

Name: _____

Who Was Homer?

"Homer" is the name given to the author of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. The importance of those two epic poems to Greek culture and all of Western literature cannot be overstated, but nothing certain is known about Homer.

According to some ancient sources, he was a blind man from the island of Chios, in the eastern Mediterranean near Turkey. However, many other Greek cities have also claimed to have been his home. The fact is that no one really knows for sure even if there was a poet named Homer.

It is believed that the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* were first written down around 700 BC, soon after the Greeks invented their own alphabet. The stories were probably significantly older than this, because we know that until this point they had been memorized by traveling bards who earned a living by reciting them.

Homer's most important contribution to Greek culture was to provide a common set of values that enshrined the Greeks' own ideas about themselves. His poems provided a fixed model of heroism, nobility and the good life to which all Greeks, especially aristocrats, subscribed. In his works, disgrace due to dishonor is the worst that can happen to a hero, and a life full of struggle and challenge is considered far superior to a long easy life of stagnation and mediocrity. In the *Iliad*, the hero Achilles believes that by performing great deeds and facing challenges, a man might become immortal (in the sense that his name would live forever). In the *Odyssey*, Achilles backs down from this position a bit, admitting that any life—even a long, dull one is better than death.

Homer's portrayal of the gods is also interesting since at times they are the least noble, fair, or admirable characters. Sometimes they are even used for comic relief.

Sources:

http://www.pbs.org/empires/thegreeks/background/3b_p1.html

1. Timeline – Show 2 key events on a time line: Supposed time of Trojan War + time of Homer.

2. § Make up a creative title for this article that sums up something important about Homer. Be ready to "sell" your title.