

## A level Classical Civilisation

### Why do I need to complete a bridging activity?

The purpose of this activity is to aid your preparation for advanced level study and make the transition from GCSE study as smooth as possible. Some activities are written pieces of work, some are research-based and some are practical. They should be completed to the best of your ability and they will give you the opportunity to start to showcase your talent for your chosen subjects. As these are compulsory activities, it is vital that you put in the time and effort to ensure they are completed to the highest standard.

### When should I hand this in?

You should complete this activity for the start of your first lesson in September.

### How will I be given feedback?

Feedback appropriate to the task will be given to you by your teacher.

### Summary of the activity

Your Classics studies will begin with a thorough examination and analysis of Homers 'The Odyssey', which is set after the events of the Trojan war as written in Homers other epic 'The Illiad'. In order to understand the context of 'The Odyssey' you are required to research the events of the Trojan war and Mycenae Greece, this should include the following information:

1. Causes of the Trojan War
2. Major Greek and Trojan Heroes
3. The actions of Odysseus during the war
4. Main events of the Trojan War
5. The fall of Troy

This is a substantial research task that will require you to use a number of books, the internet and maybe even TV shows/films (thinking of 'Troy' with Brad Pitt, though bear in mind most of this film is made up nonsense).

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#### Homer and the 'Heroic Code'

The 'Heroic Code' is incredibly important in the Mycenaean world, below is an article on this concept, read through it and then answer the questions below.

##### Terminology

'Hero', in the context of Greek literature, is used in three overlapping ways:

- 1) A warrior, usually of partly divine descent and belonging to a nobler distant past, who is celebrated in the 'cycles' (Trojan, Theban, Argonautic etc) of mythology. It is an open question whether any of them reflect real individuals of the Mycenaean age. For us they exist in art and literature, with Homer the fountainhead.
- 2) The main character in a 5<sup>th</sup> century BC tragic drama, to whom the tragedy happens, whose destiny involves other characters and usually symbolises some basic and permanent human passion or dilemma. Normally also a hero in sense (1).
- 3) A semi-divine being worshipped in real-life Greek religion, usually at tombs and with different ritual from the Olympian gods. Normally also a hero in sense (1).

There are further links. Within the whole range of heroes in the *Iliad*, Achilles and Hector are in effect heroes in sense (2): the poem revolves around their life and death, which importantly involve other people. Indeed, the whole shape and atmosphere of C5<sup>th</sup> drama is recognisably descended from the *Iliad*. Second, many of the major Homeric characters were in fact venerated as heroes in the technical, theological sense (3). In the C8<sup>th</sup>, archaeology shows a notable increase in dedications and cultic activity at genuine Mycenaean tombs, and this has been linked with increasing knowledge of the epic tradition. Perhaps, indeed, it shows the impact of our *Iliad* and *Odyssey*.  
As part of the idea of a heroic age.

Epic describes a time when men were bigger and better. This conception gathers momentum during the Dark Age and is still strong in Homer - see the many passages where he says, for example, "Achilles lifted a stone which ten men such as live today could not lift" - even though he is writing in an age of renewed confidence and adventure, qualities which generated his own large-scale written epics.

The heroic code is an aristocratic ideal. It exists in a hierarchical and paternalistic society but you have to earn the right to be a hero (the right birth is not enough; the suitors in the *Odyssey* have that). This is the concept of *noblesse oblige* which, roughly translated, means that with high position comes responsibility.

Nevertheless, the heroic code is not just 'class propaganda' tied to a particular time and place, for it is a vision of human excellence and potential which speaks to all ages (even though 21<sup>st</sup> century readers may want to challenge some aspects of it). We can usefully compare the Homeric ideal with other

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ancient visions of excellence:

The main mortal characters of the *Odyssey* represent different facets of the heroic ideal, with their various divergences and fallings-short. Odysseus is the main, archetypal hero but he is far from being faultless.

### How the *Odyssey* fits in

It obviously has one hero in sense (2) in a much clearer way than the *Iliad* does. Odysseus, like the various characters of the *Iliad* (of whom he is one), represents a version of the heroic code, but perhaps with bigger differences for so central a character than the world of the *Iliad* could accommodate. The main differences are that Odysseus is more:

‘Cerebral’... reliant on his wits.

Ready to argue... ready to trick his way out of difficult situations.

‘Individual’... in his goals and motivation (home and family rather than victory).

### Kleos / κλεος

Glory. The big aim for which the cost is high. The choice offered the infant Achilles - a short, glorious life or a long, mediocre one - sums up a more general assumption that if all human life is tragic because short-term, then the life of a hero cut off in his prime is doubly so. We see Hector so cut off and the whole of the *Iliad* foreshadows the death of Achilles. *Kleos* is from the same root as the verb *kaleo* (I call), and thus basically refers to what you are called by others. The hero is dependent on the regard of his fellows, as we all are, but it is suggested in the world of the *Iliad* that your reputation is virtually your whole identity - a ‘shame culture’ as against a ‘guilt culture’ where your own conscience and self-estimation are more important. The hero needs others to pit himself against as well as to admire him, hence inter-hero relations are usually tense as in *Iliad* Book 1.

### Timē / τιμη

Honour. Can also mean ‘price’ and ‘prize’; its root has to do with ‘getting allotted’. Your *timē* is the regard others pay you and booty, concubines, guest-gifts etc are important as its outward signs. To lose it is to lose everything.

### Aretē / ἀρετη

Difficult to translate. Adjective is *agathos* / ἀγαθος which means ‘good’ or ‘fine’. Root idea is role-efficiency, for example the *aretē* of a knife is to be sharp and cut well. So what is the *aretē* of a human being? In Homer a man should be a warrior, whereas a woman should be a faithful wife and housekeeper. In later Greek, *aretē* is something much more like moral ‘goodness’ in our sense, hence it is suggested that Homer’s world valued only competitive qualities and not more co-operative ones. Certainly Homeric morality approved harming enemies and naturally the Iliadic world gives less value to public-spirited qualities than (say) democratic 5<sup>th</sup> Athens does. But it is wrong to suggest that the heroic code is merely thinly-disguised ‘might is right’ - most obviously because of the *noblesse oblige* element.

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Important repeated phrases which are often used when one character (for example, a father) is encouraging another to be heroic:

“Always to be best and excel others.”

“To be a speaker of words and doer of deeds.” (To be nearly all brawn is a flaw - the Iliadic Ajax suffers from it, whereas Odysseus in the *Odyssey* represents a much greater emphasis on the first half.)

“Try to be bravest in battle.”

“Not to disgrace the line of my fathers.”

### Questions:

**Name one of your heroes from the present day:**

**Why are they a ‘hero’? What qualities do they possess that make them heroes?**

**In your own words define:**

Kleos:

Timē:

Aretē:

# Bridging Activity for September 2017



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Epic:

How does your hero differ from that of Homers?

**Student Name (to be completed by the student)**