



## Myths and Legends

Oxford Level 14

# Helen of Troy

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Information about assessment and curriculum links can be found at the end of these Teaching Notes.

## Synopsis

This account of the Trojan War begins during the siege and includes the death of Achilles and the trickery of the Trojan Horse. It is told from the point of view of Karis, a serving maid to Helen of Troy, as she keeps her endangered mistress informed of events.

## Background information

- The Trojan War is described in detail within Homer's *Iliad* and Virgil's *Aeneid*. The myth was retold orally for centuries before it was written down as epic poetry.
- The Greek attack on Troy is said to have been caused by Paris, the Trojan Prince, running away with Helen, the wife of the Spartan King Menelaus, although this may just have given the Greeks an excuse to attack a wealthy neighbour.
- The story begins with Achilles' lethal revenge on Hector, brother-in-law to Helen and Troy's greatest warrior, who had previously killed Achilles' friend, Patroclus.
- The active hand of the Greek gods is very apparent here, from the demigod (partly divine) status of Achilles to the intervention of two sea snakes and the palpable fear of angering Athene.

## Group or guided reading

### Introducing the book

- *(Predicting)* Look at the front cover and read the title together. Ask the children to predict the subject of the story. Have they heard of Troy or the Trojan War?
- *(Predicting)* Read the letter from the author together. What is meant by 'nail-biting suspense', and why might the term apply to this myth?
- *(Questioning)* Ask the children to read the contents page. Do they recognise any of the names in the chapter headings?
- *(Questioning)* Why might the author of this version of this ancient epic choose a twelve-year-old girl as the narrator?
- *(Imagining)* Ask the children to imagine what life would be like if their town was under siege.

### Strategy check

- Remind the children to use a combination of sound blending, words-within-words and sentence and story context to make sense of unfamiliar words. Some of the Ancient Greek names may be hard to read, but this should not spoil the story. Use the pronunciation guides (footnotes) and model their use if necessary.
- Check the children's understanding of 'sentry' on page 7, 'tragedy' on page 8, 'garlands' on page 26, 'sacrifice' on page 28 and 'plagues' on page 32.



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### During reading

- (*Summarising, Clarifying*) Ask the children to read the first two chapters and to look for clues to the importance of revenge in this story.
- As children read independently, listen to each of them in turn, noting and prompting decoding strategies.

### Independent reading

**Objective:** Deduce characters' reasons for behaviour from their actions. Infer writers' perspectives from what is written and implied.

(*Deducing, Clarifying*)

- Once the children have read the first two chapters, ask them to pair up and discuss all the instances of revenge.
- As a group, discuss the Achilles–Hector–Paris sequence of revenge. Can they work out how it started?
- After reading pages 4 and 5, ask the children if they think the attack on Troy was an act of revenge by the Greeks.
- On pages 8 and 9, Karis recounts the death of Hector, and Achilles' indestructibility; Chapter 2 begins with her recounting Achilles' death. Why has the author put these events so close together?

**Assessment:** Check that the children:

- understand the sequence of personal revenge, beginning before the events of this book.
- can see the revenge theme in the attack on Troy itself – but also that this might be an excuse.
- identify the impact of Achilles' death following so closely on his apparent indestructibility.

### Returning and responding to the text

**Objective:** Identify and summarise evidence from a text. Use evidence from across a text to explain events or ideas.

(*Deducing, Clarifying, Summarising*)

- When children have read the whole story, ask them to explain the wooden horse trick in their own words.
- On page 42, Helen is rightly suspicious. Can the children find other clues telling us she is intelligent and sensible?
- Ask the children to evaluate the effectiveness of using a young servant as the storyteller.
- Why has the author chosen to write in the present tense?

**Assessment:** Check that the children:

- fully understand the Greeks' trick, including the duplicity of Sinon.
- can see that Helen is presented as intelligent throughout.
- can comment on the use of the young narrator.
- notice the immediacy created through the use of the present tense.

### Speaking and listening activities

**Objective:** Create roles showing how behaviour can be interpreted from different viewpoints. Reflect on how working in role helps to explore complex issues.



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- Organise the children in pairs and ask them to take on the roles of King Priam and King Menelaus; improvise a discussion on the rights and wrongs of the attack.
- Hot seat a child as Helen and explore her reaction to the deaths of Hector, Achilles and Paris.

### Assessment:

- Can the children sustain roles to explore ideas and issues?

## Writing activities

**Objective:** Choose and combine words and images for particular effects. Reflect critically on their writing and improve it.

- Ask the children to write a scene from the battle between Achilles and Hector, creating a dramatic atmosphere with their language choices.
- Encourage the children to add illustrations to their work and to reread it and improve on it where necessary.

### Assessment:

- Can children apply appropriate word choices to convey a scene?

**Objective:** Summarise and shape material and ideas to write convincing non-narrative texts. Adapt non-narrative forms and styles to write texts.

