

Eric Freeberg , Kathleen Olmstead

The Iliad

United States of America (2014)

TAGS: [Achilles](#) [Agamemnon](#) [Ajax / Aias](#) [Aphrodite](#) [Apollo](#) [Athena](#) [Diomedes \(Son of Tydeus\)](#) [Hector](#) [Hephaestus](#) [Hera](#) [Hermes](#) [Nestor](#) [Odysseus / Ulysses](#) [Odyssey](#) [Patroclus](#) [Poseidon](#) [Thetis](#) [Trojan War](#) [Zeus](#)



We are still trying to obtain permission for posting the original cover.

General information	
Title of the work	The Iliad
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Country/countries of popularity	United Kingdom, United States of America
Original Language	English
First Edition Date	2014
First Edition Details	Kathleen Olmstead, <i>The Iliad</i> . New York: Sterling Children's Books, 2014, 151 pp.
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Genre	Historical fiction, Mythologies
Target Audience	Children (7-10 years)
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Creators



Courtesy of Eric Freeberg.

Eric Freeberg (Illustrator)

Eric is a professional children's books illustrator. He has illustrated over twenty-five children's books including three classical retellings for Classic Starts (*The Iliad*, *The Odyssey*, *Greek Myths*) as well as illustrating for various magazines and advertising campaigns. Freeberg has received multiple awards for his work including the 2010 London Book Fair's Children's Illustration Competition and the 2010 Holbein Prize for Fantasy Art. He currently resides in Florida.

Sources:

Official [website](#) (accessed: April 2, 2018).

[Profile](#) at the childrensillustrators.com (accessed: April 2, 2018).

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Kathleen Olmstead (Author)

Kathleen Olmstead has written a variety of children's books, including several for the "Classic Starts" series, including *The Iliad*, *Oliver Twist*, *Journey to the Centre of the Earth*, *Polyanna*, *Moby Dick*, and *The Voyages of Doctor Dolittle*. Olmstead has also written for the "Untold History of Television" series covering critically acclaimed television shows such as *Mad Men*, *Breaking Bad*, and *The Wire*.

Constantine Christoforou, "Entry on: The Iliad by Eric Freeberg, Kathleen Olmstead", peer-reviewed by Susan Deacy and Elizabeth Hale. *Our Mythical Childhood Survey* (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2021). Link: <http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/1268>. Entry version as of March 15, 2026.

Source:

[Profile](#) at goodreads.com (accessed: February 4, 2020).

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Additional information

Summary

This retelling of Homer's epic tale begins with a prologue that describes the judgement of Paris and how that led to the generals of ancient Greece marching on Troy. We are introduced to each of the gods of Olympus and told that we will learn of a great warrior Achilles, and his rage. The prologue ends with a picture page depicting the key characters in the narrative. The narrative begins with a clash between Achilles and Agamemnon which leads to Achilles withdrawing from battle and seeking advice from his mother, Thetis. In the absence of Achilles, the majority of the book covers warriors and gods fighting on the battlefield. We follow heroes such as Diomedes, Odysseus, Ajax and Hector and gods such as Apollo, Athena and Aphrodite having major roles to play on the battlefield. The major event on the battlefield is the death of Patroclus, which sparks Achilles's return to the battlefield. Grief-stricken, Achilles mows his way through the Trojan troops before a showdown with Hector. After defeating Hector, Achilles refuses to return his body to the Trojans and we see him struggle to come to terms with his emotions. The narrative ends when Priam comes to Achilles and asks for Hector's body. This provides Achilles with a small measure of peace and he agrees to leave the Trojans alone while they honour Hector's death and complete their funerary games. Ten questions for discussion follow the narrative and provide a base for this text to be a teaching resource. There are also various illustrations throughout the book which depict the gods. We see the gods which appear to be floating above the battle in the sky and are monumental in size compared to the mortals (p. 43). We also see Zeus holding a thunderbolt whilst he overlooks the scales of fate (p. 57). Other illustrations include Achilles chasing Hector around the walls of Troy (p. 134), the soldiers battling by the Greek ships (p. 103) and a young Patroclus stripped of armour (p. 113). All illustrations are black and white.

Analysis

The author succeeds in portraying Achilles's mindset to a young audience, which is important as this is the true concern of the Iliad, rather than the Trojan War itself. We are told in the prologue that we will learn about Achilles and his rage; we are told that this rage in his heart causes the death of many Trojans and many Greeks (p. 2). This captures the overall tone of the Iliad well, as does the clash between Achilles and Agamemnon over Briseis (p. 13). Achilles complains that



he fights even harder than Agamemnon yet Agamemnon receives the most rewards. Achilles is so angry that he almost draws his sword before Athena intervenes, just as she does in Homer's *The Iliad*. Achilles then visits his mother, who strokes his hair as he shakes with rage (p. 18). Achilles complains that "He should not disgrace me in front of the whole army" (p. 18) which captures the essence of Achilles's humiliation and embarrassment. When Agamemnon sends a party to Achilles to convince him to return, Achilles refuses, and Odysseus tells Agamemnon "You should never have offered him gifts. Achilles is a proud man. You have only hurt his pride again" (p. 74). This cements the idea that for Achilles, it was never truly about this one particular slave girl, but rather, the public humiliation and overall sense of being undervalued by the man who leads the Greeks. Though a young audience would not understand this scene with regards to epic ideas of honour and shame, they will understand a struggle with an authoritative figure that takes something away from them simply because they are in charge. Because of this, they can connect to the feeling of anger within Achilles.

