

## 41. Greek Gods, Goddesses, War & Peace

### INTRODUCTION

Ask children for their ideas about why some people get involved in fights:

- How many different reasons for fighting can you name?
- When does a dispute between individuals become a war?
- What alternatives to fighting are there?
- What methods do you know of that can help people to control their emotions?

Listen to their answers and explain that the problem of fighting and war is as old as life itself. In a sense, every living thing has to fight to survive, sometimes at the cost of other creatures' lives. For human beings, though, things are different: we do not usually have to kill others to ensure our survival, except perhaps when someone, or something, is trying to kill us first. Even then, some brave people would rather die than kill someone else.

Can they think of a time when someone persuaded two people not to fight, or to stop arguing?

Explain that fighting and war have featured in all the ancient stories of humankind, including the most ancient writings and in the picture records of the first empires. Tell the children about two of the great poems of human history that were written nearly 3,000 years ago in Ancient Greece: the Iliad and the Odyssey. The author was called 'Homer' [though nothing to do with Homer Simpson!], but the poems, which are very long, may have been the work of several writers. The Iliad and the Odyssey, along with other texts, tell the story of the war between the Greeks and the Trojans (who lived in Troy, a coastal area of modern Turkey). The story of the war is told in dramatic poetic terms, not like a modern historical account, and has lots to say about human nature and feelings. The story has been the subject of countless works of art, story and film. It is not a description of what actually happened, but most scholars now believe that it was based on a war that really did happen, more than 3,000 years ago, especially since archaeologists have discovered what could have been the site of ancient Troy. Homer's version of events is full gods, goddesses and super-human heroes.

### ACTIVITY

Tell the story of how the goddess Aphrodite gave the handsome Prince of Troy, called Paris, the gift of the love of the most beautiful

woman in the world, Helen, the Queen of Sparta, but how that led to war, e.g. from <http://www.historyforkids.net/ancient-greek-gods.html> > Aphrodite.

Prepare a story map of the main events for the children and provide sticky labels with the names of the main characters:

Aphrodite, Eros (aka "Cupid"), Eris, Athena, Hera, Paris (Prince of Troy), Helen (Queen of Sparta), Menelaus (King of Sparta).

Provide a 'Golden Apple' and other props, and then assign some of the children a character and a label. Retell the story showing how Eris, the goddess of discord, tricked everyone into starting a war with the children acting out the parts. Stop the story at key points and ask the rest of the group to identify thoughts and feelings that the characters may be experiencing as the story progresses. How do their feelings change? What aspects of each character's personality can they identify? e.g. Eris was deceitful, tricky, etc.

Explain that the story goes on to be an extremely bloody one, with the deaths of nearly all the warriors who took part, including Paris. Helen appears to have survived, but since she had fallen in love with Paris, it is not known whether she appreciated being 'rescued'.

## CONCLUSIONS

Ask the children if they know the story of the Trojan Horse and how the Greeks finally defeated the Trojans, noting how the war ended with great slaughter. Briefly recount the story or show a cartoon, for example: <https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=yKAXom-4adA>

Ask the children for their views on:

- Who, if anyone, could have stopped the war before it started?
- Who was most to blame?

## EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

1. Put Eris on trial. The children could decide the charges, e.g., 'stirring up hatred' or even 'genocide', and conduct a trial, with witnesses, evidence, questioning of the accused, summing up by prosecution and defence, deliberations of the jury, verdict and sentence.
2. Tell the children they can find out more about Greek gods and goddesses, e.g. at <http://www.historyforkids.net/ancient-greek-gods.html>. Encourage them to do their own research and find out as much as they can about one Greek god and one Greek goddess.