Greek Gods and Goddesses

**Zeus (Jupiter):** Mightiest of the Olympians. God of heaven, rain, clouds. Promiscuous: By Hera, he sired Ares and Hephaestus; Athena, he “made up out of his own head,” and by various goddesses and mortal women he was the father of Apollo, Artemis, Aphrodite, Dionysus, Persephone, Hercules, Perseus, Helen, etc.

**Hera (Juno):** Wife of Zeus; goddess of marriage and childbirth. Mother of Ares and Hephaestus. Her messenger was Iris (goddess of rainbow). Plays a major role in the Trojan War beginning with the Judgment of Paris; often jealous

**Hades (Pluto):** God of underworld and of wealth; King of the Dead – but was NOT Death; Controlled all that was in earth, such as gold, silver, etc. Zeus’s brother

**Poseidon (Neptune):** God of the sea; storm and calm are under his control. Father of Pegasus (winged horse) and Polyphemus (cyclops). Zeus’s brother.

**Pheobus Apollo:** God of light, music, truth, poetry, archery, prophecy. He is also associated with medicine and healing and with sudden death and through disease. Later identified with the sun. A favorite son of Zeus and Leto. Two maxims: “Know yourself” and “Nothing in excess”

**Hermes (Mercury):** God of commerce and gain; speedy messenger of the gods; also god of wrestling and thievery. Half brother of Apollo.

**Artemis (Diana):** Goddess of the hunt and wild creatures; goddess of the moon. Twin sister of Apollo. A virgin goddess.

**Ares (Mars):** God of war; son of Zeus and Hera. Greeks disliked him because they felt he was cowardly and bloodthirsty, but Romans held him in high regard as a chief god. Sister is Eris (Discord), her sons are Strife, Terror, and Panic

**Pallas Athena (Minerva):** Zeus’s favorite daughter. She sprang from his head with a great shout, fully grown and in armor. Goddess of justice; fierce and ruthless in the *Iliad*, often referred to as “grey-eyed”; Also a virgin goddess.

**Hephaestus (Vulcan):** The only ugly and lame god; son of Hera; god of fire and the forge; a clever craftsman. In the *Odyssey*, he is married to Aphrodite. Makes weapons, dwellings and furniture for the gods in Olympus.

**Aphrodite (Venus):** Goddess of love and beauty; mother of Cupid. She sometimes appears as the wife of Hephaestus, and the lover of Ares. Soft and weak in the *Iliad*. 
Literary Terms to Know

EPICS AND THEIR CHARACTERISTICS

Epic
A long narrative poem that tells of the adventures of a hero who embodies the values of his/her civilization. The adventures will be told in episodes important to the history of a nation or race.

Examples:
The *Odyssey*, the *Iliad*, *Beowulf*, *Gilgamesh*

Epic Conventions

1. Main character is a physically impressive hero of national or international importance and of great historical or legendary significance.
2. The setting is vast in scope, covering great nations, the world, or the universe.
3. The action consists of deeds of great valor or requiring superhuman courage.
4. Supernatural forces (gods, angels, demons) take interest in the action of the story.
5. The poet uses a style of sustained elevation.
6. The poet retains a measure of objectivity.

Common Devices Employed by Epic Poets

7. The work begins *in medias res* (in the middle of things), and much of the necessary exposition is not given until later.
8. The poem opens by *invoking a muse*.
9. The poet includes catalogs of warriors, ships, and armies.
10. Main characters give extended, formal speeches.
11. The poet makes frequent use of the *epic simile*.

Epic Hero
The central protagonist of an epic who embodies the important morals, values, and virtues of the society of which he is a product

Examples:
Odysseus in the *Odyssey*, Achilles in the *Iliad*, Beowulf in *Beowulf*

Characteristics of the Epic Hero

- A larger-than-life person who embodies the highest ideals of his culture
- Clever and wise, but capable of error
- Superior in degree to other men and to his environment
- Overcomes great obstacles/opponents but maintains his humanity
- Especially skilled both with and without weapons
- Undertakes a quest/journey to achieve something of great value to himself or society
- Ordinary laws of nature are sometimes suspended for the epic hero.
- Not a superhuman with magical powers but a regular human whose aspirations and accomplishments set him apart
- Experiences typical human emotions, yet is able to master and control these human traits to a greater degree than a typical person
- Lives on after death, meaning he is forever remembered by those who live after him, achieving a type of immortality. As such, the epic hero strives for honor and fame.

LITERARY TERMS

Epic (Homerian) Simile
An elaborate simile (more involved/ornate than an ordinary simile) that usually goes on for a number of lines; often compares heroic/epic events to understandable, everyday things

Example:
“She brushed [the arrow] away from his skin as lightly as when a mother / Brushes a fly away from her child who is lying in sweet sleep.”

**Epithet**
A descriptive label/phrase (adjective) applied to a person or thing that emphasizes a particular quality or attribute of the person/thing being described; often repeated throughout the text

*Six Types of Epithets*
1. Origin/home: tells the birthplace or kingdom of the character
2. Patronymic: gives the lineage (father) of the character
3. Appearance/state: gives a physical description/trait of the character
4. Skill/art: refers to a noteworthy attribute
5. Position: identifies the character's position in his/her society
6. Heroic quality/general: identifies epic or cultural ideal or innate qualities

*Examples:*
Odysseus is often referred to as “the man of twists and turns” or “long-suffering Odysseus”

**Patronymic**
A name derived from the name of a father or ancestor, typically by addition of a prefix or suffix; NOTE: not to be confused with a patronymic epithet

*Examples:*
Agamemnon and Menelaus are both sons of Atreus. At times, both men will be called “Atrides.” Be careful that you look at context to determine who “Atrides” is in a given passage!

