Achilles
Achilles: Greek Mythology
By: English For Students

Introduction
Achilles, in Greek mythology, greatest of the Greek warriors in the Trojan War. He was the son of the sea nymph Thetis and Peleus, king of the Myrmidons of Thessaly. When the Fates prophesied that Achilles would die in the Trojan War, Thetis attempted to make her infant son immortal. In one version of the story, Thetis rubbed Achilles with ambrosia and placed him in the hearth fire to make him immortal. According to a later legend, she bathed him in the River Styx. The waters made him invulnerable except for the heel by which his mother held him. The term Achilles heel has become popularized to refer to someone’s or something’s key weakness.

Youth
While Achilles was growing up, the Greek armies were preparing for their assault on Troy in Asia Minor. Knowing that her son was fated to die if he took part in the war, Achilles’s mother dressed him in women’s clothing and sent him to Skyros to live among the young women in the court of King Lycomedes. Warned that they could not conquer Troy without the aid of Achilles, the Greeks sent Odysseus, king of Ithaca, to find him. Disguised as a peddler, Odysseus went to Skyros bearing a shield and a spear among his goods. When Achilles betrayed his identity by seizing the weapons, Odysseus persuaded him to join the Greek expedition to Troy.

The Trojan War
Achilles fought many battles during the Greeks’ ten-year siege of Troy. When the Mycenaean king Agamemnon seized the captive slave Briseis from him during the war, Achilles withdrew the Myrmidons from battle and sulked in his tent. The Trojans, emboldened by his absence, attacked the Greeks and drove them into headlong retreat. Then Patroclus, Achilles’s friend and companion, begged Achilles to lend him his armor and let him lead the Myrmidons into battle. Achilles consented.

Patroclus was killed by the Trojan prince Hector. Afterward the grief-stricken Achilles returned to battle, slew Hector, and dragged his body in triumph behind his chariot. Achilles fought his last battle with Memnon, king of the Ethiopians. After killing the king, Achilles led the Greeks to the walls of Troy. There he was mortally wounded in the heel by Paris, the Trojan prince whose abduction of Helen, queen of Sparta, started the Trojan War. The quarrel between Achilles and Agamemnon, the subsequent battle, and the ransoming of Hector’s body are recounted in the Iliad, an ancient Greek epic poem attributed to the poet Homer.

http://goo.gl/IVc8M
Achilles was born in Farsala to the king of the Myrmidons, Peleus, and his immortal wife Thetis, a sea nymph. He was sent to Mt. Pelion where he was raised by a centaur named Chiron.

An ancient story by Statius claims that Thetis dipped Achilles in the river Styx, trying to make him immortal. The story goes on to tell that she forgot to dip the heel she had been holding him by, making it the only spot on his body vulnerable to attack. Another version of the story relates that Thetis covered the child in the godly ambrosia and placed him in the fire to let the flames destroy his mortal aspects, but was interrupted by Peleus, who was enraged and removed him from the fire, leaving a mortal spot on Achilles’ heel.

While Achilles was young, Calchas foretold that Troy could not be defeated without the help of Achilles. Thetis, however, knew her son was doomed to an early death if he fought in the war, so she hid him in the court of Lycomedes, disguised as a girl. His son Pyrrhus was born of Achilles’ affair with Lycomedes’ daughter, Deidameia. Achilles’ identity was eventually discovered, and he went to Troy and led many of the Myrmidons in battle.

In one of the Trojan towns captured by Achilles, Lynnessus, he took the woman Briseis as a war prize. The leader of the Greek forces, Agamemnon, took the lady Chryseis as his war prize, but an oracle of Apollo forced him to surrender his prize. He took Briseis away from Achilles to console himself, enraged Achilles and causing him to withdraw from the war. This confrontation with Agamemnon begins Homer’s epic poem Iliad.

With Achilles withdrew from battle, the Trojans began gaining ground against the Greek forces. The Greek commander was blamed for making Achilles mad, which in turn was causing the Achaeans to lose ground to the Trojans. He sent Odysseus to try to bribe Achilles with gifts in exchange for his return to battle. Achilles refused and urged them to return to Greece. The Greeks offered their most ferocious warrior many gifts to try to encourage him to return to battle.

