

1.

Athena = A-thee-na

Aphrodite = Af-ro-die-tea

Hera = Hee-ra

Paris = Pa-riss

Our epic tale starts with an argument. Over an apple. But not just any ordinary apple. No, this apple was made entirely of gold, and was inscribed 'to the most beautiful'. And the characters arguing over who was the most beautiful, and who should have the apple? No ordinary mortals. This fight was between Athena, goddess of wisdom, Aphrodite, goddess of love and beauty, and Hera, queen of the gods. None of the other gods would dare take sides in this dispute between three such powerful goddesses, so they chose a mortal to judge. This mortal's name was Paris.

2.

Priam = Pry-am

Paris = Pa-riss

Cassandra = Cass-an-dra

Paris was the rather good-looking son of Priam, King of Troy. His sister, the princess Cassandra, could see into the future, and she predicted that he would cause Troy to be destroyed by fire. Cassandra was usually right about things, but unfortunately, she was usually ignored.

3.

Athena = A-thee-na

Aphrodite = Af-ro-die-tea

Hera = Hee-ra

Paris = Pa-riss

So, the three goddesses – Hera, Athena and Aphrodite – gave the young mortal Paris the job of choosing which of them was the fairest. Hera promised him money and power. Athena promised to make him wise above all others. But Aphrodite promised that she would give him the most beautiful woman in the world to marry. Aphrodite got the golden apple. Athena and Hera got very cross.

4.

Aphrodite = Af-ro-die-tea

Paris = Pa-riss

Menelaus = Men-a-lay-us

A few years later, Aphrodite let Paris know that the most beautiful woman was just a boat-ride away, living in the kingdom of Sparta. The only problem was, she was Helen, Queen of Sparta, which meant that she was already married to the King of Sparta. Undaunted, Paris set off to Sparta where the king, Menelaus, welcomed him warmly, unaware of his plans. The goddess Aphrodite worked her divine magic to make Helen fall in love with Paris, and the two ran away in secret, back to Troy.

5.

Menelaus = Men-a-lay-us

Agamemnon = Ag-a-mem-non

Mycenae = My-see-nee

Menelaus was not happy, to say the least. He called on his brother, Agamemnon, to help him. Now, Agamemnon was King of Mycenae, and the most powerful king throughout the whole of Greece. He helped his brother to put together a large and powerful army to sail to Troy and take back Helen, his brother's wife.

6.

Menelaus = Men-a-lay-us

Agamemnon = Ag-a-mem-non

Nestor = Ness-tor

Ajax = Ay-jax

Achilles = A-kill-ees

Styx = sticks

Menelaus and Agamemnon had both brains and bravery in their ranks, such as the wise, old Nestor and the fearsome warrior Ajax. But their greatest asset was the mighty Achilles. With a goddess for a mother, he was semi-divine. For added protection, his mother had dipped him in the River Styx as a baby – something that was supposed to make his body invulnerable to injury. As a result, he had a fearsome reputation as a warrior.

7.

Odysseus = Oh-diss-ee-us

Achilles = A-kill-ees

Menelaus = Men-a-lay-us

Agamemnon = Ag-a-mem-non

Another Greek warrior was Odysseus, yet he was great in a different way to Achilles. A mere mortal, his greatest strength was his cunning and his ability to come up with a clever plan in tricky situations. In fact, he'd tried to get out of going to war altogether by pretending that he was mad, but in the end came to the aid of Agamemnon and Menelaus.

8.

Agamemnon = Ag-a-mem-non

Athena = A-thee-na

Aphrodite = Af-ro-die-tea

Hera = Hee-ra

Paris = Pa-riss

The Greek forces, led by Agamemnon, arrived at the shores of Troy. The flat land around the walled city of Troy became the site for nine years of battle, as the Greeks besieged the city sheltering Paris and his stolen wife Helen. However, neither side emerged victorious. At this point, the gods and goddesses decided to interfere in human events. Of course, Hera and Athena were still cross with Paris because he gave Aphrodite the golden apple, and so they sided with the Greeks. On the Trojan side, of course, was Aphrodite: after all, she started the whole bother in the first place. Troy was also supported by Apollo, god of music and medicine, because the Greek King Agamemnon had insulted him. Apollo decided to teach Agamemnon a lesson by striking his men down with a deadly plague.

9.

Achilles = A-kill-ees

Zeus = Zee-you-s

Patroclus = Pat-rock-luss

As if an outbreak of plague wasn't enough, things got even worse for the Greeks. A silly argument among the Greek warriors about who owned what slave girl turned really nasty, and Achilles, the top Greek warrior, walked off in a huff, taking his soldiers with him. Even worse, Zeus, the mightiest god of all, got involved, helping the Trojans to greater victories in their battles against the Greek forces. In one of the battles, the gods Zeus and Apollo had ensured that Hector, prince of Troy, was able to kill Patroclus, dearest and best friend of Achilles, the mightiest of all the Greek warriors.

