

# Key Question: The story of the Trojan Horse: historical fact, legend or classical myth?

## Learning objectives

During the enquiry pupils will have opportunities through the application and analysis of a wide range of historical skills and resources to:

- **Describe and explain** the main events in the siege of the city of Troy during the Trojan War in Ancient Greece;
- **Evaluate and critique** the visual, written and archaeological evidence which presently exists regarding the Trojan Horse, and begin to formulate **conclusions**;
- **Reach a conclusion and make a judgment** regarding whether the story of the Trojan Horse is (in their opinion) fact, legend or myth, and **justify their decision**;
- **Review and evaluate** the 'historical' evidence regarding the existence of the lost Kingdom of Atlantis and **reach a judgment** as to its reliability and trustworthiness.

## Key Subject Vocabulary

The Trojan Horse; Ancient Greece; historians; authentic; truthful; accurate; factual; myth; traditional; celebrating; fantastic; exploits; hero; judgment; evaluate; Europe; Greece; kingdoms; government; city; Troy; Sparta; Mycenae; kidnapped; Paris of Troy; Queen Helen of Sparta; King Menelaus of Sparta;

## Purpose and context

A study of Ancient Greece that encompasses almost 1,800 years of both prehistory and history (recorded times) from the 12th century BC to AD 600 presents many opportunities for in-depth investigations of the extraordinary culture of the times. The development of sports and leisure, music, poetry and the theatre, as well as the significance of the gods, myths and legends in the everyday lives of ordinary people, are all potentially attractive topics. However, this enquiry focuses on the event of arguably the greatest European significance – the emergence and rise to dominance of powerful cities situated at the heart of strong and aggressive kingdoms. The city-state had arrived in Europe. The history of Ancient Greece is punctuated by frequent inter-city wars – neighbouring kingdoms struggled for diminishing quantities of fertile land and natural resources as the population grew rapidly and prospered. Two of these city-states were, of course, Athens and Sparta, which fought ferociously for almost 27 years, seeking dominance of Greece and bludgeoning each other into ruin in the process. Another inter-city conflict (the Trojan War) involved Sparta and the emerging city of Troy, on the coast across the Aegean Sea in what is today the modern state of Turkey.

This investigation invites the learner to explore the causes and consequences of this 10-year war and in particular to evaluate the conflicting evidence relating to the famous story of the so-called Trojan Horse, which has been passed down through the generations. Did the Trojan War really end with the defenders of Troy being duped into both accepting a huge hollow horse and then wheeling it back into what until then had been an impregnable fortress? And without checking inside it first! As the enquiry unfolds, the pupils are supported to interrogate and reflect upon the nature of the evidence (written, visual depictions and archaeological) that exists to corroborate the story. They are also guided towards considering alternative viewpoints that have been formulated by modern-day historians and archaeologists. Ultimately, like so much history, the outcome for each pupil is ultimately a personal judgment call as to whether there is sufficient evidence to ascribe the status of historical fact to the story, or whether an alternative label – 'legend' or 'myth' – is more appropriate.

## National Curriculum coverage History

Pupils should be taught about:

- Ancient Greece – a study of Greek life and achievements and their influence on the Western world.

## Connections to the subject content of other curriculum areas

### Language and literacy

Teachers should develop pupils' spoken language, reading, writing and vocabulary as integral aspects of the teaching of every subject. English is both a subject in its own right and the medium for teaching; for pupils, understanding the language provides access to the whole curriculum. Fluency in the English language is an essential foundation for success in all subjects.

### Spoken language

Pupils should be taught to speak clearly and convey ideas confidently using Standard English. They should learn to justify ideas with reasons; ask questions to check understanding; develop vocabulary and build knowledge; negotiate; evaluate and build on the ideas of others; and select the appropriate register for effective communication. They should be taught to give well-structured descriptions and explanations and develop their understanding through speculating, hypothesising and exploring ideas. This will enable them to clarify their thinking as well as organise their ideas for writing.

