

## WHY THIS STORY?

Why should modern teachers – or children – be interested in a three thousand year old story, from the other side of Europe?

The first reason is that this story “is the best one in the world – no question. I have told it myself dozens of times; I’ve listened to it, been thrilled and uplifted and terrified and moved and inspired by it for most of my lifetime.” These are the words of Philip Pullman, not only an internationally acclaimed children’s author, but also a teacher.

The second reason is also simple. Experience has shown us that this version of Homer’s *Iliad* ‘works’. *War with Troy* has been trialled in many classrooms with different children by practising teachers, researchers and storytellers. Children seem to love listening to it, and learning from it. The reading, writing, speaking and listening teaching suggestions in this guide also derive from classroom trials. These suggestions have been designed by experienced teachers.

The third reason is that *War with Troy* has been developed in a unique way: it is an oral production. The story is performed by two of Britain’s leading storytellers. Both work in the original, oral tradition. In this tradition a story is planned and told *before* being written down. The end result is not a ‘reading’ of a script, but a live telling drawn from memory. This gives the language you hear in *War with Troy* a unique clarity and quality, developed with children in mind. The power and excitement of the oral story remains; similes and images from Homer’s original are used. Yet *War with Troy* has a narrative simplicity that makes it accessible to contemporary children.

The fourth reason is this story’s cultural importance. Homer’s *Iliad* was the first European epic to be written down, some 2800 years ago, though it had been told orally for centuries before that. Since then it has embedded itself in everyday language and popular culture. For instance, many children know the story of the ‘Wooden Horse of Troy’ or the term ‘Achilles’ heel’. Some will have heard of the character, Odysseus. The *Iliad*’s antiquity, length and quality means that characters and events from it appear in numerous works of European and world literature, art and music.

The fifth reason is historical. European language, laws, and civilisation rest upon the legacy of ancient Greece and Rome. Yet the current National Curriculum in England stipulates only one occasion that children have to study these societies – Key Stage 2 National Curriculum history. Even there, although many Key Stage 2 teachers use ‘stories’ in history teaching, appropriate spoken versions are rare. This production helps fill that gap. Teachers at Key Stages 3 and 4 also find spoken stories useful. *War with Troy* has been successfully used across the nine to sixteen age-range.

Finally, humans have always used stories to help think about experience, to entertain groups and to educate children. This story aims to achieve these things and more. As Philip Pullman told us, whilst commenting on *War with Troy*:

The art of storytelling is something that connects us in a profound way with our earliest ancestors. It is one of the most important, most humane, most liberating and most democratic things that human beings can do, and it should have a central place in every classroom.