Homer’s *Iliad* has been captivating audiences for thousands of years. It is a sweeping epic poem that seeks to find answers to some of mankind’s most fascinating questions, questions which still intrigue and perplex us today.

What is a hero?
Do humans have free will or are we all pre-destined?
What is friendship? What is loyalty?
Can courage be defined? Is revenge ever justified?
Does might make right? How valuable is perseverance?
How important are family and family obligations?

As you read the *Iliad*, keep these questions in mind and make note of when you think Homer is offering answers to these questions. These questions can guide you as you construct your dialectical journal. Perhaps you will see other important questions that the poet is asking. Make note of these questions as well.

The following pages will give some guidance to you as you tackle this very important piece of literature. The expectation is that you will read the entire poem. The following books are most important and should be read very closely: Books 1, 2, 3, 6, 9, 11, 16, 18, 19, 22, 24. Read the remaining books less closely and focus your attention on the broad ideas and general plot.

Upon returning to school in September, class time will be spent reviewing and analyzing what you have read. You will be given a formal assessment of the *Iliad* and the beginning units of study in Honors Western Humanities will be based, in part, on the major themes of the *Iliad*.

**Names and Places**

Keeping straight the name of places and people:

1. It might be helpful to maintain your own list of names that repeat themselves and seem important.
2. Use this evolving study guide for assistance in isolating what's important.

3. Use the glossary at the back of your book to help keep track of who is who.

Some initial pointers

1. The following are names that the poet uses to signal "The Greeks" (that is, the Greek army):

   * Achaeans =
   * Danaans =
   * Argives =
   * Hellenes =
   * Greeks

2. The poet uses two names for the city of Troy:

   * Troy =
   * Ilium

3. The poet uses two names for Paris (the son of Priam who took away Helen of Sparta, thereby starting the war)

   * Paris =
   * Alexander

4. The "sons of Atreus" are Agamemnon and Menelaus; also known as the Atridae (singular Atrides)

   * Agamemnon = son of Atreus = Atrides (singular)
   * Menelaus = son of Atreus = Atrides (singular)
   * Ag. + Men. = sons of Atreus = Atridae (plural)

Similarly, Diomedes is sometimes called Tydides (=son of Tydeus).

And, again similarly, the two Ajaxes are sometimes called Aeantes.

We'll learn soon why the poet uses a variety of names to refer to the same thing.

Note that for the following summaries, you are expected to know (of course) much more in detail about the episodes and people. What this guide will help with is isolating which people and episodes are the important ones on which to focus.
Book 1 Plague. Anger of Achilles.

The principal episodes are:

* The proem (what does it announce about the nature of the poem?)
* The priest's appeal and the plague (what do we learn about Agamemnon?)
* The assembly and the quarrel (how might "gift-exchange" be thought to underlie the central interactions between Ag. & Achilles?)
* Achilles and Thetis (what principal theme is introduced into the poem?)
* The assembly of the gods (how does this mirror, and how does it contrast, the mortal assemblies we saw at the opening of the book?)

The principal characters are:

* Agamemnon, "king of kings", son of Atreus ("Atrides")
* Menelaus, brother of Agamemnon, husband of Helen, son of Atreus ("Atrides")
* (Agamemnon & Menelaus together are sometimes called the "sons of Atreus" = "Atridae")
* Achilles, king of the Myrmidons, son of Peleus and Thetis
* Patroclus, dear friend (second self?) to Achilles
* Nestor, the old wise man
* Calchas, the seer

* Chryses, the priest (confusingly, from Chryse island)
* Chryseis, the daughter of Chryses & prize of Agamemnon
* Briseis, prize of Achilles

* Thetis, mother of Achilles, a goddess (one of the 50 Nereids, daughters of the Old Man of the Sea = Nereus)
* Zeus, king of the gods
* Hera, Zeus' wife and sister
* Hephaestus, the "smithy" god, who is lame
* Athena, a virgin goddess dressed in armor and associated with cultivated wisdom
* Apollo, the "archer" god, who sends the plague, but also is the god of music and art (as we see at the end of the book)

The principal places are:

* Troy
* Aulis
* Mount Olympus

The principal episodes are:

* Zeus sends a (false) dream to Agamemnon, and Agamemnon decides to test his army (what does the reaction of the army tell us? what does this episode tell us about Agamemnon?)
  * The Thersites episode (in what sense does this reflect the argument between Agamemnon and Achilles in Book one?)
  * The (fact of a) "catalogue of ships" (what is the net effect of this long catalogue? why does the poet insert it here?)