### Reading and writing

Teachers should develop pupils' reading and writing in all subjects to support their acquisition of knowledge. Pupils should be taught to read fluently, understand extended prose (both fiction and non-fiction) and be encouraged to read for pleasure. Schools should do everything to promote wider reading. They should provide library facilities and set ambitious expectations for reading at home. Pupils should develop the stamina and skills to write at length, with accurate spelling and punctuation. They should be taught the correct use of grammar. They should build

# Key Question: The story of the Trojan Horse: historical fact, legend or classical myth?

King Agamemnon of Mycenae; expedition; Trojan War; Aegean Sea; capture; siege; starvation; disease; surrender; Odysseus; Athena; warriors; Sinon; interrogates; offend; demolish; punish; storyboard; timeline; authenticate; vase; depiction; sculpture; Buddhist; shrine; Gandhara; region; Pakistan; illustrated; manuscript; Roman; poet; Virgil; engraving; France; Motte; procession; scene; reliable; evidence; witnessed; first-hand; primary; occurred; generation; archaeological; undergoing; subterfuge; site; discovered; remains; ruins; fortifications; massive; inhabited; fact; legend; King Arthur; Robin Hood; Kingdom of Atlantis; symbolic; creation; summarising; preparation; combination; speculation; earthquake; attributed; Poseidon; collapsed; battering ram; siege tower; archers; wheeled; reconstruction; relief; Syria; hide; soaked; resembled; negotiation; envoy; mission; mutiny; galley; perspective; viewpoint; authenticity; accuracy.

on what they have been taught to expand the range of their writing and the variety of the grammar they use. The writing they do should include narratives, explanations, descriptions, comparisons, summaries and evaluations – such writing supports them in rehearsing, understanding and consolidating what they have heard or read.

## Vocabulary development

Pupils' acquisition and command of vocabulary are key to their learning and progress across the whole curriculum. Teachers should therefore develop vocabulary actively, building systematically on pupils' current knowledge. They should increase pupils' store of words in general; simultaneously, they should also make links between known and new vocabulary and discuss the shades of meaning in similar words. In this way, pupils expand the vocabulary choices that are available to them when they write.

In addition, it is vital for pupils' comprehension that they understand the meanings of words they meet in their reading across all subjects, and older pupils should be taught the meaning of instruction verbs that they may meet in examination questions. It is particularly important to induct pupils into the language which defines each subject in its own right, such as accurate mathematical and scientific language.

## Numeracy and mathematics

Teachers should use every relevant subject to develop pupils' mathematical fluency. Confidence in numeracy and other mathematical skills is a precondition of success across the National Curriculum.

Teachers should develop pupils' numeracy and mathematical reasoning in all subjects so that they understand and appreciate the importance of mathematics. Pupils should be taught to apply arithmetic fluently to problems, understand and use measures, make estimates and sense check their work. Pupils should apply their geometric and algebraic understanding, and relate their understanding of probability to the notions of risk and uncertainty. They should also understand the cycle of collecting, presenting and analysing data. They should be taught to apply their mathematics to both routine and non-routine problems, including breaking down more complex problems into a series of simpler steps.

## Computing

Pupils should be taught to:

- use technology purposefully to create, organise, store, manipulate and retrieve digital content
- recognise common uses of information technology beyond school
- use technology safely and respectfully, keeping personal information private; identify where to go for help and support when they have concerns about content or contact on the internet or other online technologies.

## Geography

Pupils should be taught to:

### Location knowledge

- name, locate and identify characteristics of the four countries and capital cities of the United Kingdom and its surrounding seas.

### Geographical skills and fieldwork

- use world maps, atlases and globes to identify the United Kingdom and its countries, as well as the countries, continents and oceans studied at this key stage.

