

Adapted unit: Who were the ancient Greeks – a war with Troy

About the unit

This unit centres on one of the first epic stories of European history and literature: Homer's Iliad. The Iliad tells the tale of the siege of Troy by a Greek army, in revenge for the abduction of the Greek princess, Helen. The unit offers the children the chance to know more about Greek stories, beliefs and culture and to research ancient Greek cities, warfare and ways of life.

The children experience a retelling of Homer's Iliad, structured around a 12-episode story on three CDs, titled 'War with Troy: the story of Achilles', which is presented in 10–15 minute episodes alongside other important stories from Greek mythology. It links with learning in the key stage 2 national literacy framework and national curriculum for English, PSHE and citizenship, for which a teacher's guide has been produced (see 'Resources' below).

Where the unit fits in

This adapted unit builds on children's learning in year 3, in the QCA/DfES scheme of work unit 14 'Who were the ancient Greeks?' It also links with year 5 (term 2) of the national literacy strategy, in which children are expected to study myths, legends and storytelling.

The school in which this unit was developed used 'War with Troy' for year 5 children (term 2) and year 6 children (term 3). This adapted unit of work can be used anywhere in years 5 or 6. Because this unit is built around an epic story linking with years 5/6 national curriculum for English and national literacy strategy objectives, it is not easily adapted for years 3/4, although it has been used successfully with years 4/5 mixed classes.

It is particularly designed to help children think about history and how historical storytelling links with English, art, PSHE and citizenship. It can be used specifically to motivate and excite boys to have an interest in history and story, although the materials appeal to both boys and girls. Because the materials centre on a CD recording of an oral retelling, told from memory and not from a script, the unit also heightens awareness of speaking and listening as an important art form (the oral tradition), as well as a personal skill.

Expectations

At the end of this unit

most children will: describe features of the more important Greek gods and goddesses; explain some of the beliefs of the ancient Greeks and why they held them; understand some aspects and the importance of war in ancient Greek society; retell and interpret the war with Troy from one perspective, while showing an appreciation of other possible interpretations; select and combine information from spoken, written and visual sources; be able to describe some features of storytelling within the oral tradition

some children will not have made so much progress and will: know that the ancient Greeks lived a long time ago; describe some features of life in ancient Greece; know about some of the ancient Greek gods and what they represented; be able to retell key aspects of the war with Troy

some children will have progressed further and will: compare aspects of ancient Greek civilisation and society today; compare different interpretations of the war with Troy and give reasons for some differences; understand strengths of and similarities between different sources of information; select and combine information to produce extended descriptions of aspects of life in the story, such as warfare or belief; compare media and storytelling methods as used in ancient and modern times.

Prior learning

It is helpful if the children have:

- learnt about the way of life of people from different cultures who lived in the distant past, including their myths, stories and artistic achievements
- considered some of the attitudes and values of people who lived in the distant past, their motives and the results of their actions
- experienced some Greek myths, *eg Perseus and the Gorgon*
- used stories, legends, artefacts and pictures as sources of historical information
- some knowledge of the Greek gods and their particular influences, *eg Athene, goddess of war and wisdom.*

Language for learning

Through the activities in this unit children will be able to understand, use and spell correctly:

- words describing the ancient Greek world, eg *Aegean, Sparta, Troy, city, palace, walls, warrior, high king, king, prince, slave, voyage*
- words describing ancient Greek ideas and beliefs, eg *the names of gods and goddesses, nymph, temple, immortal, urn, oracle, blessing, curse, fate*
- phrases or descriptive techniques associated with epic poetry and oral tradition, eg *metaphors, similes, epithets, repetitions, formulae, intonation, alliteration*
- words associated with warfare, eg *enemies, armour, helmet, spear, sword, chariot, camp, fortress, siege.*

Resources

Resources include:

- three CDs titled 'War With Troy: the story of Achilles' in 12 episodes, including an interview with the storytellers. Available from the Cambridge School Classics Project (telephone 01223 361 458)
- the Cambridge School Classics Project website (www.cambridgescp.com) offers free downloadable visual materials for use in classrooms and additional planning and teacher material
- stories of Greek myths and legends, including references to Troy and the Trojan horse
- a range of reference books about ancient Greek cities, people, gods and goddesses, warfare and trade
- postcards, posters or pictures of ancient Greek pottery and statues
- pictures and photographs of modern day celebrities and representations of the Greek gods.