Achilles finally relented and agreed to help the Achaean forces, but still refused to personally appear in battle. He prayed to his mother that the Trojans could be defeated, although by this time the Greeks were teetering on the edge of destruction at the hands of the Trojans. Achilles gave Patroclus his armor and allowed the boy to lead the Greek troops in battle against the Trojan forces. Patroclus and his men were able to push back the Trojans, but the Trojan leader Hector mistook Patroclus for Achilles and killed him, stripping him of the armor.

In a rage, Achilles returned to battle and became a killing machine, seeking to exact revenge upon Hector. He was bolstered by a magnificent new set of armor his mother had obtained from Hephaestus.

At one point Zeus had to have Achilles restrained to prevent him from taking on the city of Troy singlehandedly. Achilles finally found Hector, who had to be persuaded by Athena to fight Achilles rather than run from him. Achilles killed Hector, then mutilated the body by dragging it behind a chariot for nine days. The Iliad closes with Hector’s funeral, which takes place shortly before the fall of Troy.

Despite his prowess as a warrior, Achilles’ affinity for young boys is perhaps what finally led to his demise. He had made many advances toward a Trojan boy named Troilus, and became aggressive in his pursuits of the boy. Troilus ran to the temple of Apollo and hid inside, trying to escape Achilles’ advances. Achilles was furious about being spurned by Troilus and beheaded him inside the temple.

Troilus was killed just prior to his twentieth birthday, and myths told that should Troilus have lived past his twentieth birthday, Troy would have been invincible. Apollo was enraged by the desecration of his temple, and swore revenge against Achilles.

Achilles was finally killed by an arrow, which struck his heel, the only vulnerable place on Achilles’ body. Paris was the one who loosed the arrow, but many believe it was guided to its fatal mark by Apollo.

Following his death, Odysseus and Ajax competed for Achilles’ armor by telling why they were the bravest warriors, and therefore the most deserving of it. When Odysseus won the competition, Ajax lost his mind and went mad. After killing many sheep, believing them to be Greek soldiers, he killed himself.

http://mythologymadness.com/heroes/
Part I - Thetis

Achilles was the great hero of the Trojan War. His mother was the Nereid Thetis, who is known for her many interventions in the affairs of both gods and mortals. For example, when Hephaestus was cast by Zeus (or Hera, as some say) from Heaven, and fell into the sea, he was saved by Thetis. And when Dionysus was persecuted by King Lycurgus of the Eodions, he found refuge in the sea with her. And when the Argonauts, after having met the Sirens, encountered Charybdis and Scylla and the Wandering Rocks, Thetis, along with the other Nereids, put them out of danger by steering their ship through those threats.

Thetis helped even Zeus, the king of the Olympians - Once a palace revolt took place in Olympus and the deities Hera, Poseidon and Athena plotted against Zeus, planning to chain him, and taking away his awesome thunderbolts. Thetis averted it by calling to Mount Olympus the Hecatoncheire (One-Hundred-Handed) giant Briareus who squatting down by Zeus and displaying his force frightened the other gods away and undid Zeus's binds, freeing him.

Zeus and his brother Poseidon, the god of the sea, both were in love with Thetis and tried to win her hand in marriage. But the respected Titaness Themis made a prophecy that the son of Thetis would grow up to become mightier than his father, so quickly they changed their minds about her. Instead she married a man named Peleus.

Others say that Hera had raised Thetis as a child, and out of respect for her, Thetis herself refused the offer of Zeus, and to punish her he decided that she would not marry a god but instead a mortal man. Zeus did not stop pursuing Thetis until he learned the prophecy from Themis. And Hera in recognition for what Thetis had done, or rather not done, chose Peleus as Thetis' husband, for according to her, he was the best man on earth at that time.

Still, Thetis was not happy to wed a mere mortal and complained that it was an insult to her status. So when Peleus tried to claim his bride she refused him and changed her form, first into a bird, then a tree, and finally into a tigress, scaring Peleus into letting go of her. But Proteus, a son of Poseidon, instructed Peleus to not let go of Thetis no matter what form she took. When Thetis turned into fire and water yet Peleus still held on, in admiration of his perseverance she finally grudgingly relented and agreed to be his wife.