The principal new characters are:

* Odysseus (leader of the Greeks, from Ithaca, esp. known for his cleverness at speaking)
  * Thersites (deformed subversive from the lower ranks)
  * the Muse (goddess of inspiration and memory, called on by the poet before undertaking a particularly difficult poetic feat)
  * Hector (principal fighter on the Trojan side, son of Priam)


The principal episodes are:

* Paris and Menelaus agree to fight in single combat (Abortive attempt to end the war #1).
  * Helen points out the warriors to Priam from the walls of Troy.
  * Paris and Menelaus fight, and Aphrodite whisks Paris away to the bed of Helen.

The principal new characters are:

* Paris (Trojan, son of Priam, abductor of Helen)
* Helen (the "face that launched a thousand ships", most beautiful woman in the world and cause of the war, wife of Menelaus, consort of Paris)
  * Priam (old king of Troy)
  * Iris (messenger of Zeus)
  * Aphrodite (winner of the "judgement of Paris", goddess of love, protector of Paris, supporter of the Trojans)
Book 4 Breaking of the Oaths. Agamemnon Reviews the Troops.

The principal episodes are:

* At the prompting of Athena, Pandarus breaks the truce by shooting an arrow at Menelaus.
* Agamemnon urges on his men as the Trojans attack.

The principal new characters are:

* Pandarus (Trojan Bowman who breaks the truce).
* The Greater and Lesser Ajax, great Greek warriors (we'll learn more about these figures later, but go ahead and memorize the names).
* Nestor and Odysseus (revisited, important Greek leaders).
* Diomedes, son of Tydeus (the great Greek warrior who will be the focus of book 5).

Book 5 The Aristeia of Diomedes.

The principal episodes are:

* The "Aristeia" of Diomedes begins; Pandarus wounds Diomedes.
* Athena revives Diomedes and allows him to see the gods.
* Aeneas and Pandarus attack Diomedes; Diomedes kills Pandarus, and wounds Aeneas; Diomedes wounds Aphrodite trying to save her son Aeneas.
* Dione comforts Aphrodite, who complains to Zeus.
* Diomedes attacks Apollo, who saves Aeneas.
* Athena and Diomedes attack and wound Ares, who complains to Zeus.

The principal new characters are:

* Ares, god of war
* Aeneas, son of Aphrodite and Anchises, great Trojan warriör
* Sarpedon, son of Zeus himself (we'll see him again), Trojan warrior
* Dione, mother of Aphrodite (by Zeus)

Book 6 Diomedes & Glaucus. Hector and Andromache.

The principal episodes are:

* Diomedes (Greek) and Glaucus (Trojan) meet: the story of Bellerophon: D. and Gl. decide to exchange armor.
* Hector returns to the city and visits his mother, wife, and child; as well as Paris and Helen.
The principal new characters are:

* Glaucus, Trojan hero who exchanges his golden armor for Diomedes' bronze armor
* Bellerophon, ancestor of Glaucus
* Hecuba, wife of Trojan king Priam, mother of Hector (and many others)
* Andromache, wife of Hector
* Astyanax, infant son of Hector

**Book 7 Combat of Hector and Ajax. Burial of the Dead. Building the Wall.**

The principal episodes are:

* Hector challenges the Greeks to single combat: Ajax is chosen by lot to fight. The duel ends without the death of either hero.
* Antenor (a Trojan elder) advises the Trojans to return Helen; Paris objects, but makes the offer to give back other plunder with additional payment. The Greeks refuse. (Abortive attempt to end the war #2.)

The principal new characters are:

* Ajax, Greek warrior, the "bulwark of the Achaeans": here we get our first full view of this warrior, a huge man with little cleverness and much strength (Ajax will commit suicide after the war when Odysseus, rather than he, is awarded the armor of the dead Achilles-- this is the subject of Sophocles' play, the Ajax).
* Poseidon, god of the sea, and builder of the walls of Troy

**Book 8 Trojans advance. Zeus stops Hera's Interference.**

The principal episodes are:

* This is one of several books which gives us the feel of the back and forth of the battle. There are no episodes of remarkable importance, but note that by the end of the book the Greeks are very much getting the best of the battle. Read quickly, but notice things like
  - Zeus' magnificent use of scales
  - the gods' agreement on the fated death of Patroclus
  - the beautiful, yet ominous simile that ends the book

The principal new characters are:

* None
Book 9 Embassy to Achilles.