Section 1: How and why were 'heroes' important in ancient Greece?

Learning objectives	Possible teaching activities	Learning outcomes	Points to note
<p>Children should learn:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> to question why ancient Greeks created stories about heroes, heroines, gods and goddesses to consider 'What is a hero?' by discussing the qualities of human characters in 'War with Troy', comparing and contrasting these to modern day heroes and heroines to reason about how and why modern and ancient societies need heroes, and how characteristics of heroes and heroines differ. 	<p>After playing the first three episodes of 'War with Troy', ask the children to list important characters. <i>Which are immortals (gods and goddesses), mortals (human) and what are the differences?</i></p> <p>Discuss which of the story's mortal characters might become heroes. <i>What are their different qualities?</i> Revisit 'heroic' characters, eg <i>Achilles, Hector</i>, as the story unfolds.</p> <p>Ask the children to discuss/define their idea of 'a hero', building a model by referring to qualities from historical and modern examples of 'real people' who are seen as 'heroic'. <i>How does modern celebrities, eg sports or pop stars, seem similar or different to ancient Greek or other ages' 'heroism'?</i></p> <p>Ask the children to collect photographs of modern heroes. Select one and write an explanatory comment for how that person might be seen in one hundred years' time.</p>	<p>Children:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> list and describe important mortal and immortal characters in this story create and explain a display comparing modern and ancient Greek heroes define a hero (or heroine) and recognise the qualities that she or he possesses show an understanding that concepts such as honour, heroism and celebrity exist in different historical periods. 	<p>Ask the children to write modern newspaper articles about events in the story, eg <i>the grand wedding of Peleus and Thetis, a birth announcement for Achilles</i>.</p> <p>The display about heroes can be added to as the story progresses, since views about Achilles (the central 'hero') are likely to change.</p> <p>There are opportunities to link this work with the QCA/DfES scheme of work for PSHE and citizenship unit 11 'In the media: what's the news?'</p>

Section 2: What does this story tell us about how the ancient Greeks lived?

Learning objectives	Possible teaching activities	Learning outcomes	Points to note
<p>Children should learn:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • about ancient Greek trading, by using books and other sources • to recognise differences between the lives of men and women in ancient Greece • about the armour and weapons that were used in warfare • about some of the manufactured things that ancient Greeks considered beautiful and/or valuable. 	<p>Review the extract (episode 3) where Odysseus tricks Achilles out of hiding. List the goods Odysseus sells to the 'women', <i>eg cloth, rugs, mirrors, jewels, food, wine</i>. Using research and imagination, list other objects that Odysseus could have traded around 3000 years ago.</p> <p>Episode 3 describes Helen in Sparta then in Troy. Read or listen again, as a source for describing how noble women like Helen lived. <i>What goods did nobles possess and how did they get them?</i></p> <p>Discuss with children why 'ordinary' people do not show up. <i>How many ordinary people appear in this story?</i> Using reference books, ask children to research and describe (with dates) ordinary people from any period of ancient Greece. Later these can be placed on a timeline.</p> <p>Using visual reference sources research details of Bronze Age ships, armour and weapons. Ask children to imagine planning an attack using these. <i>What else would they need?</i></p>	<p>Children:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • make observations and inferences about factual information in a fictional story • ask and answer questions about objects traded in ancient Greece • show that they can compare the lives of different groups of people and that they can make deductions about similarities and differences • show that they understand some details of how and why wars were fought in ancient times • show by drawings and written description that they know about items of a warrior's equipment. 	<p>The children can compare highly valued items then and now, either to link knowledge from different periods of history or as a prompt for discussion in PSHE.</p> <p>Further questions are 'What do we mean by ordinary?'. This builds on previous discussions 'What is a hero?'</p> <p>Also, 'How do ideas about right and wrong influence how people in this story are behaving?' <i>eg Paris running away with Helen, the Greek kings keeping their promise to bring her back.</i></p> <p>Ask the children to think about issues of 'right and wrong' that they have come across from other historical periods, <i>eg transportation for stealing or the existence and abolition of slavery in Victorian times, executions for religious reasons in Tudor times.</i></p>

Section 3: Why was Troy worth fighting for?