It's worth noting that the wedding of Thetis and Peleus indirectly brought on the Trojan War. All the gods and VIPs had been invited by Zeus to the wedding, except for the goddess of Discord, Eris. To get even, Eris tossed a golden apple in the midst of the gathering, and labeled it "To the Fairest". A fight soon ensued between the beautiful goddesses Hera, Aphrodite and Athena, as to who the rightful recipient of the golden apple should be. The decision was left to a shepherd named Paris, who awarded the apple to Aphrodite on the promise of winning the hand of Helen, the most beautiful mortal. Aphrodite caused Helen to fall in love with Paris, and when he abducted her and they ran away to Troy, the Greeks launched the Trojan War.

Part II - Young Achilles

Since Achilles was half god (from Thetis) and half mortal (from Peleus) his mother wished to make him immortal. When he was young she dipped him in the waters of the infernal river Styx, found in the Underworld. Thus he became invulnerable, save for the spot on his heel where she held him. Still others claim that to make Achilles immortal Thetis would nightly hold him over the fire to get rid of the mortal elements inherited from Peleus, and that in the daytime she would anoint his body with Ambrosia. Peleus chanced upon his infant son in the fire one night and freaked out on Thetis. In disgust she tossed down the child and left both him and Peleus, rejoining her fellow Nereids. Thetis never stopped caring for her son, however, and always kept an eye out for his welfare.
heroes. On Mount Pelion Achilles was fed meat from lions and wild boars, and the marrow of bears, to give him
courage. A diet of honey-comb and fawn's marrow made him a swift runner. Cheiron taught Achilles the arts of
riding, hunting, archery, pipe-playing, healing and more. The Muse Calliope taught him to sing. Achilles exemplified
the best qualities of a warrior, coupled with the soul of a poet.

He killed his first boar when he was only six years old and every day brought wild animals back to Cheiron. Athena
and Artemis gazed in wonder at this handsome golden-haired child, impressed at his swiftness and skill - Achilles
could overtake and kill stags without the help of hounds.

When Achilles was nine years old the prophet Calchas declared that Troy would never be taken without the help of
Achilles. Thetis knew that her son would either die young as a hero at Troy, or live an inglorious life at home. She
did her utmost to preserve the life of Achilles, even going so far as to disguise him as a girl and sending him away to
Lycomedes, king of Scyros. There he lived under the name of Cercysera, Aissa, or Pyrrha, it is said. Achilles wanted
nothing to do with dressing like a girl but he realized that it was the only way to get close to King Lycomedes's
beautiful daughter. This affair with the king's daughter, Diedameia, produced a son named Pyrrhus, later called
Neoptolemus.

Thus disguised as a young woman Achilles lived quietly at Scyros until the leaders of the Greek expedition against
Troy, who were Odysseus, Nestor and Ajax, arrived and asked to speak to Achilles. They wanted him to join them in
the Trojan War. King Lycomedes insisted that he wasn't there, and offered the men a search of the palace. The
search failed to expose Achilles, so Odysseus resorted to trickery.

The Greeks had brought a pile of gifts to Scyros, mostly jewels, girdles, fancy embroidered dresses and colorful
cloth. Odysseus asked the ladies to pick their choice of any gift, but instructed his men to sound a sudden trumpet
blast and clash of arms outside the palace. All the girls had gathered around the gold and finery, ooohing and
aaahing, but one girl showed absolutely no interest in the jewels, but instead seemed fascinated by the swords,
spears and arms that were part of the gifts.

So when the trumpet blew and the sounds of fighting were heard, one of the "young girls", the disguised Achilles,
instinctively stripped to the waist and grabbed the sword and shield, readying for battle. Thus Achilles was exposed,
and he promptly agreed to join the Greek expedition, and lead to Troy his army of Myrmidons, which was what his
warriors were called.

Before he left Achilles married his sweetheart, the pregnant Diedameia. Then he brought a fleet of fifty or sixty
ships to join his fellow Greeks at Aulis. He was fifteen years old at the time.

