

Reader's Guide Homer's Iliad

JANUARY-APRIL 2012

Session One: Iliad, pages 1-159

Monday, January 9 @8pm ET (1 hour)

Session Two: Iliad, pages 160-331

Monday, February 13 @8pm ET (1 hour)

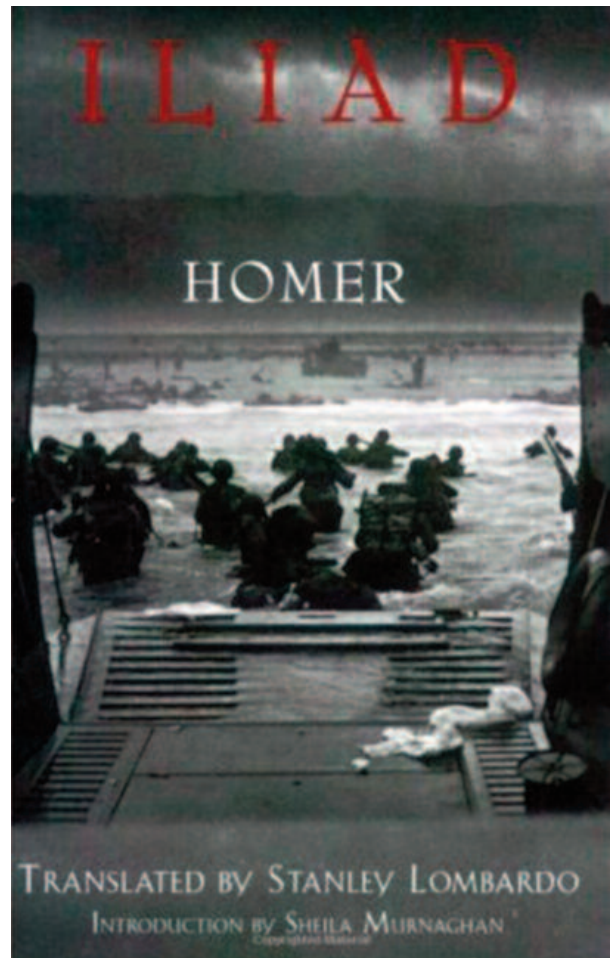
Session Three: Iliad, pages 332-492

Monday, March 12 @8pm ET (1 hour)

**Q & A with Professor Paul Cartledge,
Cambridge University**

Monday, April 2 @7pm ET

(1 hour via live webinar/teleconference)



What Is Reading Odyssey?

Through making it possible for adults to read together some of the most important texts of humanity, Reading Odyssey ignites curiosity and lifelong learning.

Reading Odyssey was formed when Phil Terry, a businessman and passionate reader, asked his longtime friend, Pat Wictor, a musician and equally passionate reader, for help. Phil had decided to read the three hundred or so great books of the human tradition over the remainder of his lifetime but knew he could not and would not be able to do it alone. So in 2005 he asked Pat to join him on a reading journey—and the odyssey began.

While reading their first book together, Homer's *Odyssey*, they learned they could work through it without any special expertise. Contrary to reading in school, there was no "correct" way to read these texts, no teachers, no grades. They found that as adults with a variety of life experiences they could bring meaning and insight to the text on their own.

While reading their second book, Herodotus' *Histories*, along with several friends, Phil decided to reach out to scholars to see if they would be willing to join the conversation. Phil first contacted Professor John Marincola, editor of the Penguin edition of Herodotus, to ask if he would be willing to participate in a conference call at the end of their reading. Professor Marincola agreed without hesitation. He called in and was delighted (maybe even surprised) at the high level of conversation and quality of the questions. As a result, he began to introduce Reading Odyssey to other scholars. Thus began the partnership with scholars that has come to define a core part of the Reading Odyssey experience.

Reading Odyssey is peer-led so each adult can share responsibility for creating the conversation that makes the learning and reading possible for everyone. The assistance and participation of scholars from leading universities such as Cambridge and Harvard, among many others, make Reading Odyssey's programs richer and the individual's experience deeper. Reading Odyssey today combines the passion ignited by adult readers who discover the joy of reading these texts with the delight of scholars who love the experience of talking to—and supporting—interested, curious adults.

Who usually reads with Reading Odyssey?

Artists, journalists, business people, teachers, librarians, musicians, social workers, inventors, unemployed actors, clerks—just about any adult who is curious and willing to go on a reading odyssey.

Why is community important?

Reading these books is much easier—and more enjoyable—when reading them with other adults. They, like you, have had some life experiences to bring meaning and insight to the texts. As a result, they will understand things you don't—and get confused by things you understand. The community—and trust—that gets built from the monthly discussions is the highlight of the experience for many readers.

Why is it free?

It's **free** because we know that it's hard enough for most adults to make the decision to read what sounds like a dull and boring old book. Yet, in our experience, if someone reads just one of these books with us, then their curiosity will be ignited—and they'll read more with us or on their own. That's the reason—because we want to get more adults reading more good books. If that happens, then we know that more adults will become more curious and thoughtful and that we believe will have all kinds of unexpected and good consequences for our world.

To make our services free, we rely on the incredible generosity of our scholar partners, sponsors like Citrix Online, our volunteers, and talented designers like Kim Llewellyn, who designed this Reader's Guide, our logo, and our web-related materials.