The principal episodes are:

* The "embassy" to Achilles: an important episode. Ajax, Odysseus, and Phoenix visit Achilles in his hut to try to persuade him to rejoin the fighting. Odysseus details the gifts proffered by Agamemnon. Phoenix tells the story of Meleager. Ajax bluntly rebukes the stubborn hero.
  * The story of Meleager and the boar

The principal new characters are:

  * Phoenix, tutor and comrade of Achilles
  * Meleager, prince of Calydon

Book 10 Dolon Episode.

The principal episodes are:

* Diomedes and Odysseus are chosen by the Achaeans to go on a spying expedition at night; meanwhile, Dolon is chosen for the same activity by the Trojans.
  * Diomedes and Odysseus capture Dolon, who tells of the disposition of the Trojan forces; they then kill Dolon.

The principal new characters are:

  * Dolon, Trojan spy

Book 11 Aristeia of Agamemnon. Achilles send Patroclus to inquire.

The principal episodes are:

* The aristeia of Agamemnon. After giving the Trojans a bad time, Agamemnon is wounded and must withdraw.
  * But now the battle turns badly against the Greeks, and their leaders are wounded one by one: Diomedes, then Odysseus, then Machaon; even Ajax, though unwounded, is beaten back to the ships
  * Patroclus, at Achilles' command, goes to Nestor's hut to see who has been wounded: Nestor suggests to Patroclus that he ask Achilles if he, Patroclus, can lead the Myrmidons into battle and wear Achilles' armor

The principal new characters are:

  * Machaon, Greek & son of the famous healer Asclepius
Book 12 Battle about the Wall.

The principal episodes are:

* The battle rages hot; more back and forth; at the end Hector breaks through the wall and the Trojans rush in to attack the ships
* Polydamas gives a sinister interpretation to an omen, but Hector ignores him
* At 359 Sarpedon and Glaucus give a detailed statement of the heroic code; note the simile that precedes.

The principal new characters are:

* None

Book 13 Fighting at the Ships.

The principal episodes are:

* Poseidon intervenes for the Achaeans, who are desperately trying to save their ships (the last chance for safety) from the rampaging Trojans.

The principal new characters are:

* None


The principal episodes are:

* The "Beguiling of Zeus": to distract Zeus, Hera (with an assist from Aphrodite) seduces Zeus, who falls asleep.
* With Zeus asleep, the Greek (with an assist from Poseidon) gain the upper hand in the battle, and Ajax knocks out Hector, who is carried from the battle.

The principal new characters are:

* None

Book 15 Retreat to the Ships.

The principal episodes are:

* Zeus wakes up, and is not happy. With Apollo's help, Hector recovers, and the Trojans rush upon the Greek ships. The Greek situation is now desperate.

The principal new characters are: none
Book 16 Aristeia and Death of Patroclus.

The principal episodes are:

* Patroclus returns to Achilles and tries to persuade him to relent. Achilles will not, but does agree to what Nestor had suggested to Patroclus towards the end of Book 11: that Patroclus lead out his troops, the Myrmidons, and wear Achilles' famous armor.

* Patroclus kills Sarpedon, Zeus' son, but not before a famous deliberation between Zeus and Hera as to whether Zeus can intervene and save his son from his "fate" (very important!)

* Hector and Patroclus fight: Hector slays Patroclus.

The principal new characters are:

* Myrmidons: the troops of Achilles

Book 17 Aristeia of Menelaus. Fight over body of Patroclus.

The principal episodes are:

* The fight over Patroclus' body (why so much emphasis? is there significance in Menelaus being the first defender of the body? ["like a mother cow lowing over her calf"]).

* Hector strips the armor from Patroclus: note well that this is Achilles' armor (what's the consequence? when Achilles later fights Hector, what does he see?)