ACHILLES GOES TO WAR

The winds were not favorable for the fleet to sail and much time was wasted, making the gathered armies restless.
The seer Calchas then lied, using Achilles's name - He told the Greek leader Agamemnon that the gods would only
co-operate if he was to sacrifice his daughter, Iphigenia. He tricked his daughter by telling her to sail to Aulis, as
she was to be married to Achilles, who naturally was unaware of the Agamemnon's scheming. Just as Iphigenia was
about to be sacrificed, however, the goddess Artemis substituted a deer in her place and she escaped. The Greek
fleet was then able to sail to war.

Thetis had warned Achilles that the first Greek to land on Trojan soil would die so Achilles was able to avoid that.
It was unlucky Protesilaus who was first to land and he soon died, but not before first dispatching a number of
Trojans.

The walls of Troy were heavily fortified and the Trojans had stocked up tremendous stores of supplies so the siege
lasted ten years. During that time Achilles sacked and pillaged a large number of surrounding cities, including the
islands of Tenedos and Lesbos, and the cities of Thebe, Antandrus, Adramyntium, Lynnessus, reaching very far to the
south and taking also Cyme, Phocaea, Smyrna, Clazomenae and Colophon.
King Agamemnon insulted a seer of Apollo, who had come to claim his daughter Chreisis, who was kidnapped by the Achaeans (Greeks). To punish the king Apollo brought a terrible pestilence upon the army and many Greek warriors died, until the seer Calchas claimed that it was Agamemnon's pride which brought this evil upon the Greeks. Still Agamemnon chose to insult this seer also, but announced that he would give up claim to the girl. To show who was boss, however, he took away Briseis, who was Achilles' current sweetheart.

This put Achilles into a deep funk and he refused to fight, instead wasting away in his tent while his army of Myrmidons idled their time away. When the Trojans realized that Achilles and his Myrmidons had withdrawn from battle they became emboldened by the great warrior's absence and they launched a series of raids against the Greeks, inflicting severe losses. At Thetis's urging, Zeus permitted this to happen, in order that the Greeks would once again honor Achilles and realize how indispensable to them he truly was.

As time went on and the Trojans became more and more dangerous, Agamemnon came to his senses and agreed to appease Achilles' wrath. And it is for that purpose that he offered him the seven tripods, the seven women, the seven cities, and many other gifts including the (according to Agamemnon) untouched Briseis. But Achilles was too hurt and no gift of wealth would sway him to rejoin the battle. The Greeks appeared lost.

Now, Achilles had a best friend called Patroclus. When the Trojans became so bold as to begin setting fire to the Greek ships, Achilles consented to send his pal Patroclus to fight, giving him his own famous armor to wear. The Trojan prince Hector killed brave Patroclus in battle and took the armor for himself. The death of his best friend devastated Achilles and spurred him into action. He was angry and wanted revenge!

Realizing that he had wasted his time and skills bitterly sitting by his ships, Achilles asked his mother to fetch him new armor from the god of smiths, Hephaestus. His old armor had been taken by Hector, son of Priam, King of Troy, when he slew Patroclus.

When Thetis delivered the new armor Achilles called a council of war and reconciled with Agamemnon, both agreeing that they had acted foolishly. It was payback time!

None could stand before the wrath of Achilles. At the sight of him the Trojans broke rank and scattered, dividing into two bodies. Achilles drove one part across the plain towards the city of Troy and penned the other in a bend of the river. The River-god tried to subdue him but Hephaestus came to the aid of Achilles and dried up the waters with a scorching flame. The stunned Trojan survivors hastened back to behind their walls like a bunch of scared rabbits.

Now it was Hector's turn. The two men met and both armies stood back and watched amazed. Hector's plan was to run around the city walls, hoping to tire Achilles who had been long inactive. Wrong. Three times Achilles chased Hector around the walls and each time Hector ran for the safety of a gate, Achilles would cut him off. At last Hector stood to fight and at once Achilles drove his sword through him, gaining revenge for the death of Patroclus.

Achilles ignored Hector's dying wish to have his body returned to his father Priam for ransom. Instead he fastened leather straps to the body of Hector, secured them on his chariot and whipping up his immortal horses Balus, Xanthus and Pedasus, dragged the corpse three times around the walls of Troy, much to the dismay of the devastated Trojans.

