

Discussion Questions: Iliad 1-6

Why does the poem start where it starts? How does the precipitating conflict of the poem (Agamemnon and Achilles) resemble the basis for the war between the cultures of the Achaians and the Trojans?

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 the 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.

What are the conditions which make the war both inevitable and unwinnable? What are the two sides fighting for? Is peace impossible? Why can't the Greeks just pack up and go home? Why can't the Trojans restore Helen, along with appropriate compensation?

Are there distinctions drawn between Greeks and Trojans? Does Homer take sides in his representation of the heroes?

What are the relations between words and deeds in the heroic life?

What holds a warrior culture together? What threatens its disintegration?

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?

What are the major elements of Diomedes' aristeia in Book 5? What is the symbolic and thematic significance of his battles with the gods?

In Book 6, Diomedes' aristeia is interrupted by his confrontation with Glaucus. What is the significance of their stories, and of gift-giving in the heroic world?

What are the wider ramifications of the passage which begins Glaucus's speech: "High-hearted son of Tydeus, why ask about my birth? / Like the generations of leaves, the lives of mortal men . . ." (6. 170-75)?

Study Hector's meeting with Andromache and their child Astyanax (6. 462-600). Note the poem's structural contrasts between Hector and Achilles, on the one hand, and Hector and Paris, on the other. Is Hector fighting for something different from the other heroes? What's the importance and the role of family in the heroic world?

(adapted from <http://pages.slc.edu/~wshullen/iliadquestion.html>)