Learning objectives	Possible teaching activities	Learning outcomes	Points to note
<p>Children should learn:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> to look at history from different perspectives how to structure and contribute to a formal debate to recognise the most important characteristics of an ancient city and to understand why they were built to begin to make links within and across different times and between different civilisations that we can use different sources and methods to investigate the past. 	<p>After hearing at least half of 'War with Troy', divide the class into Greeks and Trojans. Each group lists their reasons for going to war.</p> <p>In pairs (Greeks or Trojans), children devise a propaganda pamphlet or speech, encouraging citizens to support the war. A possible stimulus is Mark Anthony's speech to the people, after the death of Caesar in Shakespeare's Julius Caesar. This shows the power of words to persuade crowds.</p> <p>Following this work on 'reasons' and 'persuasion', divide the class again for a formal debate in which children try to blame the other side for starting the war.</p> <p>Using a range of reference books, and CD-ROM or internet sources, research ancient towns and cities, <i>eg Knossos, Athens, Alexandria, Rome</i>. For each write a 'fact file' describing location, age, fortifications, population and other facts.</p> <p>From examples above, deduce and list vital elements of an ancient city. Put these in order of importance, <i>eg walls, freshwater, roads, harbour, market, temples, river, hill, food supply, rulers</i>.</p>	<p>Children:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> participate in a formal debate and describe what a 'debate' is offer different reasons for the Greeks and Trojans 'going to war' contribute to a written or spoken piece of persuasive propaganda ask and answer questions about ancient cities using a wide range of information sources can express their knowledge about ancient cities through text, illustrations, a timeline and talk. 	

Section 4: How does this story help us to understand what the ancient Greeks believed and why?

Learning objectives	Possible teaching activities	Learning outcomes	Points to note
<p>Children should learn:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> to explain a display of gods and goddesses and understand how some were related, <i>eg Poseidon and Zeus</i> how in this story gods and goddesses prevail, even when mortals try to act of their own free will that all ancient and modern societies develop beliefs, laws and customs – though these may be very different to compare laws and customs from different periods, places and societies. 	<p><i>How do gods and goddesses behave in this story?</i> The children describe this through text and illustration, possibly using other reference sources, <i>eg books, websites.</i></p> <p>Give six groups two different episodes to hear again or read. What can these reveal about ancient Greek laws and customs, <i>eg the importance of marriage, of prophecy, Achilles' obedience to his mother, allegiance to kings, belief in divine intervention, the heroic code and other customs.</i></p> <p>Compare and contrast the above with laws and customs from a modern or other historical society. List or illustrate. <i>How are they the same, or different?</i></p> <p>From an ancient perspective, ask children to write 'an eyewitness account' of events in episode 5, during which Paris offers Menelaus single combat. Emphasise this as imaginary writing: no such eyewitness accounts exist.</p> <p>Discuss Achilles' argument with Agamemnon in episode 7. <i>What does the behaviour of Achilles reveal about himself – or ancient Greeks in general?</i></p>	<p>Children:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> are able to name important gods and goddesses and define their qualities show that they understand ancient Greek beliefs in the power of the gods to influence human events note some similarities and differences between ancient and modern civilisations ask and answer questions about how and why societies develop beliefs, laws and customs write an imaginary account that shows an awareness of historical period. 	<p>Both modern and ancient European societies have enslaved people, have produced tyrants and fought wars and have valued science, art and philosophy. But try to avoid oversimplifying children's images of ancient Greece.</p> <p>Most of their city-states were not 'democratic' in a modern sense; yet neither were they part of the 'make-believe' land portrayed in many Greek myths. The reality was one of communities farming, fighting and trading to make a difficult living.</p> <p>Some children will be able to compare and contrast the beliefs, laws and customs of the ancient Greeks to those of another society, <i>eg Victorian Britain, Aztec society.</i></p>

Section 5: How far can we trust this story? How much of it might be history?