Achilles now buried Patroclus and sacrificed horses, two of Patroclus' own hounds and twelve noble Trojan captives, several sons of Priam among them. Still beside himself in grief, at dawn every day Achilles would drag Hector's body three times around Patroclus' tomb. Finally at the command of Zeus, Hermes led Priam to the Greek camp one night and he beseeched Achilles to ransom his son's body, throwing himself at the warrior's feet begging.

Oddly enough Priam found Achilles asleep and could have easily killed him but chose not to. They agreed to exchange the corpse for Hector's weight in gold and a pair of scales were set up outside the city walls. Hector's body was laid in one pan and the Trojans were invited to heap their gold in the other until the scales balanced. When at last
Priam's treasury was empty and still Hector's burly corpse was heavier. Polyxena, a Trojan princess, threw down her bracelets to provide the missing weight. Impressed at her courage Achilles offered to exchange the gold for the beautiful woman and Priam told him that she was freely his if Achilles persuaded the Greeks to depart without Helen, ending the war. No deal.

Achilles and his warriors continued their rout of the Trojans and pursued them towards the city. But Poseidon and Apollo had pledged to punish certain deaths and also some insolent boasts uttered by Achilles over the corpse of Hector. Apollo sought out Paris during the battle and guided his hand. The arrow of Paris found the only vulnerable spot on Achilles, his right heel, and the great hero of the Trojan War died in agony. Others say that it was Apollo himself, disguised as Paris, who struck the fatal shot.

A great battle raged over the corpse until finally the Greeks carried dead Achilles through the midst of the enemy and back to their camp, dismayed at the loss of their greatest warrior. To make amends with Thetis, Poseidon promised to bestow on Achilles an island where he would be worshipped and receive divine sacrifices for eternity. The Nine Muses sang his funeral dirges while a host of Nereids offered salace to his mother Thetis.

His corpse was burned upon a pyre on the eighteenth day and his ashes mixed with those of Patroclus, laid in a golden urn made by Hephaestus and buried at Sigaeum. But Thetis snatched Achilles' soul from the pyre and brought it to the island of Leuce, where he rejoined his dead friends, including Patroclus. Helen, the cause of the war, was his bride there, by some accounts.

Yet others claim that Achilles went to Hades where he complains bitterly of his lot in life as he stamps about the Asphodel Fields. And other ancient writers say that he married Medea, of Golden Fleece fame, and that they live like king and queen in the Elysian Fields, or the Islands of the Blessed.

By the way, soon thereafter the Greeks won the Trojan War, utilizing the Trojan Horse to sneak their warriors into the city and sack it. It's a great story, well worth studying.

http://mythman.com/
Achilles (uh-KIH-leez) was a mighty Greek hero. Ancient Greeks and Romans told many stories about him. The stories said that Achilles could not be harmed. He was invulnerable.

The stories also said that gods helped Achilles and other heroes. During one battle, a hero named Hector threw his spear at Achilles. The goddess Athena (uh-THEE-nuh) knocked the spear down. Then Achilles raised his spear to throw at Hector. But the god Apollo created a fog around Hector. Achilles could not see Hector.

Hector ran from Achilles. As Hector ran, Athena approached him. She had disguised herself as one of his brothers. So Hector stopped. Athena offered him a new spear, but it was a trick. When Hector reached for the spear, it disappeared.

Achilles then caught up to Hector. He attacked and killed Hector. Achilles defeated many enemies in battle.
Achilles' mother was Thetis (THEE-tuhss). She was a sea nymph. Nymphs were creatures that never grew old or died. They were immortal. Achilles' father was the human King Peleus (PEE-lee-uhss). Peleus ruled an area of Greece called Phthia (THYE-uh). Because Achilles was part human, he would grow old and die. He was mortal.

Thetis wanted to keep Achilles from dying of old age. At night, Thetis put Achilles into a fire to burn off his mortal skin. In the morning, she rubbed ambrosia (am-BROH-zhuh) on him to heal his body. Ambrosia was the food of the gods.