The final chapters tackle Achilles's grief following the death of Patroclus. When Achilles learns the news he "let out a terrible wrenching cry, so loud that all the gods on Mount Olympus heard him" (p. 118). On top of this, he shows suicidal tendencies: "I have lost the will to live" and "Then let me die now" (p. 119). Achilles also proclaims that the only thing that could quell his anger is taking revenge on Hector. This reaction gives an insight into the grief an ancient Greek warrior would experience when losing a close friend; in addition, it introduces the idea that to the ancient Greeks, one way of dealing with this grief is to undertake violent revenge. We are then told of Achilles's showdown with Hector, which in Homer's *The Iliad* is particularly graphic and violent. The author omits the details of Achilles defiling Hector's body after his death and simply notes that Achilles "dragged the body back to the Achaean camp" (p. 136). This was a necessary omission for a young audience and the overall message that even with Hector dead Achilles can still not let go of his grief remains. Achilles' interaction with Priam ends with Achilles feeling calm for the first time since Patroclus death (p. 142) which also mirrors Priam's interaction with Achilles in Homer's *The Iliad*. Overall, this book offers an accurate account of the emotional experience of Achilles and portrays Achilles rage and grief in a way that would connect to a young audience.

Various themes are explored through the hero Diomedes. Diomedes epitomises strength and bravery, as he does in Homer's *The Iliad*. The



author tells us that Diomedes lifted a boulder over his head and "normally, it would take two men to lift a boulder that size" (p. 40). Strength on the battlefield was an indicator of a great warrior in ancient Greece, and we are even told that Diomedes wounds both Aphrodite (p. 40) and Ares (p. 45). Diomedes also demonstrates his bravery when Agamemnon suggests that the Greeks sail home in defeat. Diomedes stands up to Agamemnon and claims "You have a throne and you have a crown. But you do not have courage." (p. 68). He goes on to say "If your spirit drives you to go home, then sail away! You are not meant for battle. But the rest of us will continue." (p. 68). Diomedes's encounter with Paris perfectly encapsulates the difference between what was considered brave and what was considered cowardly on the battlefield. Diomedes is racing through the battlefield killing Trojans and taking their armour (a common custom on the battlefield) and he is hit on the foot from an arrow by Paris. Paris then attempts to goad Diomedes "aha! My arrow did not miss. If only it had hit higher." (p. 87) to which Diomedes replied that it was a fine shot, "But if you are not a coward, you will fight me face to face." (p. 87). Paris declines and this demonstrates the bravery of Diomedes while simultaneously portraying Paris as the coward, something that shines through in the narrative of Homer. The young audience would connect with the basic principle of strength and bravery being commendable assets while understanding why Paris would be deemed a coward for not fighting Diomedes face to face.

The gods play a major role in the narrative, as they do in Homer's *The Iliad*. They both watch the battle like interested onlookers from their thrones on mount Olympus and get involved in the battle at various moments. They are seen intervening to save their favourites (Aphrodite saving Paris, p. 33). They are seen fighting on the battlefield (Ares fighting Diomedes, p. 45). They use their god-like power to influence the action (Zeus fires thunderbolts onto the battlefield, p. 56). They instil mortals with superhuman strength (Poseidon to Ajax, p. 93). The Gods have a huge impact on the action, and essentially the message comes through that the army that was on top was the army that currently has the gods on their side. This perfectly represents the ancient Greek understanding of how the gods influenced every aspect of their life and they were simply slaves to fate.

The questions for discussion at the rear of the book are a brilliant addition and get the students to think about the text but also ask themselves questions about their own life with the text as a frame to build on. For example:



"Some Achaean and Trojan soldiers know they are favoured by certain gods. Does this knowledge affect their behaviour in battle? If you knew a powerful figure was always on your side, would it change the way you live your life?"

"As I write regarding the question section in "Classic Starts" books, "These questions teach critical thinking and are an introduction to philosophical discussion rather than a simple comprehension style "quiz" on the text.'" (see [The Odyssey](#) by Tania Zamorsky)

Overall, the book's educational intention is to give the young audience an insight into ancient Greece by retelling the story of *The Iliad*. The authors achieve this through displaying the emotional mindset of Achilles, as well as exploring key themes such as bravery and strength and demonstrating the impact the gods of Olympus had on the Trojan War and the lives of the ancient Greeks and Trojans. Though this is a battle narrative, there is very little graphic violence that occurs frequently in the Iliad, making this an accessible read for a young audience and one which gives a rounded account of the battle.

Classical, Mythological,
Traditional Motifs,
Characters, and
Concepts

[Achilles](#) [Agamemnon](#) [Ajax](#) / [Aias](#) [Aphrodite](#) [Apollo](#) [Athena](#) [Diomedes](#)
([Son of Tydeus](#)) [Hector](#) [Hephaestus](#) [Hera](#) [Hermes](#) [Nestor](#) [Odysseus](#) /
[Ulysses](#) [Odyssey](#) [Patroclus](#) [Poseidon](#) [Thetis](#) [Trojan War](#) [Zeus](#)

Other Motifs, Figures,
and Concepts Relevant
for Children and Youth
Culture

[Conflict](#) [Death](#) [Good vs evil](#) [Heroism](#) [Intellect](#) [Journeys](#) [Judgement](#)
[Masculinity](#) [Revenge](#) [Violence](#) [War](#)