# Key Question: The story of the Trojan Horse: historical fact, legend or classical myth?

## NOTES

### Ancillary Question 1: What exactly is the story of the Trojan Horse?

Explain to the pupils that you are going to tell them a very famous story from history, a story from Ancient Greece which is over 3,000 years old. It is one of the most well-known and popular stories from any time in history, but historians strongly disagree about how authentic (truthful and accurate) it really is. Some believe that the story is factual, whilst others believe it is merely a Greek myth (no more than a traditional story celebrating the fantastic exploits of heroes or amazing events in the past that people accept as truthful even though they almost certainly didn't happen). Tell the pupils that the objective of this enquiry is for them to reach a judgment themselves whether the story of the Trojan Horse is historical fact or merely a myth. To do that they will have to evaluate the evidence that exists, but before that they must understand the story as it has been passed down through the generations. 'So sit back, relax and make yourself comfortable and I will begin':

*About 3,000 years ago the modern country of Greece (see maps of Europe in **Resource 1** and detailed map of Greece in **Resource 2**) was divided into lots of separate kingdoms, each with its own government and big city (see map in **Resource 3**). Around 1250 BC war broke out between the armies of the city of Troy on one side and the combined forces of the cities of Sparta and Mycenae on the other. This was because Prince Paris of Troy had kidnapped Queen Helen of Sparta and taken her back to his city. Helen's husband, King Menelaus of Troy, was understandably very angry and convinced his brother Agamemnon, King of Mycenae, to join him on an expedition to Troy to rescue her. They set sail across the Aegean Sea and so began the Trojan War, which was to last for 10 years. When Menelaus arrived at Troy, his armies were quickly able to win control of most of the lands and people of the Kingdom of Troy, but capturing the city itself was to prove a much more difficult task. Among other things, it had very tall and thick walls, which were over 15 metres high. As was normal in those days, the Greek army of Menelaus laid siege to the city. This means his forces surrounded the city, cutting off its supplies, knowing that eventually the people inside would be driven to surrender by a combination of starvation, lack of water and disease.*

*Unbelievably, after 10 years the siege had still not resulted in the surrender of the forces of Troy, or the rescue of Helen. Then Odysseus, a Greek general in Menelaus' army, had an idea. His plan was to build a huge wooden horse and to leave it outside the gate of the city of Troy. Then, the entire Greek army would pretend to leave and sail away in their ships as if they had finally admitted defeat (although they would actually hide among nearby islands). The horse took three days to build, as the Trojans watched from the top of their city walls. When it was finished, it bore the inscription 'For those returning home, the Greeks dedicate this offering to Goddess Athena'. However, unknown to the watching Trojans there were about 30 carefully selected Greek warriors hidden inside the horse as the Greek army pretended to leave. When the horse was complete, the Greeks made a big show of burning their tents and camps and returning to their ships, to set sail for home. One man called Sinon was left behind with the wooden horse. After the Greeks had gone, Paris and the leaders of Troy opened the gates of the city and came outside to interrogate Sinon and inspect the horse. Sinon told them that the Greeks had built the horse as an offering to the Goddess Athena so that she might keep them safe on the way back home. He also told them that the Greeks had made the horse much larger than the gates to the city so that the people of Troy would not be able to take it inside and benefit from the blessings of Athena themselves.*

*Although Paris's first instinct was to burn the horse, he was advised by his counsellors that this would certainly offend Athena, and that as a result she might punish the people of Troy. So the Trojans decided to demolish part of the wall next to the gate so that the horse could fit through and be moved into the city (which is exactly what General Odysseus thought they would do). That night, everyone in Troy celebrated what they thought was a great victory over the Greeks – a party that lasted until the early morning. The soldiers inside the horse waited patiently until everyone was eventually asleep, and then freed themselves. They ran straight to the gates and opened them, also lighting a beacon to tell the Greek armies (who were hidden on their ships among the islands close to the shore)*

## Key Question: The story of the Trojan Horse: historical fact, legend or classical myth?

### NOTES

*that the city was now undefended. The Greek soldiers of Menelaus entered the city, rescued Helen and killed most of the soldiers of Troy. Trojan women and children were taken back to Sparta as slaves and the Trojan War ended in a great victory for the Greeks.*

After you have read through the story a number of times, the pupils can then be encouraged to produce a timeline storyboard of what they consider to be its main events in the order that they occurred (using the template in **Resource 4**). In addition to this, also ask the pupils to draw their own interpretation of the events of the story. This will then be used as an integral part of their thinking during the next ancillary question.

