the eight cards you have put in order to find out the plot of the *Iliad*, but on the left of each card you have now a quotation taken from the poem, which supports the event explained on the right.

- Decide who says each speech, among the characters named in the following list:

- Achilles                      - Patroclus      - Priam                      - Andromache                      - Paris  
 - Menelaos                      - Zeus                      - Calchas                      - Hector                      - Thetis

<p>'Apollo does not fault our prayer or sacrifice, but his anger is for his priest, dishonoured by Agamemnon, when he would not release his daughter and accept the ransom.'</p>	<p>In the tenth year of the war, Agamemnon captures the daughter of a priest of Apollo. Upon his refusal to return the girl, a plague strikes the Achaeans. The seer Calchas reports that the girl must be returned to her father for health to be restored. Agamemnon agrees, but only if he has a substitute war prize - Briseis - Achilles' concubine. When Agamemnon takes Briseis from him, Achilles refuses to fight. Thetis, the immortal mother of Achilles, persuades Zeus to punish Agamemnon by making the Trojans beat the Achaeans for a while.</p>
<p>'But if you want me to now to fight and do battle, have the others sit down, the rest of the Trojans and all the Achaians, and pit me and the warrior Menelaos together in the middle.'</p>	<p>With Achilles out of the battle field, there is an attempt to solve the conflict by a single combat between Paris and Menelaus. <u>Paris is at first reluctant to fight</u>, but after accepting Hector's reprimands, he accepts the duel and a truce is accorded.</p>
<p>'Father Zeus! There is no god more destructive than you! I thought I had vengeance on Paris for his crime. But now my sword has broken in my hands, and my spear flew fruitless from my grip, and I could not hit him.'</p>	<p>Paris fights against Menelaos and gets almost killed, but Aphrodite helps him. She hides Paris in a mist and takes him to his own bedroom with Helen. Menelaos rages on with Hector demanding the release of Helen and her treasure. After that, the truce is broken and battle begins. Diomedes inspired by Athena kills many Trojans and wounds Aphrodite though she is a goddess. Ares joins the battle helping the Trojans; Athena and Hera help the Greeks. Later, in Troy, Hector meets his wife Andromache and his son Astyanax on the walls.</p>
<p>'Wife, all that you say is surely in my mind also. But I would feel terrible shame before the men of Troy and the women of Troy with their trailing dresses, if like a coward I skulk away from the fighting.'</p>	<p><u>She begs him not to leave her a widow, but he goes back to battle anyway.</u> He faces Ajax in single combat and they fight till night without result. Then Zeus forbids the gods from interfering. So the gods withdraw from the battle and with Achilles out of the way Hector pushes the Greeks back. At the urging of the other chiefs Agamemnon sends an embassy to ask Achilles to return to the battle and offers rich prizes.</p>
<p>'But now put my glorious armour over your shoulders, and lead the war-loving Myrmidons into battle.'</p>	<p>Achilles refuses the offer and many of the Achaean warriors are wounded. Then Patroclus wants to enter the battle. Achilles lets his friend go and lends him his armour, so that the Trojans will think that Achilles has returned.</p>

'Then let me die directly, since I was not to help my friend at his killing; he has died far away from his native land, and did not have me there to protect him for destruction.'

Patroclus kills the Trojan son of Zeus, Sarpedon, but later he is killed by Hector with the help of Apollo. Hector strips Achilles' armour from Patroclus and the Achaeans barely manage to save Patroclus' body from desecration. When Achilles learns of Patroclus' death, he is full of grief and rage. Thetis warns him that if he kills Hector, he will die soon afterwards. Achilles accepts his own life as the price for revenge.

'My child, we must let him be now, for all our grief. Now that he has finally been brought down through the gods' will let him lie. And you take this glorious armour given by Hephaestus, armour so fine that no man has ever worn its like on his shoulders.'

Achilles reconciles himself to Agamemnon, receives new armour, via his mother, forged by Hephaestus and goes into battle. Meanwhile Zeus allows the gods to join in the battle, but they quarrel among themselves. Achilles meets Hector and kills him easily. He then drags the body from the back of his chariot, running laps around the city of Troy so that the Trojans can watch as Hector's body is desecrated.

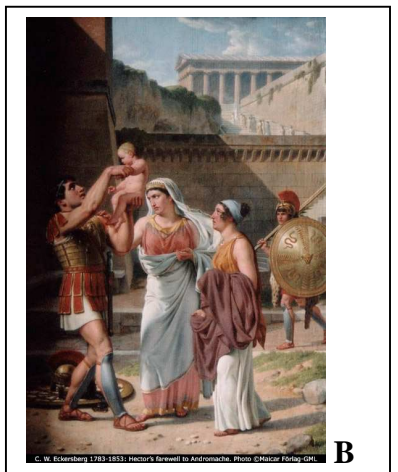
'Respect the gods, then, Achilles, and have pity of me, remembering your own father. But I am yet more pitiable than he. I have endured to do what no other mortal man on earth has done. I have brought to my lips the hands of the man who killed my child.'