* Achilles' immortal horses mourn Patroclus, and Zeus meditates on human mortality (what is the effect of this rather strange sequence?)

The principal new characters are:

* Immortal (talking) horses of Achilles

Book 18 Shield of Achilles.

The principal episodes are:

* Achilles' laments the death of Patroclus to his mother, Thetis.

* Achilles shows himself to the Trojans; Polydamas advises retreat to the city and is ignored (see book 12).
* Thetis asks Hephaestus to make armor for Achilles.
  * A description of the shield of Achilles: city at peace, city at war; scenes of ploughing and reaping, scenes of vintage and herding; scene of the dance.

The principal new characters are:

* Note now that Polydamas, whom we saw in Book 12, is a minor but pivotal figure

**Book 19 Achilles' Anger Unleashed.**

The principal episodes are:

* In a complex interchange, Agamemnon and Achilles "make up" (at least sort of): study the details of how this works itself out, esp. the role of food.
  * Achilles laments Patroclus and will not eat: Athena gives Achilles divine food.
  * Xanthos the horse foretells Achilles' death (notice the effect here: we now enter the realm of the fantastic, and books 20 & 21 will continue this theme!)

The principal new characters are:

* We now understand why the horses of Achilles were described as "talking horses"
  * Food, though not a "character", is very important here

**Book 20 Battle of the Gods.**

The principal episodes are:

* Zeus unleashes the gods to battle for Trojans or Greeks as they will: and the gods do battle! (Why does Zeus do this?)
  * Achilles and Aeneas in single combat; and Aeneas (with Poseidon's help) takes a wondrous leap.
  * Achilles wreaks havoc among the Trojans, and almost kills Hector (who however is hidden by Apollo).

The principal new characters are:

* None, but note prominence of Aeneas (see book 5)
  * Also note the ABSENCE through this sequence of the other Achaean leaders: what effect does this have?

**Book 21 Achilles fights the River Scamander.**

The principal episodes are:

* Achilles slays so many Trojans in the river Scamander that the River (as a god) rises up and fights him.
* Fighting among the gods: Athena & Ares, Athena & Aphrodite, etc. (What is the effect here on our view of the divine world? How does this fold into human concerns on the battlescape?)
* The bulk of the Trojan force escape within the walls of Troy, as Apollo deceives Achilles.

The principal new characters are:

* Scamander, chief river of the plain before Troy, here conceived as the river god.

**Book 22 Death of Hector.**

The principal episodes are:

* The death of Hector: note (1) Zeus' role, (2) the entreaty by Hector and Achilles' reply, (3) the role of Athena, (4) Hector's last request.
  
  * Achilles befouls Hector's body

The principal new characters are:

* None, but note the dramatic reappearance of Andromache

**Book 23 Funeral Games for Patroclus.**

The principal episodes are:

* Funeral feast and games for Patroclus. Note especially: how the dispute over the chariot race is resolved-- what are the social interactions; how Agamemnon is treated.

The principal new characters are:

* Antilochus, the Greek who cheats in the chariot race

**Book 24 Priam Ransoms the Body of Hector.**

The principal episodes are:

* Achilles daily drags the body of Hector around Troy.
  * Priam goes to the hut of Achilles to ransom the body of Hector (what god(s) help and how? what exactly is the sequence of events? why is it so terrible for Priam to kiss the hand of Achilles? what makes Achilles relent?)
  * Note within the ransoming the story of Niobe (why is this inserted here? note the link, once again, with food-- what is the importance of food?)
  * In succession, Andromache, Hecuba, and Helen lament the fallen hero Hector.
The principal new characters are:

- Niobe, a mother who boast that her 12 children (6 male, 6 female) are better than the mere two children of Leto (= Apollo and Diana), a hubris that merits a spectacular divine revenge.

**Guiding Questions for Homer’s *Iliad* (Fagle’s translation)**

As you read the *Iliad*, uses these questions to help focus your attention on the larger, more important themes of the poem. You do not have to write responses to these questions, but use them to help guide your dialectical journal. Pick passages/quotations from the poem that may give answers to these questions and then record your reflections on these passages.


**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?
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)

8. Hera’s seduction of Zeus in 14 provides a shift from central narrative of human warfare. What is the tone and the thematic or symbolic point of this shift?

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. 903ff.)?

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?

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 possible to you?