Name: _____

Date: _____

ANCIENT GREECE
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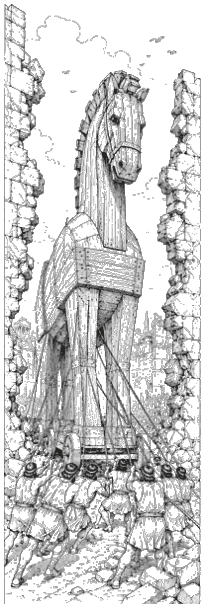
The Iliad and the Odyssey

They thought it was a gift. It wasn't.

For ten years, the Greeks had camped outside their walls. Now the ships were gone, and the beach where a thousand tents once stood was empty. At the city gates stood a horse taller than any man, carved from wood, offered to the gods as an apology for a war the Trojans believed they had finally won. They hadn't.

The Gift That Wasn't

That night, the city celebrated. Wine flowed in the streets. Families slept with their doors unlocked for the first time in a decade, and their gift horse stood watch in the square, silent and still, exactly as its makers intended. With the city asleep, a secret door opened and Greek soldiers emerged from the horse. The soldiers unlocked the city gates, allowing the just-returned soldiers to enter and present one of history's most unwelcome surprises.



A Tale Often Told

The story of the Trojan Horse appears in the Odyssey, one of two epic poems that are the oldest surviving examples of Greek literature. Historians estimate the poems were written down in the eighth century before the Common Era, during the Dark Age of Ancient Greece. But the war they describe was said to have happened four centuries earlier, in a time the Greeks later called the Heroic Age.

The Trojan War

The Trojan War began when the Greeks set out to recover Helen. Paris was a prince of Troy and was infatuated with the most beautiful woman in the world. Helen was that woman. She was the daughter of Zeus and married to the Spartan king. Paris came to the king's home as a guest, and while the host was away, Paris kidnapped Helen, stole the king's treasure, and sailed home for Troy.

The other Greek poli joined Sparta to send a fleet to retrieve Helen, but they were unable to breach Troy's city walls. For ten long years, the Greeks held siege, but Troy managed to survive. That is, until the clever Odysseus came up with a plan, with help from the goddess Athena. He ordered the soldiers to construct a horse so massive it could never pass through the city gates. Inside the horse, thirty Greek soldiers would wait for nightfall. The Greeks burned their camp and sailed out of sight, leaving the horse behind. With the enemy gone, the Trojans felt safe enough to do the unthinkable: they tore down a section of their own wall to drag the horse inside.

The returning Greek army poured through the broken wall. By morning, the city had burned to the ground.

The Mystery of Homer

The epics are often attributed to a storyteller named Homer. We have only a few clues about who Homer might have been. He may have been one person or several. Homer may have been invented by the bards and never actually existed. We still do not know. The language of the Iliad and the Odyssey suggests that the poet came from the western coast of present-day Turkey, a clue that would eventually complete the story. Homer's name can be translated as "blind," but the vivid imagery of the Iliad and the Odyssey has led many to assume he must have had sight at some point in his life.

Finding Troy

In 1870, a German businessman named Heinrich Schliemann, obsessed with the old poems since childhood, followed clues buried in the verses of the Iliad and the Odyssey to a quiet hill in western Turkey. There, he found not one lost city, but several, stacked on top of each other like pages in a book. One layer showed the unmistakable scars of fire and violent destruction, dated to almost exactly the time the war was said to have happened. Schliemann didn't find the horse, but he may have found Troy.

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Fill in the Blanks

The I__i__d and the O__y__s__y are two epic poems that describe the T___an War, a conflict that was said to have occurred during the Greek H__r__ic Age. The war began when P__r__s, a prince of Troy, kidnapped H__l__n, the d__u__h__er of Zeus and the wife of the S__a__t__n king. The other G__e__k poli joined Sparta, but for ten years they were unable to b__e__ch Troy's city walls. O_y__s__us came up with a plan to construct a massive h__r__e as a *p__a__e offering. Greek s__l__ie__s hid inside the h__r__e as the Greeks sailed out of sight. The T__o__a__s tore down part of their own w__ll to *b__i__g the horse inside. During the n__g__t, the G__e__k soldiers emerged from the horse and u__l__c__ed the city gates to let in the other Greeks. The epics are often attributed to H__m__r, and in 1870 Heinrich S__h__i__m__nn may have found the ruins of Troy in what is now western T__r__ey.

Answer in Complete Sentence

1. Why did the Greeks go to war with Troy?

*2. "Beware of Trojan Horses" is a common piece of advice. Explain the historical context of this phrase.

*3. How did Homer's dialect become a clue in the search for Troy?

*4. In your opinion, is the story of the Trojan Horse likely mostly true or false? Explain your reasoning.

*This is a higher order learning question. You must answer the question to the best of your ability, but any reasonable answer will be graded as correct.

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