

**Homer, *Iliad***

Student Activities**Activity 1: Sense of an Ending – Parallels between Book 1 and Book 24**

Scholars have long since noticed that the events in Book 24 of the *Iliad* echo the events of Book 1.

Match the events of Book 1 and 24 below. [Note: the events are currently matched up.

Teachers will need to mix up the events in the right-hand column themselves!]

Event in Book 1	Event in Book 24
Reference to unburied bodies which are to be the prey of dogs and birds.	Funeral of Hector.
Achilles named in very first line of poem.	Hector named in very last line of poem.
A Trojan priest, Chryses, comes to the Greek camp to ransom his (living) daughter from Agamemnon	The king of Troy, Priam, comes to the Greek camp to ransom his (dead) son from Achilles.
Agamemnon refuses the ransom and does not release Chryseis.	Achilles accepts the ransom and releases Hector's body.
Apollo punishes Agamemnon and the Greeks for refusing to accept the ransom.	Apollo insists that Achilles should release the body of Hector.
Apollo referred to as god of healing and purification.	Apollo mentioned as god who preserved Hector's body from disfigurement.
Hera quarrels with Zeus regarding his decision to do what Thetis has asked of him, i.e. promote the Trojan cause.	Hera quarrels with Zeus regarding his decision to tell Achilles to release Hector's corpse.
Thetis takes a message from Achilles to Zeus.	Thetis takes a message from Zeus to Achilles.
Quarrel between Agamemnon and Achilles, who are supposed to be on the same side.	Reconciliation between Achilles and Priam, who are supposed to be enemies.



Thetis visits Zeus twelve days after Achilles summons an assembly	The gods quarrel twelve days after the death of Hector.
The plague lasts nine days and on the tenth day, Achilles summons an assembly.	The preparations for Hector's funeral pyre last nine days and on the tenth day the body is burnt.

Questions to consider:

1. What is the impact of the fact that there are so many parallels between Book 1 and Book 24?
2. To what extent do the parallels between Books 1 and 24 contribute to the sense of closure at the end of the poem?
3. To what extent does Book 9 mirror Book 16?

Further reading:

To read more about the parallels between Book 1 and Book 24 and the 'geometric' structure of the Iliad more generally, see:

– C. H. Whitman, *Homer and the Heroic Tradition* (Cambridge, MA, 1958), ch. 11 (pp. 249-84).

**Activity 2: Similes in Book 16 and 24**

There are several hundred similes in the Iliad, including twenty-four in Book 16 and seven in Book 24.

In this exercise, the aim is to look at the similes in your set texts and see what (if any) patterns emerge.

Classify the similes in your set text(s) using the table(s) below, then move on to the discussion questions that follow.

Note: when describing a simile or metaphor, the ‘tenor’ is the thing being described, whereas the ‘vehicle’ is the figurative language being used to describe it.

Book 16

Reference	Speaker	Tenor	Vehicle	Semantic field
16.3	Narrator	Patroclus crying	spring	natural world: natural phenomenon
16.7	Achilles	Patroclus	silly child	human behaviour
16.59				
16.156				
16.192				
16.212				
16.259				
16.297				
16.352				
16.384				
16.406				
16.428				



16.482				
16.487				
16.582				
16.589				
16.633				
16.641				
16.742				
16.752				
16.756				
16.765				
16.823				

Book 24

Reference	Speaker	Tenor	Vehicle	Semantic field
24.41	Apollo	Achilles	lion	natural world: wild animals
24.80	Narrator	Iris	lead sinker	human activity: hunting/fishing
24.317				
24.328				
24.480				
24.572				
24.758				

Questions to consider:

1. Aside from the narrator, which character uses similes more than anyone else? What does this tell us about that character?

2. Why are so many similes in the *Iliad* drawn from the world of animals and nature?



3. What is the purpose of similes in the poem? Would the poem be better or worse if all the similes were removed?

4. It has been argued that similes allow Homer to offer glimpses of genres other than epic. Which poetic genres might be represented in the similes you have classified above? Why would the poet want to evoke other genres in this way?

Further reading:

For the idea that similes as ‘generic interaction’, see R. Martin, ‘Simile and Performance’ in E. Bakker and A. Kahane (eds.), *Written Voices, Spoken Signs: Tradition, Performance and the Epic Text* (1997), pp. 138-66.

For a short but classic account of similes in the *Iliad*, see C. Moulton, ‘Similes in the *Iliad*’, *Hermes* 102 (1974), pp. 381-94.