Achilles' mother also wanted to protect her son from harm. Thetis held Achilles by the heel and dipped him into the river Styx. This river ran through the Underworld. Its waters made Achilles invulnerable. The water covered Achilles everywhere but the heel that Thetis held. Achilles' heel was the only part of his body that could be harmed.
The Trojan War began when Trojan Prince Paris took Helen from her husband. Helen was married to Greek King Menelaus (meh-nuh-LAY-uhss). Menelaus gathered an army to go get Helen back. He needed help from heroes like Achilles.

Thetis did not want Achilles to join the Greek army. She was afraid her son would die in the Trojan War. Thetis dressed Achilles as a woman and sent him to hide on the island of Scyros.

Menelaus told the wise hero Odysseus (oh-DIH-see-uhss) to find Achilles. Odysseus sailed to Scyros. He had heard that Achilles was hiding among King Lycomedes’ (lye-koh-MEE-deez) daughters. Lycomedes ruled Scyros.

Odysseus played a trick on Achilles. He set out treasures and a sword. The king’s daughters looked at the treasures, but Achilles looked at the sword. Odysseus then knew which woman was actually Achilles. Odysseus talked Achilles into going to Troy and helping the Greek army.
Achilles killed many people in battle. On the way to Troy, he stopped on the island of Tenedos. King Tenes (TEN-eez) ruled the island. Thetis warned Achilles not to harm the king. But Achilles argued with Tenes and killed him. Achilles' actions angered the god Apollo. Apollo was Tenes' father.

During the Trojan War, Achilles fought the Trojan hero Cygnus (SIG-nuhss). Like Achilles, Cygnus was invulnerable to weapons. Achilles used the strap on Cygnus' helmet to choke him to death.

Priam (PRYE-uhm) was the king of Troy. One of his 50 sons was named Troilus (TROI-luhss). The gods had said Troilus would never lose a battle if he lived to be 20 years old. Achilles killed Troilus before he turned 20. Achilles killed many of Priam's sons.

Achilles also attacked the city of Lyrnessus. There, he captured a beautiful woman named Briseis (brih-SEE-ihss). Achilles and Briseis fell in love.
Agamemnon (ay-guh-MEM-non) was the leader of the Greek army. He had captured Chryseis (kry-SEE-ihss). Chryseis’ father asked the god Apollo to get his daughter back. Apollo told the Greeks to let Chryseis go. Achilles made Agamemnon give Chryseis back to her father.

Achilles’ actions angered Agamemnon. Agamemnon took Briseis from Achilles. Achilles then became sad and would not leave his tent. He no longer wanted to fight the Trojans.

Achilles led the Myrmidons (MUR-muh-duhnss). These soldiers were ants that had been changed into men. Without Achilles and the Myrmidons, the Greek army lost many battles. They could not beat Hector, the leader of the Trojan army.

Achilles’ friends begged him to fight. Agamemnon even returned Briseis. Achilles still refused to help. His mother, Thetis, had told Achilles that he would die if he stayed and fought. Achilles thought about going home.
Patroclus (puh-TROH-kluhss) was Achilles' best friend. Patroclus did not want the Greeks to lose the war. He asked to use Achilles' armor. He also asked to lead the Myrmidons into battle. Achilles agreed to give Patroclus whatever he wanted. But Achilles did not want Patroclus to get hurt. He warned Patroclus only to push the Trojan army away from the Greek army's camp.

Patroclus disguised himself with Achilles' armor. When he entered the battle, the Greeks believed that Patroclus was Achilles. The Greeks began to fight harder because they thought Achilles was there to help them. They began to beat the Trojan army. The Trojans ran away from the Greek army's camp.

Patroclus forgot about Achilles' warning. He chased after the Trojans. Patroclus caught up to Hector, and the two heroes fought. Hector was strong. He also had help from Apollo. Hector killed Patroclus and took Achilles' armor.
Patroclus' death made Achilles angry. Achilles decided to stay and fight the Trojans. Thetis asked the gods to help her son. The god Hephaestus (he-FESS-tuhss) made Achilles new armor. Achilles then went looking for Hector.

Achilles killed dozens of Trojans in his search. After Achilles killed one of Hector’s brothers, Hector agreed to fight. The two heroes fought hard, but Achilles was stronger. Athena also helped him. Achilles killed Hector.