- Ask the children to write two short diary entries from Paris' viewpoint: one after the death of Hector, and the other after the death of Achilles.

### Assessment:

- Can the children use a diary style, combining recounts of events with thoughts, opinions and emotions?

## Cross-curricular links

### History

- Research facts about the Greek fighting forces.

### Drama/ICT

- Recreate key scenes using dramatic freeze-framing. Create photo-story versions of the myth by taking photos of the freeze-frames and asking the children to add speech and thought bubbles on screen, or using paper.

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# Helen of Troy (Oxford Level 14) curriculum coverage chart

## Links to Oxford Reading Criterion Scale:

### Reading

- Can read confidently and independently using a range of strategies appropriately to establish meaning, e.g. self-correcting, widening knowledge of vocabulary. (READ) [ORCS Standard 5, 2]
- Can work out the meanings of ambitious words and/or phrases in context. (D) [ORCS Standard 5, 13]
- Can read between the lines, using clues from action, dialogue and description to interpret meaning and/or explain what characters are thinking or feeling and the way they act. (D) [ORCS Standard 5, 14]
- Can identify the effects of different words and phrases to create different images and atmosphere, e.g. powerful verbs, descriptive adjectives and adverbs. (E) [ORCS Standard 5, 17]
- Is beginning to recognize how a character is presented in different ways and respond to this with reference to the text. (D) [ORCS Standard 5, 22]
- Can sometimes explain different characters' points of view. (D) [ORCS Standard 5, 23]

### Comprehension strategies

- Comprehension strategies are taught throughout the Teaching Notes to enable pupils to understand what they are reading in books that they can read independently. In these Teaching Notes the following strategies are taught:

*Predicting, Questioning, Clarifying, Summarising, Imagining, Deducing*

## ENGLAND The National Curriculum in England: Years 3–4

<b>Spoken language</b>	Pupils should be taught to participate in discussions, presentations, performances and debates (SpokLang.9) Pupils should be taught to consider and evaluate different viewpoints, attending to and building on the contributions of others (SpokLang.11)
<b>Reading: Comprehension</b>	Pupils should be taught to understand what they read, in books they can read independently, by drawing inferences such as inferring characters' feelings, thoughts and motives from their actions, and justifying inferences with detailed evidence predicting what might happen from details stated and implied (Y3/4 ReadComp.2iii) Pupils should be taught to understand what they read, in books they can read independently, by identifying main ideas drawn from more than one paragraph and summarising these (Y3/4 ReadComp.2v)
<b>Writing: Composition</b>	Pupils should be taught to draft and write by in narratives, creating settings, characters and plot (Y3/4 WritComp.2iii) Pupils should be taught to draft and write by in non-narrative material, using simple organisational devices such as heading and sub-headings (Y3/4 WritComp.2iv)

## SCOTLAND Curriculum for Excellence: Literacy and English experiences and outcomes – Second level

<b>Listening and talking</b>	When I engage with others, I can respond in ways appropriate to my role, show that I value others' contributions and use these to build on thinking (LIT 2-02a)
<b>Reading</b>	To show my understanding across different areas of learning, I can identify and consider the purpose and main ideas of a text and use supporting detail (LIT 2-16a) To show my understanding, I can respond to literal, inferential and evaluative questions and other close reading tasks and can create different kinds of questions of my own (ENG 2-17a)
<b>Writing</b>	By considering the type of text I am creating, I can select ideas and relevant information, organise these in an appropriate way for my purpose [...] (LIT 2-26a) I am learning to use language and style in a way which engages and/or influences my reader (ENG 2-27a)

## WALES Programme of Study for English: Year 4

<b>Oracy</b>	Learners are able to explore different situations through role play (Y4_OracSpea.6) Learners are able to, after listening, respond, giving views on what the speaker has said (Y4_OracList.2)
<b>Reading</b>	Learners are able to accurately identify the main points and supporting information in texts (Y4_ReadComp.1) Learners are able to deduce connections between information, e.g. sequence, importance (Y4_ReadComp.2)
<b>Writing</b>	Learners are able to adapt what they write to the purpose and reader, choosing words appropriately (Y4_WritMean.1) Learners are able to use specific structures in writing (Y4_WritStru.1)

## NORTHERN IRELAND Levels of Progression in Communication across the curriculum: Primary Level 3

<b>Talking and listening</b>	Pupils can maintain a role (L3_com_talk.1ii) make contributions which show understanding (L3_com_talk.2i)
<b>Reading</b>	Pupils can recognise, understand and sequence main points (L3_com_read.1i) Pupils can make deductions using information from the text (L3_com_read.4ii)
<b>Writing</b>	Pupils can structure and sequence their writing (L3_com_writ.2ii) Pupil's can provide supporting detail using an expanding vocabulary (L3_com_writ.2iii)