Learning objectives	Possible teaching activities	Learning outcomes	Points to note
<p>Children should learn:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> about differences between factual recounts (led by information) and fictional descriptions (led by imagination) about how historical information and imagination are both necessary to represent the past that history can be represented and interpreted in different ways and why this happens. 	<p>Write 10–15 sentences about information in 'War with Troy'. This should include some factual information, <i>eg ancient Greeks worshipped different gods</i>, some fictional information, <i>eg river water protected Achilles</i>, and some factual or fictional information, <i>eg Agamemnon existed</i>. Ask the children to work in pairs and put the sentences into groups and explain.</p> <p>Stages 'an incident' for the children to witness. One group of children should write accounts of this; the other should describe it orally. Compare the written and oral accounts.</p> <p>Discuss filming one scene of 'War with Troy'. The children should list items and knowledge needed for historical authenticity, <i>eg clothes, weapons, backgrounds</i>. <i>Can they produce sequenced accurate drawings of the scene?</i></p> <p><i>What other films, TV programmes or novels do children know that describe events in the past?</i> Place examples on a timeline, with comments and reviews about historical aspects of the story.</p> <p>With an example from the above, discuss 'How can we tell the difference between fact and fiction in historical stories?'</p>	<p>Children:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> can explain how fact and fiction originate and are expressed, by referring to details of texts, films and other resources can write about or retell an incident as a witness and discuss strengths and weaknesses of methods of recall learn about interpretation in modern media sources and in historical fiction learn to use reference sources, <i>eg books and the internet</i>, for a specific purpose and for detailed research understand how historical accuracy is ensured and why it is desirable in different genres. 	<p>This question prompts children to consider the reliability of information and to explore differences between primary and secondary sources, information and imagination, or fact and fiction.</p> <p>Some care is needed when staging 'an incident'. Years 5 and 6 children can be upset or misled if inappropriate actions look too convincing.</p> <p>Encourage the children to research different ways in which 'the past' is shown in popular media, <i>eg television, comics, computer games</i>.</p> <p>Discuss how war is represented in historical fact and fiction. How realistic are these views of violence – or of the boredom of a soldier's life? (see W H Auden's poem 'Roman wall blues').</p>

Section 6: When did the story of War With Troy start, and how have people retold it over time?

Learning objectives	Possible teaching activities	Learning outcomes	Points to note
<p>Children should learn:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> to select and organise historical information and to place events into the correct periods of time about how this historical story has been used by different societies to inform and entertain people about historical storytelling in different art forms and media about the importance of factual research and accurate information to history. 	<p>Make a timeline showing the Trojan war and other conflicts the children are aware of, eg <i>WWII, Roman invasion of Britain, 1066</i>.</p> <p>Ask the children research what ‘Bronze Age’ or ‘Iron Age’ means and look for an historical site in Britain from circa 1500-500BC. How would it have compared to Troy, Knossos or Mycenae? The children should write about or illustrate a British place to compare with Troy.</p> <p>Collect different written, spoken, musical, filmed or painted interpretations of Homer’s characters and story (see www.cambridgescp.com for a list of versions). Put this collection in order from the earliest to the latest. <i>Which do the children prefer and why? What new ‘versions’ could they imagine? Can they be put on the timeline?</i></p> <p>Recount an incident from ‘War with Troy’ deliberately mixing fact, fiction and anachronism. <i>Can the children spot which is which and explain why?</i></p>	<p>Children:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> create a timeline from around 1500BC to the present and post knowledge of other conflicts and societies and of retellings, characters or incidents from the story of ‘War with Troy’ on this timeline experience ‘other’ extracts, characterisations or versions of this story in different genres and from different times, eg <i>historical fiction, film, opera, paintings, cartoons</i> can use the terms fact, fiction and anachronism in a discussion about a representation of history. 	<p>Many previous pieces of children’s work in this unit can be placed on this timeline.</p> <p>The second activity offers a chance to link with local history and local archaeological sites. The most famous British Bronze Age site is probably Stonehenge.</p> <p>Care should be taken when collecting adult versions of the story since some aspects may be unsuitable for children.</p> <p>The importance to European music and art of Homer’s Iliad and Odyssey, and other Greek myths and legends, gives children the chance to explore aspects of art, music and history with some confidence, if they have enjoyed and responded emotionally to ‘War with Troy’.</p>