

The *Iliad* Characters



Author: Homer

Genre: Greek Epic Poetry

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The Greeks



(Achaean)

Pallas Athena



Known for: She is Zeus' daughter; a warrior goddess, the goddess of wisdom.

Role in the *Iliad*: Powerful ally of the Greeks and protector of Odysseus; she hated the Trojans because of the judgment of Paris. She stops Achilles from killing Agamemnon; inspires Odysseus to rally the Greek troops; tricks the Trojan warrior, Pandarus, into breaking a truce; and intervenes in support of the Greeks - and particularly on behalf of Odysseus - throughout the poem.



Hermes



Known for: He is a son of Zeus who guides souls to the Underworld.

Role in the *Iliad*: He is sent to guide Priam on his risky trip to the tent of Achilles for the ransom of the body of his son, Hector .



Thetis

Known for: She is a sea goddess, wife of the warrior, Peleus, and divine mother of Achilles.

Role in the *Iliad* She foretold Achilles' fate, intervened with Zeus on his behalf, mourned the death of Patroclus, and brought her son divine armor made by the god, Hephaestus.



Hera



Known for : She is the jealous wife - and sister - of Zeus

Role in the *Iliad*: She is a vigorous patron of the Greeks because of her anger at the Trojans over the judgment of Paris (about her beauty), and she repeatedly bickers with her husband, Zeus, over his sympathy for the Trojans. She inspires Achilles to call an assembly to deal with the plague, and later she seduces her husband Zeus to distract him while the god of the sea, Poseidon, aids the Greeks on the battlefield.



Poseidon



Known as: Son of Cronus, brother of Zeus and lord of the sea.

Role in the Iliad: Though a supporter of the Greeks, he later intervenes to save the Trojan warrior, Aineias, lest he be killed by Achilles against destiny.



Agamemnon



Known as: Mortal son of Atreus, king of Mycenae, brother of Menelaus and most powerful Greek king.

Role in the *Iliad*: His quarrel with Achilles sparks Achilles' anger and sets in motion the plot of the *Iliad*.

Achilles



Known as: Mortal leader of the Myrmidons and central character of the *Iliad*; son of the goddess, Thetis, and the warrior, Peleus; immortal except for in one small place on his heel.

Role in the *Iliad*: Central character, flawed hero who has too much pride and rage.



Helen



Known as: Mortal daughter of Zeus and Leda, step-daughter of Tyndareus; wife of Menelaus

Role in the *Iliad*: Eloped with Paris, causing the Trojan war; through the gifts of the goddess, Aphrodite, she was said to be the most beautiful of all women. Her beauty was said to “launch a thousand ships.”

Menelaus



Known as: Mortal son of Atreus, brother of Agamemnon, lord of Lakedaemon (Sparta)

Role in the Iliad:
Husband of Helen, until she runs away with Paris



Odysseus



Known as: Son of Laertes, lord of Ithaca, famed for his wisdom and trickery

Role in the *Iliad*: He rallies the troops, forms part of the embassy to Achilles, and urges Achilles to put aside his grief.

Patroclus



Known as: Son of Menoitius and companion of Achilles. He was raised in Achilles' household.

Role in the *Iliad*: He accompanied Achilles to Troy. He enters the battle in Achilles' place and his death at the hands of Hector provokes Achilles' return to the battle. After his ghost visits Achilles, Achilles holds splendid funeral games in his honor.



Diomedes



Known as: Son of Tydeus, a great warrior whose exploits form the subject of book five

Role in the *Iliad*: He accompanies Odysseus on a bloody spying mission to the Trojan camp



Nestor



Known as: The Aged king of Pylos and a wise counselor who often uses stories from the past to advise and instruct the Greek warriors.

Role in the *Iliad*: He tries unsuccessfully to make peace between Achilles and Agamemnon, and he later helps persuade Agamemnon to offer compensation to Achilles. He urges Patroclus to ask Achilles to let him lead his men into battle, the plan that leads to Patroclus' death.

The Trojans



Priam



Known as: Aged king of Troy, married to Hecabe, father of fifty sons

Role in the *Iliad*: He ransoms the body of his son, Hector, from Achilles.

Hector



Known as: Son of Priam and Hecabe and leading warrior of the Trojans.

Role in the *Iliad*: He leads the Trojan onslaught against the Greek ships. With Apollo's help, he kills Patroclus, Achilles' closest friend. Later, he is slain by Achilles outside the walls of Troy before his parents' eyes, and his body is brutally abused by Achilles.