## Key Question: The story of the Trojan Horse: historical fact, legend or classical myth?

### NOTES

#### Ancillary Question 2: What evidence exists to authenticate the story of the Trojan Horse?

Write the word *authenticate* on the board and ask the pupils what they think it means in the context of the question above. It means to prove or show something to be true. So, what exactly is there that may prove or show that the story of the Trojan Horse is true? First, there are many depictions or images in existence that show the Trojan Horse, including those in **Resource 5**:

- a) Mykonos Vase, dating from 675–650 BC (about 600 years after the event) and the oldest known depiction of the Trojan Horse, which also includes images of the soldiers hiding inside and looking out
- b) a stone sculpture on a Buddhist shrine from the Gandhara region of northern Pakistan dating from AD 100–200 (850 to 950 years after the event)
- c) depiction of the interrogation of Sinon and the Trojan Horse outside Troy's walls – this appears in an illustrated manuscript of the works of the Roman poet Virgil, dating from the fifth century AD (at least 1,600 years after the event)
- d) engraving by the French artist Motte created in 1874 (over 3,000 years after the event)
- e) illustration from a book about the Siege of Troy by John Lydgate, published during the 1400s (at least 2,500 years after the event)
- f) *The Procession of the Trojan Horse* into Troy, by Giovanni Domenico Tiepolo, from around 1760 (3,000 years after the event)
- g) engraving from the book *Vergilius Vaticanus*, from AD 400 (1,650 years after the event).

Encourage the pupils to study each of the images. Get them to discuss how reliable each image might be as a source of evidence regarding what might or might not have happened at Troy all those centuries ago. Were any of the images produced by people who actually witnessed the events? How do they compare with the depictions the pupils produced themselves (very similar, most likely)? If the artists did not actually witness the event themselves, and therefore did not use primary evidence as the basis of their depictions, where would they have got the information they used to create their images? In all cases, this would have been from written records of what happened in the Trojan War. So let's examine their reliability next.

**Resource 6** contains the oldest known written references to the Trojan Horse. These appear in the works of the Roman poet Virgil (about 19 BC), the Greek playwright Euripides (415 BC) and a Greek poet called Homer (780 BC). Read these through with the pupils and interpret and translate as required. Discuss with the pupils how trustworthy they think each of these pieces of evidence might be? Even the newest text of Virgil is still at least 1,250 years younger than the date when historians think the siege of Troy occurred. If these are the oldest written references to the Trojan Horse, then where did these three authors get their information about what occurred? Before history was recorded in writing, information about events and people in the past would have been handed down from generation to generation in stories that were told orally (out loud). By the time that Virgil was writing his account of the siege of Troy and the building of the Trojan Horse, the stories he was hearing were already over 1,000 years old! How accurate do the pupils feel that they would have been by the time Virgil heard them?

Finally, ask the pupils to consider the archaeological evidence. Explain that for hundreds of years there was no evidence at all to suggest that the city of Troy ever existed, let alone that it underwent a 10-year siege which led to its destruction following the Trojan Horse subterfuge. But, in the 1870s, a German archaeologist discovered a site in Turkey which today almost everyone accepts as the site of the city of Troy. Here, archaeologists have discovered the remains of at least nine cities constructed on top of each other over a

## Key Question: The story of the Trojan Horse: historical fact, legend or classical myth?

period of 4,000 years and evidence of at least one large battle. A city protected by stone walls 4 metres thick and 3 metres high, and topped with brick ramparts, has been uncovered (see the photographs in [Resource 7](#)).