**Narrative Drift/Digressions**
An interruption in the narration to elaborate on an aspect of something that is being talked about

*Example:*
If Homer mentions a gift of wine, he may digress and describe both the history of the gift and the history of the giver.

**Cataloging**
The listing of ships, warriors, gods, etc.

**GREEK CONCEPTS**

**Shame Culture**
Self image is generated by what other people say/perceive of that person

**Nostos**
Greek word meaning “song of return” or “homecoming song”

**Kleos**
Greek word meaning “song of glory”

**Xenia**
Greek word for “hospitality,” refers to the importance of hospitality in Greek culture and the expectation of that a host show generosity and courtesy to those who are far from home.

**Moira**
Greek word meaning “share of life”

**Aristeia**
Soldier's highest moment of glory in war, when he fights so bravely and single-mindedly as to experience no fear and to appear nearly invincible

**Timé**
Greek word for “honor;” most basic tangible, physical expression of *timé* is *geras*

**Geras**
The booty, gifts, or particular prize collected by a warrior

**Mēnis**
Greek word for “anger, rage, wrath”
Important Notes Regarding the Quoting and Citation of Epic Poetry

- Indicate line divisions with a backslash (i.e. “Roses are red / Violets are blue”).
- The *Iliad* has a specific MLA citation format, which is the abbreviation for the *Iliad* (*Il.*) followed by the book and line number(s) separated by periods.  
  Example: (*Il.* 5.299-301)

THE TROJAN WAR

An epic poem is a long narrative that relates the deeds of heroes. Many of the stories of the Trojan War were compiled in an epic poem called the Iliad by the author Homer. They are among the oldest stories in literature.

While these tales are clearly mythological, historians believe there really was a Trojan War and that it took place about 1200 B.C. near the coast of Turkey. It might have been a trade war between different groups of Greek-speaking people for control of waters leading into the Black Sea.

The Apple of Discord

The struggle began when Eris [AIR-is], goddess of discord and quarreling, was not invited to the wedding of the hero Peleus and the sea-nymph Thetis. Eris threw among the revelers a golden apple inscribed “for the fairest.” It rolled right up to where three goddesses were sitting: Hera, Athena, and Aphrodite. Of course, each goddess claimed it. Zeus refused to be the judge of this Olympian beauty contest. He knew no matter how he decided he would never hear the end of it from the others. He told the goddesses to have Hermes escort them to a mountain near Troy where Paris, a son of King Priam, was watching the sheep. The king had sent him away because he had been warned that someday this boy would bring grief and ruin on his country. Paris was supposed to be a good judge of feminine beauty. The goddesses agreed, and Zeus warned them to abide by Paris’s choice, however it went. Hermes escorted them to the high pastures of Troy where the shepherd-prince watched his flocks.

Each goddess promised Paris something if he would favor her. Hera offered him kingly power, Athena promised wisdom and glory in war, but Aphrodite, the Love Goddess, offered him the most beautiful woman in the world for his wife. Paris cared nothing for power and glory and, least of all, wisdom. He was young and shallow-minded. He awarded the golden apple to Aphrodite.

Helen of Sparta
The most beautiful woman in the world, Helen of Sparta, was the daughter of Zeus and Princess Leda. Of course, every prince in Greece wanted to marry her. Her mother’s new husband, King Tendareus of Sparta, had to choose among the suitors. He was afraid that whoever he chose would have to fight for Helen against all the rest. To prevent this, he made them all take an oath that they would accept his decision and support the cause of Helen’s husband if any wrong were committed against him because of this marriage. The suitors, each thinking he might be the one chosen, swore the oath and promised solemnly to punish any man who interfered with the marriage. Tyndareus then chose Menelaus, brother of Agamemnon, King of Mycenae, and made Menelaus a king of Sparta, too.

Meanwhile, Aphrodite led Paris directly to Sparta. Menelaus and Helen received the Trojan Prince graciously. They trusted him so completely that Menelaus went off on an expedition to Crete, leaving his wife to entertain their guest. The ties between host and guest among the Greeks were sacred, but Paris violated that trust, with the help of Aphrodite, who turned her arts on Helen and made her fall madly in love with the boy. When Menelaus got back he found his guest gone and his wife with him.

Here the oath and pact of the suitors went into effect. The brother of the injured husband, King Agamemnon of Mycenae, as commander in chief, was able to rally nearly all of the Greek kings to bring Helen back.

**Valiant Warriors**

Agamemnon gathered together hundreds of ships and set sail for Troy. The ships carried many men brave in battle and some wise in counsel. Chief among them was Achilles [uh-KILLeez], the greatest warrior and champion of all the Greeks.

The Greek kings and army were strong, but so were the defenders of Troy. King Priam and Queen Hecuba had many valiant sons ready both for attack and defense. But first and foremost there was Prince Hector. He was not only brave but noble – in every way a match for Achilles. In a sense, the whole outcome of the war hung on when, where, and how these two might meet. The Fates had revealed that each would die before Troy would be overthrown. Both heroes lived and fought under the shadow of certain death.

The gods, as they always do, took sides: Hera and Athena, who had lost out in the “beauty contest” were naturally for the Greeks. Poseidon, Sea God, also favored the Greeks. Apollo, Aphrodite, Artemis, and Ares were for the Trojans. Zeus was neutral.

And so the Trojan War would shake both heaven and earth.

It went on for nine years, the fighting swaying back and forth – a stalemate. The Greeks could not take Troy, and the Trojans could not drive out the Greeks.