With help from Achilles, the Greeks began to win more battles. The Trojans’ weapons were useless against Achilles. But he did have a weakness.

During one battle, Prince Paris stood on top of Troy’s walls. He shot an arrow at Achilles. The god Apollo saw a chance to get revenge for the death of his son Tenes. Apollo made the arrow hit Achilles’ heel. Achilles’ heel was not invulnerable like the rest of his body. He died from the wound.
People thought Achilles could not be hurt, but Apollo knew his weakness. People sometimes use the expression “Achilles’ heel” to describe a person’s weakness. A person fighting a much stronger enemy will usually lose. But a person who can find an enemy’s Achilles’ heel, or weak spot, might win the battle.

The muscle near a person’s heel is called the Achilles tendon. It is named after the spot where Achilles was hit by Paris’ arrow. The Achilles tendon goes from the heel bone to the calf muscle. People sometimes hurt their Achilles tendon during work or sports. Injuries to this tendon can keep people from walking, running, or jumping.

Today, people no longer believe that Greek and Roman myths are true. But stories about gods and heroes are still popular. *The Iliad* has been printed into books. Movies have been made about popular myths. People continue to enjoy stories about Achilles and other famous heroes.
Even before his birth, it was prophesied that Achilles would be greater than his father. For this reason, neither Zeus nor Poseidon dared to pursue the hero's beautiful mother Thetis. Instead, the cautious gods arranged for the sea nymph to marry a mortal ruler.

Thetis was not prepared to accept that Achilles would have to die, and she tried to endow him with immortality by various means. One way was dipping him as an infant into the river of Hades, the Styx, but since she had to hold him by the heel, this one spot was left unprotected. This vulnerability (known as the Achilles heel) allowed Paris to kill Achilles with a poisoned arrow.

CUNNING WARRIOR
Realizing that her son was destined to fall at the battle of Troy, Thetis did her utmost to prevent him from learning the arts of war, but nevertheless his prowess as a fighter became well known. Odysseus brought him to Agamemnon, king of Mycenae and leader of the Greek expedition against the Trojans. Although he owed no loyalty to Agamemnon, Achilles ignored his mother's advice and sailed with the fierce leader, taking with him his squire and lover Patroclus.

The fact that the southern Greeks needed Achilles, a northern prince, to bolster their expedition is an indication of the strength of his reputation as a fighter. When they were encamped before the mighty walls of Troy, the Greeks needed the power of Achilles, who commanded a ferocious army made up of the Myrmidons (meaning “ant-men,” after Zeus had turned ants into soldiers). Yet he and Agamemnon clashed on many occasions, Achilles regarding the king as high-handed and ungrateful, and disagreeing with most of his
strategies. Achilles was so stubborn in his opposition to Agamemnon that he refused all gestures of reconciliation, including his offer of marriage to any of his daughters. Taking his place, Patroclus put on the armor of his sulking lover and went out to help the Greeks. In the moment of triumph, however, Patroclus was killed by Hector, the bravest son of the Trojan king, Priam.

SLAYING OF HEKTOR
On hearing the news of Patroclus’ death, Achilles was overcome by remorse. When Thetis came to mourn with him, he told his mother that he longed for death. He swore to avenge the death of his friend and thus his fate was sealed. Clad in new armor made at Thetis’ request by the smith god Hephaestus, Achilles sought out Hector, who stood his ground only after making the request that if he were killed, his body should be returned to King Priam. With rage undimmed, Achilles slew Hector, mutilated his body, and for twelve days dragged the bloody corpse behind his chariot around Patroclus’ grave.

The death of Achilles himself was brought about by the sun god Apollo, when he guided Paris’ arrow to penetrate the hero’s vulnerable heel. The fearless warrior had earned the enmity of Apollo during the siege of Troy by killing several of his devoted followers, including his own son Tenes, king of the island of Tenedos.

Death of Hector and triumph of Achilles
In revenge for the death of his lover, Patroclus, Achilles slays Hector in a scene set in the midst of battle.
ACHILLES

Jason Glaser

100 CHARACTERS FROM

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