Take time now to ascertain the views of the pupils in relation to the evidence they have examined – depictions of the Trojan Horse, written accounts and the archaeological evidence. What do we know for certain? The ruins of the city of Troy in Turkey show a place on a hill with massive fortifications that was inhabited for at least 4,000 years, so there would have been a city here in 1250 BC, when the events involving the Trojan Horse were believed to have occurred. There is also evidence here of a great battle having occurred around the time of the alleged siege. How about the images and written accounts of the stories? Even though none of the depictions or writings was created until long after the supposed Trojan Horse event, does this necessarily mean that they are not based on fact? Why *so many* images and stories? If all of these have been produced over such a long period of time, then surely there must be some truth in the story?

Now remind the pupils of the difference between *fact*, *legend* and *myth*:

**Fact:** this is something that is known or has been proved to be true because we have original or primary evidence created at the time by people who were there, such as information contained in a letter, diary, photograph, interview, film, sound recording. An example of this is the Battle of Britain in 1940.

**Legend:** this is a very old traditional story about a place, person or event that has been passed on from person to person and includes some true events or historical facts, but is mostly made up. Examples include the legend of Robin Hood or King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table.

**Myth:** this is a story which has only symbolic or figurative meaning and does not include any true events. Myths are created to explain things that people did not understand at the time, such as how the world came into existence.

Now ask the pupils to consider where they stand regarding the story of the Trojan Horse at this time. What does their instinct say about the Trojan Horse story – is it historical fact, legend or myth? Support them to write a few summarising notes about why they feel the way they do, which acts as preparation for the next ancillary question.

# Key Question: The story of the Trojan Horse: historical fact, legend or classical myth?

## NOTES

### Ancillary Question 3: What other explanations could there be for the origin of the story of the Trojan Horse?

Some historians believe that the story of the Trojan Horse could have emerged and developed over time from other events that took place during the 10-year Trojan War and the siege of Troy. Without giving the pupils any clues, explain that a number of historians think that the story might have originated from one, or a combination, of the things shown in **Resource 8**, **Resource 9**, **Resource 10** and **Resource 11**. Divide the pupils into pairs and give each a set of the four resources to examine and discuss. What connection could each have to the story of the Trojan Horse? Allow plenty of time for discussion and speculation before taking feedback and developing thinking through further questioning. Explain that the images in **Resource 9** and **Resource 10** belong together as a pair. So what do the pupils think?

#### Resource 8

Archaeologists who have been excavating the ruins of the city of Troy have found evidence of what could have been a serious earthquake around the time of the Trojan War and the siege. If this is the case, then the Ancient Greeks would have attributed the earthquake and the destruction to the actions of the god Poseidon (Greek god of *both* earthquakes and horses). If the walls of Troy collapsed following an earthquake to allow the Greek armies to enter the city, then it is possible to see how a story involving Poseidon and horses could have emerged over time to explain the miraculous events.

#### Resource 9 and Resource 10

During the time of the Ancient Greeks, it was usual for armies that were laying siege to cities to attack the walls with battering rams and also to construct tall siege towers containing archers, which were wheeled up to the walls to fire arrows into the city below. The two photographs in **Resource 9** show modern wooden reconstructions of both, but the image in **Resource 10** from a stone wall relief in modern-day Syria dates from 865–860 BC (400 years after the supposed siege of Troy). This depiction is very unusual, as it shows a combined battering ram and siege tower. What historians do know is that the Ancient Greeks covered both battering rams and siege towers with horse hide, which they then soaked in water to prevent the wooden structures underneath catching fire during an attack on city walls. They frequently gave the battering rams and siege towers animal names, as well – very often the names of horses. In addition to this, wooden battering rams covered in wet horse hide would have resembled the shape of a horse from a distance. So it's not difficult to see how the story of the Trojan Horse might have developed from horse-shaped and horse-hide-covered wooden battering rams used during the Trojan War and the 10-year siege of the city.

