

Lessons from homer's "the iliad" essay sample

[Literature](#), [Poem](#)



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Lessons from Homer's "The Iliad" Essay Sample

Understanding the theme: The Great War, Foreshadowed

Although most today refer to the great battles between 1914 and 1917 as "World War One" (WWI), those who lived through the turmoil referred to it as "The Great War." "The Great War" stands as a great warning to how one can basically stumble into war. WWI began with a small, local feud in the Balkans, which exploded into a global catastrophe. In the exact same manner, the Trojan War, as explained by Homer, blew into a huge event from a small feud between Menelaus and Paris. Menelaus drags all of Greece against Paris who drags the great city of Troy into the ordeal. This war became well known all throughout history as a magnificent conflict that had escalated from basically a triviality when viewed as a piece of a greater picture. In this way, the mighty Trojan War shook the entire known world thus foreshadowing "The Great War" which actually involved the entire globe.

Lessons from The Iliad

1. Although Homer does not explicitly state that men should be weary of the gods and their interference in the life of man, he clearly attests to this lesson via powerful examples in The Iliad. Olympus is the original cause of the entire epic because it is here that Paris is summoned and subsequently promised the most beautiful woman in the world, Helen, queen of Sparta. Once the war commences, the gods treat the Trojan War as a sporting event where each pulls for his favorite team and the gods go into pre-arranged

alliances. Some gods team up (Hera and Athena; Apollo and Artemis) and other gods actually go down to the battlefield to help (Ares and Aphrodite). Aphrodite, in a *deus ex machina*, swoops down from Mt. Olympus in order to save the life of Paris.

Zeus eventually becomes completely fed up with all the bickering the war has caused with the gods and forbids all the Olympians, except himself, from helping anymore at Troy for either side. Zeus then begins to try to orchestrate a victory for Troy but has his plans destroyed by the interference of his clever wife, Hera. Towards the end of the narrative, Zeus “ laugh[s] pleasantly to himself when he [sees] god matched against god” (190). Homer ultimately develops a clear thesis out of all this interference by the gods: the gods rule our lives, and our fate rests in their bickering hands.

2. In the course of the bloody warring, Homer shows the reader his definition of a true hero through three significant characters: Protesilaus, Achilles, and Hector. The first of these, Protesilaus, as part of his name (Prote-) implies, is the first man to jump ashore when the Greeks reach Troy. There had been a prophecy made concerning the war that states that “ he who land[s] first [will] be the first to die” (183). It is not that Protesilaus is a stupid man or that he does not believe the prophecy; on the contrary, Protesilaus embraces the prophecy and completely understands the consequences of his actions. Protesilaus lays aside the fear of death for a noble deed, leading the Greeks to victory.

In a similar fashion, Hector admits on several occasions that he knows this war will lead to his death (183, 187). However, Hector valiantly fights on, not

ignoring his fate, but rather embracing it as Protesilaus had done before. Homer also describes Achilles' fate from the beginning through Achilles' mother, Thetis. Thetis, a demi-god, knows that it is Achilles fate to die at Troy in a valiant manner. Disregarding what she knows will soon play out as fact, Thetis repeatedly tries to hold Achilles back from the "shadow of certain death" (183). Achilles does not act cowardly as his mother does. He, like all the other heroic men herein mentioned, embraces his fate without fear and goes off to war. Eventually, even Thetis gives up trying to hold back her son and gives him her blessing.

3. Homer's least direct lesson, the importance of oaths and loyalty, plays out in the background of the savage war. Originally, Zeus promises Thetis that he will help Troy to win (she is attempting to save her son, Achilles, from his fate by pulling for a Trojan victory). Had Zeus, the god of oaths, remembered his promise to Thetis instead of constantly changing his mind back and forth between the two camps, then perhaps much blood could have been prevented from staining the land of Troy. The two epic heroes of The Iliad, Hector and Achilles, keep their oaths until their deaths, stark contrasts to Zeus.

Hector is a "noble" man bound to "defend Troy [and] Priam and Priam's people" (183). His fate is to die by his strict loyalty to Troy. Achilles, likewise, after having his dearest friend fall to Hector due to his own stubbornness, pledges to avenge Patroclus' death. It is this new pledge that turns the entire war in the Trojans' favor. Finally, an enormous breach of trust is made when Pandarus shoots an arrow at Menelaus after a truce had been made between

the opposing sides. This breaking of the truce causes the war to continue even longer, claiming even more lives. Homer makes it clear throughout the epic that when men keep their oaths, events happen in their favor. Yet, when men break their oaths, the consequences are fatal.