DEATH OF ACHILLES

0. DEATH OF ACHILLES - Story Preface

1. ACHILLES

2. HELEN AND PARIS

3. THE TROJAN WAR

4. THE PLOT THICKENS

5. DEATH OF HECTOR

6. DEATH OF ACHILLES

7. THE WOODEN HORSE

8. RUINS OF TROY AND MYCENAE

Although Homer does not tell us about the death of Achilles, in the *Iliad*, ancient-Greek artifacts tell the story in their illustrations. Here we see Ajax carrying the lifeless body of Achilles. The image illustrates an Attic black-figure lekythos, created around 510 B.C., which was found in Sicily. It is now maintained by the Staatliche Antikensammlungen (State Collections of Antiques) in Munich, Germany. Image online via Wikimedia Commons.

How did Achilles met his end? Polyxena (not mentioned by Homer but key to the story in other versions) was the daughter of Priam. During the twelve-day truce for Hector's funeral, Achilles spotted Polyxena with her brother Troilus, who was watering his horse at a fountain. It would prove to be a fateful meeting for all three.

Despite the truce, Achilles ambushed the pair, killing Troilus. Knowing that Achilles was smitten with his daughter, Priam thought of a way to end the conflict. What if he allowed Achilles to marry Polyxena as the price for ending the war?

Polyxena embraced her father's plan. Seemingly, she loved the famous warrior who had ambushed her at the fountain and had killed her brothers. But Polyxena was a loyal sister. She learned that Achilles had a weak spot on his heel.

The youngest daughter of Priam and Hecuba collaborated with her brother Paris (brother of Hector, lover of Helen). Together they concocted a plan.

Polyxena would convince Achilles to make a sacrifice in the temple of Apollo, where their marriage would soon be celebrated. Paris, completely hidden from view, would be waiting in the wings with his bow and arrow.

Agreeing to make a sacrifice, Achilles went to the temple of Apollo. Concerned for his safety, Odysseus and two others followed Achilles to the temple. No one was in sight.

As Achilles knelt at the altar, Paris raised his bow. He sent a poison arrow toward his brothers' killer and, with the help of Apollo, the arrow entered the only vulnerable part of Achilles' body: his heel.

Realizing death was imminent, Achilles cried out (some versions of the story say he gave the command after his death) to sacrifice Polyxena on his tomb. In the arms of Odysseus, Achilles died a painful death.

Protecting the remains of his friend, Ajax (with the help of Menelaus) prevented Paris from desecrating the body of his-brother-Hector's killer. Ajax returned the body of the fallen warrior to the Achaean camp.

Later, fighting with Odysseus over the weapons and armor Achilles had left behind, Ajax lost that battle and his mind. He ended up committing suicide.

See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:
http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/DEATH-OF-ACHILLES-Troy

See Learning Tasks for this story online at:
http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/DEATH-OF-ACHILLES-Troy

Media Stream

At a Fountain - Polyxena

Image, courtesy Perseus Project at Tufts University.
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Arrow - Achilles' Heel as Target

Image online, courtesy the hellenicaworld.com website.
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Arrow - Achilles' Heel Struck

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Death of Achilles

Image online, courtesy University of Maryland.
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Polyxena - Achilles Orders Her Death

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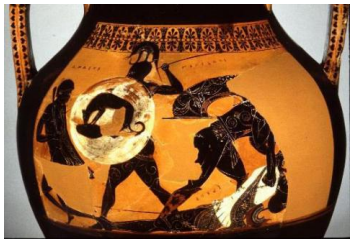

Ajax Protects Achilles' Dead Body

Image online, courtesy Teach Greece.org
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Retrieval of the Dead - Ajax Carries Achilles

Image, described above, depicting a black-figure amphora which is part of the Campana Collection, 1861, now maintained at the Louvre, in Paris. Photo by Marie-Lan Nguyen; online via Wikimedia Commons.

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Ajax Carries the Body of Achilles from the Battlefield

Image, described above, online courtesy Classical Art Research Centre and the Beazley Archive at Oxford University.

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DEATH OF ACHILLES

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