10.

Achilles = A-kill-ees
Patroclus = Pat-rock-luss
Athena = A-thee-na

Achilles was furious. Seeing his best friend's lifeless body, he swore to avenge him. Putting on new armour (he'd lent his old armour to Patroclus), Achilles led his troops into battle to face Hector, killer of his best friend Patroclus. Apollo protected Hector but Achilles had Athena on his side. Finally, in a one-on-one duel to the death, Achilles got the better of Hector, and stabbed him through his armour. Finally Patroclus was avenged.

11.

Achilles = A-kill-ees
Styx = sticks

But, as in most wars, things didn't stop there. Apollo got involved in the mortals' fighting again. The god inspired Paris - yes, the troublemaker who started this whole war - to take a very lucky shot with his bow and arrow at Achilles. Now, as we heard before, Achilles had been lucky as a baby, as his goddess mother had dipped him in the River Styx, whose waters had made his body invulnerable. No sword could cut him, no spear could piece him. However, when he was being dipped in the magical waters, his mother had held him by the heel, so this part of his body received no special protection. And guess where Paris's arrow hit him? Yep, in his heel. The invincible Achilles was finally defeated, and died.

12.

Odysseus = Oh-diss-ee-us
Priam = Pry-am
Athena = A-thee-na

Without their greatest warrior, how were the Greeks to win? Not by fighting, suggested Odysseus, but by clever tactics and a cunning plan. He instructed the Greek forces to build a huge wooden horse. When it was finished, it was left outside the city gates of Troy, and the Greek ships sailed away. The suspicious Trojans at first went to check that the Greeks had really left. They found one Greek fighter left behind, who told King Priam and the people of Troy that the Greek forces had given up and left, and that the giant wooden horse was an offering to Athena, so that she would see them all home safely. So the Trojans brought the horse into their city, and around it celebrated the departure of the Greeks and the end of a very long war.

13.

Odysseus = Oh-diss-ee-us

Priam = Pry-am

Menelaus = Men-a-lay-us

Of course that wasn't the end of the war. In the dead of night, with the Trojan people fast asleep after their celebrations, a band of soldiers, led by Odysseus, crept out of the belly of the wooden horse. Stealthily, they captured the royal palace and killed King Priam. At the same time, the Greek ships sailed back from their nearby hiding places and stormed Troy, looting treasure, killing people, burning down houses. Now the war was finally over, but not exactly as the Trojans had imagined just a few hours before. King Menelaus, remembering exactly why this war had been fought, found Helen, put her on his ship, and with all the other Greeks set sail, finally, for home.

14.

Odysseus = Oh-diss-ee-us

Ithaca = I-tha-car

Some of the Greek ships got home safely. However, others did not. One of the unlucky ones was Odysseus, inventor of the Trojan Horse. In fact, his journey back home to his island kingdom home of Ithaca was long and full of adventure, full of danger.

15.

Zeus = Zee-you-s

Odysseus = Oh-diss-ee-us

Cyclopes = Sy-klop-ays

Zeus, king of the gods, did all he could to make life hard for Odysseus and his men. He made their sea journey rough and unpredictable. One day, surrounded by swirling sea fog, Odysseus's ship came across the land of the Cyclopes, a race of terrible giants known for their fearsomeness and unusual faces: they had only one eye.

16.

Odysseus = Oh-diss-ee-us

Cyclops = Sy-klops

Polyphemus = Polly-fee-muss

After landing on these unfamiliar shores, Odysseus and a band of his men went looking for food. They came across a cave, and went inside. They couldn't believe their luck as the cave was piled high with cheese and with wine. Odysseus and his men loaded up their bags with the food, then went to leave the cave... but found their way blocked by the cave's inhabitant, a ferocious (if slightly dim-witted) Cyclops called Polyphemus. Polyphemus herded his sheep back into his cave, rolled a stone boulder to block the entrance. The giant then reached out, seized some of Odysseus' men, and, with a terrible crunching of bones, gobbled them up.

17.

Cyclops = Sy-klops

Odysseus = Oh-diss-ee-us

Polyphemus = Polly-fee-muss

Stuck inside the cave with a man-eating Cyclops, Odysseus knew he had to come up with a plan, and a good one. The next morning, after Polyphemus had left the cave (remembering to roll the big stone boulder to block the doorway), Odysseus and his men found the giant's walking stick and set about sharpening one end of it. That night, when Polyphemus returned to the cave, Odysseus used all his skill and wit to start up a conversation with the Cyclops. Although Polyphemus wasn't going to give up the idea of munching all the humans he could find in his cave, he chatted with Odysseus, who persuaded the giant to drink a little wine.