Pandarus



Known as: A famous archer and the son of Lycaon.

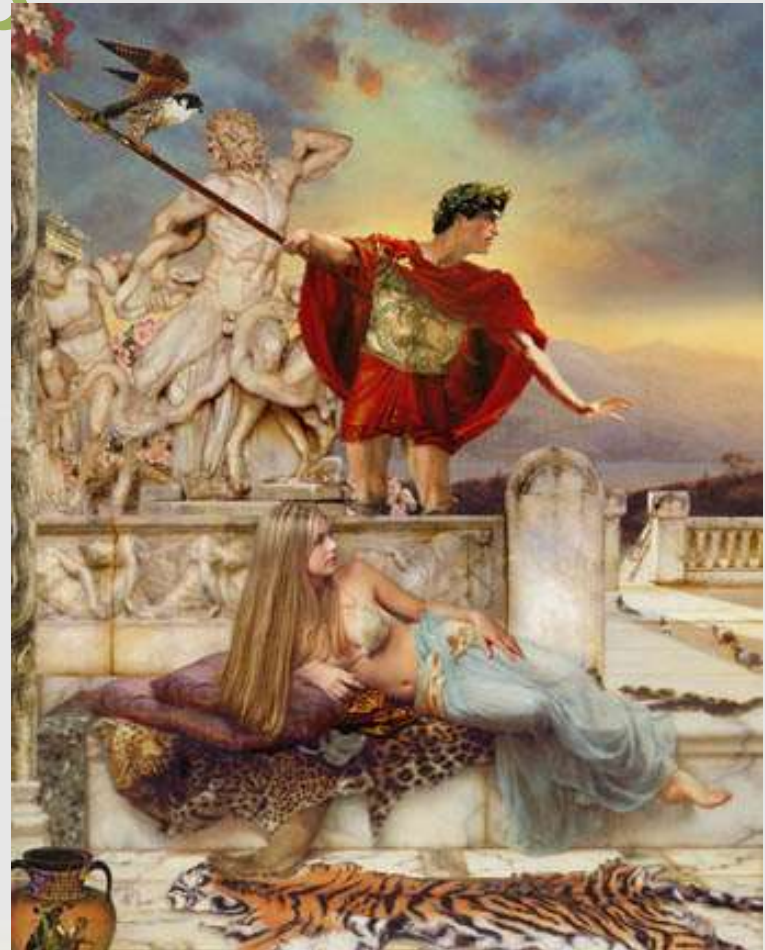
Role in the *Iliad*: Fights on the side of Troy. He shoots Menelaus and wounds him with an arrow, sabotaging a truce that could potentially have led to the peaceful return of Helen. He is tricked into breaking the truce by the gods, who wish for the destruction of Troy. He then wounds Diomedes with an arrow but is later killed by Diomedes, whose spear strikes him in the face, severing his tongue.

Paris



Known for: He is a son of Priam; according to later legend, he had been asked to judge which of the three goddesses, Hera, Athena or Aphrodite, was the most beautiful; each goddess tried to bribe him and he accepted Aphrodite's offer of Helen, the most beautiful mortal woman.

Role in the *Iliad*: In book three, he challenges Menelaus to a duel, but is rescued from the fight by Aphrodite.



Aphrodite



Known as: Goddess of love and daughter of Zeus, although in later legends she was said to have been born from the foam of the sea.

Role in the *Iliad*: She protected Helen, to whom she gave great beauty, and, in book three, she rescues Paris from Menelaus, and brings him to Helen.



Apollo



Known as: The archer god, cause of plagues, god of prophecy and a music; the son of Zeus and Leto.

Role in the *Iliad*: In the opening scene of the *Iliad*, he sends a plague upon the Achaeans because Agamemnon has dishonored his priest, Chryses. Later, he helps Hector in the killing of Patroclus, and eventually his complaint about the treatment of Hector's corpse leads the gods to arrange the ransom of the body by Priam.



Zeus



Known as: The son of Cronus and most powerful of the gods; brother of Poseidon, Hades and the goddess, Hera, his wife; as lord of the sky, the thunderbolt is his most potent weapon.

Role in the *Iliad*: He responds to Thetis' appeal by turning the battle against the Greeks, so that they will honor Achilles.

Throughout the *Iliad*, he acts as an overseer: he ensures that fated events, like the deaths of Patroclus and Hector, take place, and he prevents



Troy from falling at the hands of Achilles against fate.

At Hera's insistence, he even allows his own mortal son, Sarpedon, to die, so that fate will not be overturned.

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