Achilles returns to the Achaean camp, where he holds magnificent funeral games for Patroclus. He continues to abuse Hector's corpse. Zeus sends Thetis to tell Achilles that he must accept the ransom that Priam offers in exchange for Hector's body. Priam himself comes to see Achilles and Achilles suddenly is reminded of his own father who, as Priam has, will outlive his most beloved son. He understands what he has done, and his rage and grief give way to compassion. He returns the body and the epic ends with the funeral of Hector.

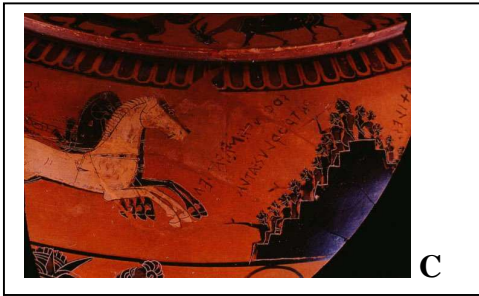
2. Draw arrows to relate each picture with its description



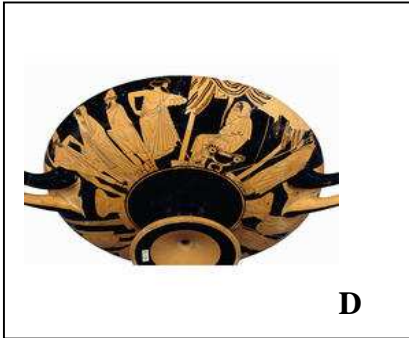
**C.W. Eckersberg, *Hector's farewell to Andromache*, 19th century**  
Hector holds his baby Astyanax and takes his leave from Andromache.



**Attic black figure vase, ca. 520 BC**  
Achilles steps into his chariot, looking back at Priam and Hecuba. Hector's body is attached to the chariot by his feet.



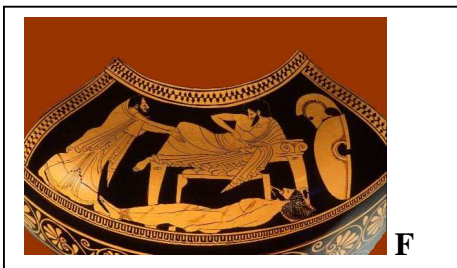
**Roman fresco, 1st century AD**  
Thetis in the workshop of Hephaestus. She is waiting for her son's new armour.



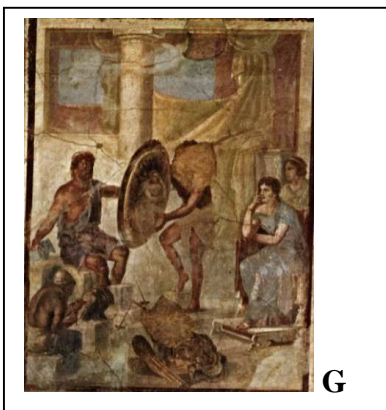
**Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres, Thetis appeals to Zeus, 1811**  
Thetis asks Zeus to bring ruin on the Achaeans as long as Achilles does not fight for them.



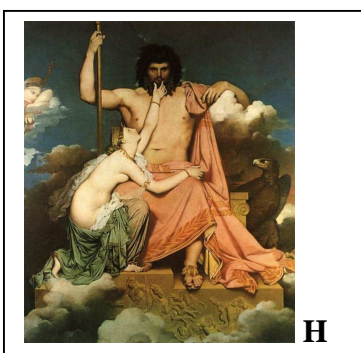
**Attic red figure vase, ca. 500 BC**  
Achilles is reclining on a couch, as Priam enters, stretching both arms out to grasp Achilles' knees. Hector's corpse lies on the floor below. Cords lash together the feet of Priam's dead son.



**Red figure vase, ca. 480 BC**  
Two heralds lead Briseis away. Behind them angry Achilles sits alone in his tent. Achilles was determined to punish Menelaos and Agamemnon for his loss, so refused to fight for them any more.



**Manuscript illumination, 1495**  
Greek warriors inside the wooden horse that they used to win the war



**Black figure vase, ca. 580 BC**  
Greek warriors are looking at the funeral games of Patroclus

3. Put the images of the previous exercise in order, according to the plot of the *Iliad*.  
Attention: there is an odd one!

1	2	3	4	5	6	7

- Which picture is the odd one?
- Why is it the odd one?

4. Read carefully the underlined sentences of the summary. Which ones do you think express the right behaviour of an epic hero?

- Paris is at first reluctant to fight*
- She begs him not to leave her a widow, but he [Hector] goes back to battle anyway*
- Thetis warns him that if he kills Hector, he will die soon afterwards. Achilles accepts his own life as the price for revenge*
- He [Achilles] holds magnificent funeral games for Patroclus*
- He understands what he has done, and his rage and grief give way to compassion*