18.

Cyclops = Sy-klops

Odysseus = Oh-diss-ee-us

Polyphemus = Polly-fee-muss

Polyphemus guzzled the wine down, and became a little bit drunk. He asked Odysseus what his name was, to which the cunning Odysseus replied, "My name is Nobody." Then, seizing the opportunity, Odysseus and his men took the sharpened walking stick and drove it into Polyphemus' eye. The giant's cries of agony were so loud and terrifying that they brought all of his Cyclops neighbours running to his door. "Who is doing this to you?" they shouted from beyond the boulder. "It's Nobody!" roared the injured Cyclops. "Nobody is killing me!" So the neighbours shrugged their shoulders, and went away. With one word, Odysseus had tricked Polyphemus.

19.

Odysseus = Oh-diss-ee-us
Polyphemus = Polly-fee-muss

Of course, there was still the matter of escaping. However, that problem was made much easier by the fact that Polyphemus was now blind in his one, big eye. Yet Polyphemus stood at the entrance to the cave, feeling with his giant hands for anyone trying to make a getaway. Looking around him, Odysseus noticed that Polyphemus was happily letting his sheep out, so that they could go and graze. So he instructed each man to cling on to the belly of a sheep, hanging underneath the animal, as it exited the cave. When he found out that Odysseus and all his men had escaped, Polyphemus roared with uncontrollable anger, and cried for divine vengeance.

20.

Odysseus = Oh-diss-ee-us
Polyphemus = Polly-fee-muss
Ithaca = I-tha-car

The problem is, someone was listening. Polyphemus was actually the son of Poseidon, god of the seas. Not really someone to annoy when you're undertaking a long sea voyage. Odysseus' ship was almost back home in Ithaca when some of the crew decided to open a bag they'd been given on their travels, thinking that great treasure was inside. Instead, they let loose a storm of howling winds, which blew them far, far from home, when they had been so very, very close. Things never looked more desperate.

21.

Odysseus = Oh-diss-ee-us
Circe = Sir-see

After more months of fruitless sailing, a stroke of luck: Odysseus' ship came across an island. Exhausted from months toiling at sea, Odysseus and his men anchored their ship and came onto the island. The island seemed fruitful: Odysseus managed to hunt a stag, and he and his hungry men had a feast the likes of which they'd not had in a long, long time. Some of Odysseus' crew decided to go hunting for more food, but they found something - or someone - else instead. In a house on the island lived a beautiful sorceress called Circe. On seeing Odysseus' men, she invited them warmly into her house, where she poured them each a friendly cup of wine. Except what she didn't tell them was that the wine contained a powerful drug. Once they were overpowered by the drug, Circe used her magic powers to turn Odysseus' men into pigs. Pigs that she then herded into sties, to be fattened, to be served as roast pork.

22.

Odysseus = Oh-diss-ee-us
Circe = Sir-see
Hermes = Her-mees

As luck would have it, one of the men thought twice about accepting Circe's hospitality, and escaped from the unfortunate fate of his companions. Rushing back to Odysseus, he told of what had happened. As Odysseus rushed to Circe's house to save his companions, he was met by Hermes, the messenger god. But Hermes wasn't delivering a message this time, but some much-needed help. Instead, he gave Odysseus a special plant to eat which would make him invulnerable to Circe's potion.

23.

Odysseus = Oh-diss-ee-us
Circe = Sir-see

Of course, Circe tried her usual trick, and offered Odysseus a friendly cup of wine. He drank it all up, but remained just fine. Circe tried to use her magic, but Odysseus sprang at her with his sword. Seeing she has met her match, Circe gave in, and turned Odysseus' men, as well as a few others she'd used her magic on, back into human form. And, would you believe it, Odysseus and his men got to like Circe and life on her island. So much, in fact, that they stayed there for quite some time.

24.

Odysseus = Oh-diss-ee-us
Circe = Sir-see
Sirens = Sy-rens

But for Odysseus, his longing for his home island, his family, his wife was far too strong. Eventually, he took his men and left Circe's island behind, embarking again on an unpredictable and harsh sea journey. A journey where he soon met with danger in the shape of the Sirens, strange bird-like creatures that used their hypnotising song to make sailors crash their ships into jagged rocks. Once again, Odysseus showed himself the master of smart thinking. He gave his crew wax, which they put in their ears, so they could not hear the enchanting but deadly song of the Sirens. The ever-curious Odysseus, though, desperately wanted to hear, so he left his ears unplugged by wax and had his men tie him to the ship's mast. Safely restrained, he experienced the Sirens' magical, lethal song.

25.

