



Black Ships Before Troy: The Story of 'The Iliad'

By Rosemary Sutcliff

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For fans of D'Aulaires' Book of Greek Myths and readers who enjoyed Homer's epic tales comes a retelling of *The Iliad* by a master storyteller and an award-winning illustrator that evokes the golden age of mythical Greece.

Homer's epic poem, *The Iliad*, is one of the greatest adventure stories of all time. In it, the abduction of the legendary beauty, Helen of Troy, leads to a conflict in which even the gods and goddesses take sides and intervene. It is in the Trojan War that the most valiant heroes of the ancient world are pitted against one another. Here Hector, Ajax, Achilles, and Odysseus meet their most formidable challenges and in some cases their tragic ends.

Rosemary Sutcliff makes such extraordinary stories as those of those Trojan horse, of Aphrodite and the golden apple, and of the fearsome warrior women Amazons, accessible to contemporary young people.

This book has been selected as a Common Core State Standards Text Exemplar (Grades 6-8, Stories) in Appendix B.

Praise for *Black Ships Before Troy*:

AN ALA Best Book for Young Adults

"This re-creation of the classic epics [is]...described in **vivid, exquisitely cadenced prose....A splendid offering**, bringing the ancient tale to new and vibrant life."-*Kirkus Reviews*, Pointer

"[Sutcliff] brings into vivid focus the mythic story of the Trojan War, with **all of its visually dramatic elements**...[and] leaves many of the epic's powerful metaphors intact."-*Publishers Weekly*

"**Amazingly told, taut with cunning and terror.**"-*Booklist*

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Black Ships Before Troy: The Story of 'The Iliad' By Rosemary Sutcliff Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #21490 in Books
- Brand: Laurel Leaf
- Published on: 2005-12-13
- Released on: 2005-12-13
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 6.89" h x .41" w x 4.18" l, .15 pounds
- Binding: Mass Market Paperback
- 151 pages

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Sutcliff, who died last year, authored numerous retellings of canonical texts for younger readers. Here she brings into vivid focus the mythic story of the Trojan War, with all of its visually dramatic elements. While carefully tempering the bias towards the Greeks that exists in the original poem, Sutcliff's text leaves many of the epic's powerful metaphors intact: "The dark tide of warriors poured through and became a river of flame." Also preserved are a good many disturbing images ("Hector's body was dragged behind them, twisting and lurching over the rough ground, his dark hair flying and fouled with dust and all the filth of the battlefield"); and while there is no doubt that this authenticity maintains the saga's integrity and enhances its impact, younger or particularly sensitive readers may be disturbed by the violence. Accompanying the dense, earnestly told tale are Lee's cool-toned watercolors, which frequently take up the greater portion of the large format double-page spreads. Dreamy, yet highly detailed and filled with representational images, these illustrations are in keeping with the story's mythic grandeur. All ages.

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From [Booklist](#)

Gr. 5 and up. "Achilles sat among his ships, nursing his anger as though it were a red rose in his breast." The late Rosemary Sutcliff always knew how to humanize the epic heroes without diminishing their power. Now, with the same kind of lyrical prose that distinguished her Arthurian trilogy, she takes on Homer's *Iliad*. People whose names we all know--Helen, Hector, Achilles, Odysseus, etc.--are all woven into one great story, with the jealous gods taking sides in the Greeks' 10-year siege of the city of Troy. Sutcliff's strong rhythms and Lee's misty watercolors in shades of brown, blue, and silvergray make this large-size volume great for reading aloud. There are dull patches about desultory battles, funeral games, and the weary machinations of gods and people, but you can skip those and get to the dramatic confrontations. Achilles sulks in his tent, then driven mad with grief and rage at the death of his friend Patroclus, he not only kills Hector, but also drags the body through the dust and filth of the battlefield. For all the rules of honor, this is a filthy battlefield, "clotted with blood," the soldiers drunk with fire and killing. Lee's illustrations show gateways choked with soldiers and chariots, men and women bent with sorrow. The climax, the story of the Wooden Horse, is amazingly told, taut with cunning and terror. *Hazel Rochman*

From Kirkus Reviews

Among the late author's finest books are renditions of the Arthurian legend; to this re-creation of the classic epic, she brought the same compelling vision and sensitivity to language, history, and heroics. Beginning with Discord's apple, inscribed "To the fairest" (it set off the competition among goddesses that led to Paris's abduction of Helen), she centers on Achilles and Hector while also recounting such significant events as Paris and Menelaus' single combat (inconclusive because Aphrodite meddles, as gods frequently do here), the funeral games honoring Patroclus, the Amazons' death in battle, and Odysseus' devious exploits. Described in vivid, exquisitely cadenced prose, both sides behave with nobility, though Sutcliff's Trojan War also involves atrocity (Hector's body dragged by Achilles' chariot), posturing, loss, and despair. After ten years, the remaining Greeks--with Helen, willingly restored to a husband whose first impulse is to kill her, plus the captive royal Trojan women--set sail for home, leaving Troy in flames; and though Sutcliff has focused on their honor and courage, she ensures that it's the ironic futility of their venture that lingers in the mind. Lee's subtly muted watercolors, on most spreads, surpass even his fine illustrations for *Merlin Dreams* (1988). Carefully researched, delicately detailed, rich in character and action, they beautifully evoke the setting and heroic ambience. A splendid offering, bringing the ancient tale to new and vibrant life. (Fiction.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Deborah Tate:

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