

# Authors: Homer

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Portrait of the Poet Homer - Walters Wikimedia Commons

## Synopsis

The Greek poet Homer was born sometime between 1,200 and 750 B.C. in the area that is now Turkey. He is famous for "The Iliad" and "The Odyssey," long, epic poems that told stories about heroes. They are very important to Western culture, but very little is known about the author that may have written them.

## The Mystery Of Homer

Homer is a mystery. Some scholars believe the Greek poet who wrote epic poems about heroes in "The Iliad" and "The Odyssey" was one man. Others think these stories were written by groups. Back then storytelling was a spoken art that was memorized. Then it was passed on from one person to another.

Homer's style was very different from the written poems, stories and plays of the Roman poet Virgil or the English author Shakespeare. It was more musical. Homer's stories have parts that repeat like the chorus of an opera.

The question "Was Homer a real person?" is one of the greatest mysteries in the world of literature.

## **When He Was Born**

There are many theories about when Homer was born. Some say he was born around 750 B.C. Others say it was around 1,200 B.C., the time of the Trojan War. "The Iliad" tells the story of that war, so some thought it fit to put the poet closer to the time when the war happened. Others believe the poetic style of his work is from around 750 B.C. Historian Herodotus thought Homer was born around 850 B.C.

Part of the problem is that Homer lived before there was a calendar. The first Olympic Games in Greece were in 776 B.C. That was the starting point for a calendar, with every four years after marking the time for the next Olympic Games.

## **Where He Was Born**

People don't know exactly where Homer was born, either. Some think he was born in Asia Minor, which is Turkey today. Others say he was born in Ionia or Smyrna in western Turkey, or the island of Chios, just off the western coast of Turkey. Today there are seven cities that say Homer was born there.

The dialect, or words, in "The Iliad" and "The Odyssey" are used as clues for where he was born. The stories are in Asiatic Greek, or Ionic, which was spoken in Smyrna and western Turkey. "The Iliad" and "The Odyssey" frequently mention strong winds blowing from southeast Europe. All these clues point to the idea that Homer came from this area of Turkey.

## **What He Was Like**

All the facts that are supposed to be about Homer's life come from his poems. Homer is thought to have been blind. This idea comes from a blind poet and singer in "The Odyssey." He sang wonderful stories about wars and heroes, and

everyone at the king's banquet praised and cheered for him. Many say this was Homer giving hints about his own life. There are many statues of Homer with thick curly hair, a beard and blind eyes.

## **"The Iliad" And "The Odyssey"**

"The Iliad" and "The Odyssey" are important because they show how people lived together long ago and how little the world has changed. They were written thousands of years ago. Still, the story of the attack of Troy, the Trojan War and Paris' kidnapping of Helen, the world's most beautiful woman, are seen in so many other stories that came later. Some believe Homer knew about the plain of Troy personally, because his description was so perfect in the poem.

"The Odyssey" picks up after the fall of Troy. Some say "The Odyssey" has a different style than "The Iliad" and was written 100 years later by others. Some say "The Iliad" is harder to read because it was written when Homer was young and a strong writer. They say the easier-to-understand storytelling in "The Odyssey" was written when Homer was much older.

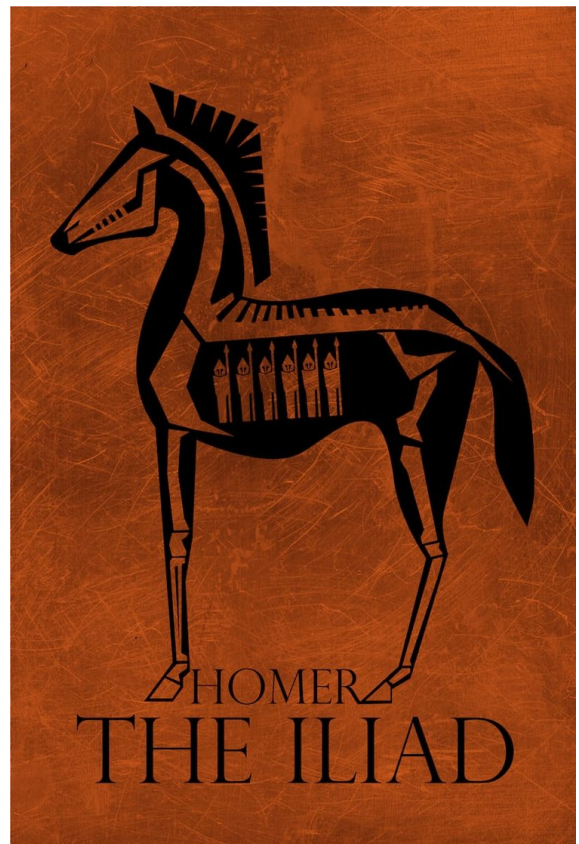
Homer uses many similes and metaphors in his poems. This was copied by many writers that came after him. His style was to begin in the middle of a story and then fill in the missing information using memories of the characters.

Even today, the ideas in Homer's poems are seen in books like J.R.R. Tolkien's "The Fall of Gondolin" and the Coen brothers' film, "O Brother, Where Art Thou?"

## **Legacy**

"The Iliad" and "The Odyssey" are not only seeds but also the rich soil for our ever-growing arts and sciences. Homer wrote wonderful tales of mythology that have filled the world's imagination.

Homer's real life may still be a mystery, but his work still lights up our world today.



## Quiz

1 Which two of the following selections from the biography include central ideas of the biography?

1. *[Homer's epic poems] are very important to Western culture, but very little is known about the author that may have written them.*
2. *There are many theories about when Homer was born. Some say he was born around 750 B.C. Others say it was around 1,200 B.C., the time of the Trojan War.*
3. *The first Olympic Games in Greece were in 776 B.C. That was the starting point for a calendar, with every four years after marking the time for the next Olympic Games.*
4. *"The Iliad" and "The Odyssey" are important because they show how people lived together long ago and how little the world has changed.*

- (A) 1 and 3
- (B) 1 and 4
- (C) 2 and 3
- (D) 2 and 4

2 Which detail would be MOST important to include in a summary of the biography?

- (A) a description of the particular dialect used in Homer's epic poems
- (B) a description of "The Iliad" and "The Odyssey" and their significance
- (C) a description of Homer's writing style, including his metaphors and similes
- (D) a description of which books and movies have featured the ideas of Homer's poems

- 3 Read this sentence from the section "What He Was Like."

*All the facts that are supposed to be about Homer's life come from his poems.*

How does the phrase "are supposed to be" affect the tone of the sentence above?

- (A) It conveys certainty that Homer was a blind man.
- (B) It conveys uncertainty about the honesty of poets in Homer's day.
- (C) It conveys certainty that Homer's poems are significant.
- (D) It conveys uncertainty about the details of Homer's life.

- 4 Read the paragraph from the section "Legacy."

*"The Iliad" and "The Odyssey" are not only seeds but also the rich soil for our ever-growing arts and sciences.*

What do the words "seeds" and "rich soil" convey about Homer's work?

- (A) The stories contain ideas that have inspired other stories.
- (B) The stories came about in very natural ways.
- (C) The stories grew out of an agricultural society.
- (D) The stories were the first instance of storytelling in the world.