Odysseus = Oh-diss-ee-us

Scylla = Sill-ah

Charybdis = Ka-rib-diss

Just as soon as they had escaped this challenge, a new danger appeared. Odysseus' ship had to sail past two monsters, Scylla and Charybdis, who guarded a narrow passage of water, one on each side. Scylla was a hideous, giant sea monster, who lashed out at any nearby ships. Charybdis' evil trick was to suck up then spit out the sea, creating a giant whirlpool that would smash up any passing boats. Odysseus chose to sail closer to Scylla: he lost a crew member, but he wisely realised that if he went near Charybdis, nobody at all would live to tell the tale.

26.

Odysseus = Oh-diss-ee-us

Zeus = Zee-yous

Poseidon = Poss-eye-don

Polyphemus = Polly-fee-muss

Scheria = Ske-ree-ah

And yet this was not the end of Odysseus' ordeals: when you have two of the mightiest gods against you, nothing is ever going to be easy. Zeus and Poseidon made Odysseus' life very, very difficult. Zeus killed all of Odysseus' remaining men with a tornado and a thunder bolt. Poseidon, still angry at Odysseus' treatment of Polyphemus, his son, almost drowned him. Finally, the tormented Odysseus, alone and without a ship, washed up broken and battered on the shores of Scheria. Would Odysseus' luck finally change, or would this place, too, be full of monsters and danger?

27.

Odysseus = Oh-diss-ee-us

Nausicaa = Now-sick-ar-ar

Alcinous = Al-see-noose

Ithaca = I-tha-car

Poseidon = Poss-eye-don

As it happens, Odysseus for once was very, very lucky. He was found, washed up on the beach, by the kind Princess Nausicaa, who immediately rushed to Odysseus' help. The princess took him back to the palace to meet her father, King Alcinous, who treated him as an honoured guest. Not only that, the king kindly provided a replacement boat and highly-trained sailors to take Odysseus back - finally - to Ithaca, his home. Exhausted by all he had gone through, Odysseus fell asleep on board the ship, and was still sleeping when it reached Ithaca. King

Alcinous' sailors gently set the sleeping hero down on the beach of his beloved homeland. But this is an epic: peace and love never last for long. Poseidon, still bearing a grudge, zapped the sailors who had dared to help his arch-enemy Odysseus, turning them and their ship into a giant, black rock.

28.

Odysseus = Oh-diss-ee-us

Athena = A-thee-na

Penelope = Pen-nell-oh-pea

Telemachus = Tell-emm-a-kuss

One god, though, was still on Odysseus' side. As he woke on the beach, home at last, Athena appeared to the hero to warn him of what had been going on for the ten long years he'd been away from Ithaca. Assuming King Odysseus was dead, and seeing an opportunity for themselves, many men had appeared at the palace, trying to get Queen Penelope, Odysseus' wife, to agree to marry. For ten years, Penelope and her son, Telemachus, had to put up with these unwelcome guests. Penelope had an unshakeable faith that Odysseus would return. To put off those men trying to marry her, she said that she would choose a husband when she had finished weaving a burial sheet for Odysseus' old father. She worked tirelessly on her weaving by day... and at night, she tirelessly unravelled the previous day's work.

29.

Odysseus = Oh-diss-ee-us

Athena = A-thee-na

Eumaeus = You-may-uss

Penelope = Pen-nell-oh-pea

Telemachus = Tell-emm-a-kuss

Guided by Athena, Odysseus met with Eumaeus, his old pig-herder and Telemachus, his son, a joyful reunion. Together the three men and the goddess Athena came up with a clever plan to take back the palace. Telemachus went back home, keeping the news of his father's arrival to himself. He then went about organising a great feast to which all the greedy suitors came, as well as a mysterious beggar, whom not even Penelope recognised. Inspired by Athena, Penelope announced that she had a new idea to settle the whole marriage business once and for all. She said she would marry the man who could, like her husband Odysseus, string a great bow, and shoot an arrow through twelve axes.

30.

Penelope = Pen-nell-oh-pea

Odysseus = Oh-diss-ee-us

Athena = A-thee-na

Eumaeus = You-may-uss

Telemachus = Tell-emm-a-kuss

Athena = A-thee-na

Ithaca = I-tha-car

One by one, the suitors struggled and failed to accomplish Penelope's task. When the mysterious beggar stepped up to try, he was noisily mocked. And yet, he took up the bow, strung it like it was a toy, and shot straight through the axe heads. Bow still in hand, and helped by his son Telemachus, and by Eumaeus, Odysseus killed Penelope's troublesome suitors and took back the palace. Reunited with his wife Penelope, Odysseus was now home and king, once more, of Ithaca. Zeus and Athena ordered that Odysseus' suffering was finally over, and a time of peace and happiness descended upon Ithaca, its people, and its long-suffering king.