What Makes a Good Reader?

Reading Odyssey groups are peer-led, meaning that the individual readers create their own setting. The moderator, a volunteer from the group, serves as an organizer and facilitator, not as an expert or teacher.

Good readers (and moderators):

- are humble, curious, playful
- are passionate about learning and sharing
- bolster confidence in others
- are interested in asking questions that make people think
- are good listeners and contributors: agree or not, all thoughts are treated with respect

Your moderator will:

- send reminders about meetings and follow-up notes
- encourage questions and dialogue before and during sessions, and in follow-up emails
- assign questions to individual readers
- model for everyone that this is not a competitive sport but a collaborative effort

Simple Guidelines for Reading with Reading Odyssey

1. Read

The most important thing you can do to help yourself, your fellow readers, and your moderator is to read. It's obvious but important. Reading this text will blow your mind and is the foundation of a good experience with the Reading Odyssey (and in life, in our humble opinion).

2. Support the moderator and your fellow readers (by reading)

How? See #1—that is, read. And keep in mind that the moderator is neither a teacher nor an authority on the text. The moderator's job is to help the process of the reading group—and the job of the reader is to support the moderator and the fellow readers in the activity of reading and discussing these wonderful books.

3. Keep reading

If you get confused or bored—and the two are often connected—keep reading. Don't stop to try to figure it out. And have faith that if you continue something beautiful and amazing will emerge. Many first-time readers of these wonderful but challenging books never recover from stopping. Just keep reading. The big picture will begin to resolve. And when you get to the monthly discussions you'll discover that you had some important insights and you'll also learn from and get help from your fellow readers.

4. Read 15 minutes a night

We recommend that you consider reading *Iliad* in small bits—about 15 minutes a night. Works that were readily understood centuries ago when they were written are not so easily understood by the contemporary reader. Give yourself time to absorb what is novel. Taking small bites will help.

5. Listen to your own reactions and questions

Because you are reading this text for the first time along with everyone else (or for the first time in a long time), your questions and reactions are important. Listen to the things that confuse you; they probably confuse other people, too. Listen to the moments that delight you; they may delight others. Enjoy your own naiveté—and use it to bring energy and freshness to the conversation when you meet once a month.

6. Respond to the emails

Your moderator will be sending you emails before and after each session. A big part of their job is to organize your group and keep everything moving. Respond and help make their jobs easier, please. They will email you specific questions roughly two weeks before each session. These questions are meant to open up areas of discussion in sessions, not solely to focus your reading and look only for specific answers. For now, we want to share only these thoughts—and not overdetermine your experience of reading this great poem.

A Few Notes on *Iliad*

1. The joy of reading a foundational text

Homer's *Iliad*, written down sometime in the eighth century B.C.E. (Before the Common Era), has played and continues to play a key role in the life and imagination of people around the world.

The eighth century B.C.E. was approximately:

- 2,500 years after the first ancient writing appeared in Sumer
- 300 years after the Biblical King David
- 200 years *before* the first temple in Jerusalem was destroyed
- 200 hundred years *before* Athens became a democracy
- 300 years *before* Socrates and Plato

At Reading Odyssey, we like to celebrate the joy of reading something that has been a part of the human tradition for thousands of years. We like to imagine the millions of people who have read the text (or heard it, in the case of epic poetry) before us, and we like the connection to the original poet (possibly not a single author named Homer), who sometime in the distant past created this magnificent testament to the power of human creativity.

We do like to caution, however, that when reading an ancient foundational text like Homer's Iliad for the first time, you probably will experience what psychologists called "cognitive strain." The place names, the character names, the religion, the culture, and the style of epic poetry may be initially foreign to you. Unlike reading a piece of modern fiction, you will have to initially work harder. But with that work will eventually come joy, including interesting discoveries that we hope will inspire you to see and think differently in your everyday life.

2. Epic poetry is captivating

Iliad is an epic poem that was shared orally long before it was written down. There are many questions about how to translate the style of the ancient Greek poetry to a modern language (and some of these are reviewed in the helpful Preface and Introduction to the Stanley Lombardo edition that we recommend you read) but beyond those important but technical questions lies the simple power of poetry.

3. About the Stanley Lombardo translation

We have chosen the Stanley Lombardo translation of Iliad because of its connection to the spoken word. Professor Lombardo is not only a classicist but he's one of the only regular performers of this epic poem in both ancient Greek and English. Over the course of hundreds of performances, he has honed the rhythm of the English words. Enjoy Lombardo's translation—and imagine hearing this poem performed live. You can even purchase or download excerpts of Iliad performed in English by Lombardo and Susan Sarandon at:

http://www.amazon.com/Iliad/dp/B000WOYDM0/ref=tmm_aud_title_0

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Kim Llewellyn Design provides art direction, design, editorial, and web-related materials for Reading Odyssey. With work ranging from design of The Landmark Ancient Histories series to authors such as Shel Silverstein and Matt Groening, each project is treated with patience and individuality to realize its full potential.

LlewellynDesign@gmail.com

National Humanities Center supports the Reading Odyssey by helping us provide our free program resources to all of their many members. We thank them. They deserve all of our support and more.

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