#### Resource 11

Finally, some historians believe that the siege of Troy might have been ended peacefully and through negotiation rather than with a battle. There is some evidence that, at about the time of the Trojan War and the 10-year siege, a peace envoy (a messenger or representative of a government sent on a peace mission) set sail for Troy from Sparta in order to negotiate an end to the very costly and increasingly unpopular war. Writing by some Greek soldiers indicates that they were very unhappy at having been away for so long and permanently living in very uncomfortable conditions with little food. Perhaps the government of Sparta knew that many had reached the point of possible mutiny? The galley (low, flat ship) arriving in Troy with the peace envoy would have looked very much like the one in the image (from AD 150) in **Resource 11**, and perhaps not too dissimilar in silhouette to the shape of a horse?

As a final written output for this investigation, the pupils can be supported to produce a piece of discursive writing outlining the story of the Trojan Horse and the alternative perspectives and views about its authenticity and accuracy. In their piece, they will also need to explain the distinction between historical fact, legend and myth and reach a personal judgment as to where they think the 'truth' about the Trojan Horse lies – fact,

## Key Question: The story of the Trojan Horse: historical fact, legend or classical myth?

### NOTES

legend or myth? **Resource 12** contains an outline of the conventions of discursive writing, and **Resource 13** is an example of a discursive piece annotated with the conventions (which can be used as a model, if desired).

# Key Question: The story of the Trojan Horse: historical fact, legend or classical myth?

## NOTES

### Assessment

This enquiry presents several opportunities to evaluate at different stages how the pupils are progressing in History through the mastery of key historical skills and outcomes. It is not necessarily intended that all of the following learning activities should be assessed. Rather, the list can be used as a general guide for selecting perhaps one or two assessment opportunities relevant to individual pupils rather than on a whole group basis.

| Ancillary Question | Learning Activity  | Possible source of evidence of achievement  |
|--------------------|--|---|
| 1                  | <b>Describe</b> and <b>explain</b> the main events in the siege of the city of Troy during the Trojan War of Ancient Greece  | Discussion and formative assessment through questioning and observation<br>Siege of Troy storyboard |
| 2                  | <b>Evaluate</b> and <b>critique</b> the visual, written and archaeological evidence which presently exists regarding the Trojan Horse, and begin to formulate <b>conclusions</b>       | Discussion and questioning<br>Oral understanding<br>Draft notes as to 'fact', 'legend' or 'myth'    |
| 3                  | <b>Reach a conclusion</b> and <b>make a judgment</b> regarding whether the story of the Trojan Horse is (in their opinion) fact, legend or myth, and <b>justify their decision</b>     | Discursive writing  |
| Homework           | <b>Review</b> and <b>evaluate</b> the 'historical' evidence regarding the existence of the lost city of Atlantis and <b>reach a judgment</b> as to its reliability and trustworthiness | Report<br>PowerPoint presentation   |

### Homework possibilities

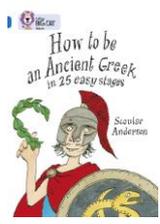
This enquiry offers an interesting and relevant opportunity for pupils to undertake an individual investigation at home into the allegedly lost city of Atlantis – historical fact, legend or myth? To reach a judgment as to the story's accuracy, they can be supported to follow the same line of enquiry and historical thinking as they pursued with their Trojan Horse investigation, while justifying their views.

# Key Question: The story of the Trojan Horse: historical fact, legend or classical myth?

## Further reading



Collins *Big Cat* has books for every child in the classroom with a wide variety of genres, top authors, relevant topics and a range of engaging formats and illustrative styles. Listed below is a selection from the *Big Cat* list to support the enquiry topics in Connected History for KS2. Find out more at Collins *Big Cat* – [www.collins.co.uk](http://www.collins.co.uk)

|                         |   |                  |   |
|-------------------------|---|------------------|---|
| ISBN: 978-0-00-723107-2 | <i>How to be an Ancient Greek in 25 Easy Stages</i> | Scoular Anderson |  |
| ISBN: 978-0-00-820892-9 | <i>Ancient Greeks: Why They Matter to Us</i>        | Juliet Kerrigan  |  |