What is Epic Poetry?

• long narrative poem
• great and serious subject,
• elevated style
• centered on a heroic or quasi-divine figure on whose actions depends the fate of a tribe, a nation, or the human race.
Origins of the Epic

- Egyptian Hieroglyphics
  - 3100 BC

- Epic of Gilgamesh
  - 2500 BC

- Moses Leads Hebrews out of Egypt
  - 1200 BC

- Trojan War
  - 1184 BC

  - Homer - Iliad & Odyssey
    - 800 BC

  - First Olympic Games
    - 776 BC

Classical Myths

6000 BC - 312 BC

Bible Timeline

4000 BC - 70 AD

77 AD

- Naturalis Historia, 1st Encyclopedia

- The Adventures of Beowulf
  - 650 AD
Characteristics of Epic

• Usually contains several books or volumes

• Many started from “oral tradition” or spoken poems that were memorized and recited ceremonially
Characteristics of Epic cont.

Original text often has rhyme/poetic devices

- Often in *rhyming couplets* (aa, bb, cc)
- Alliteration
- Digressions (into other stories/myths)
- Epithets – descriptive word or phrase to accompany or replace a person’s name “Brave Odysseus” or “wine-dark sea”
- Repetition or reoccurring lines/phrases
Characteristics of Epic cont.

Contains a hero with specific characteristics

- Known as an Epic Hero

The Setting is vast in scope

- Sometimes both in time and space
Characteristics of Epic cont.

Starts “in media res” or “in the middle”

- Story begins in the middle and flashes back so that the reader can understand the current situation

Narrator invokes a Muse

- One of the 9 daughters of Zeus that give divine inspiration
Characteristics of Epic cont.

An epic also contains:

– Battles
– Romance
– A great journey
– Lists/Catalogs
  • people, items, genealogies, etc.
– Supernatural influence/intervention
  • Called “machinery”
– A descent into the underworld/Rebirth
– Epic Simile (or extended simile)
– Extended formal speeches
The Epic Hero

The hero is a figure of great national or even cosmic importance, usually the ideal man of his *culture*. He often has superhuman or divine traits. He has an imposing physical stature and is greater in all ways than the common man.
The Hero’s Journey

According to Joseph Campbell’s *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, there are three major stages to the Hero’s Journey:

- Separation
- Initiation
- Return
Modern Examples of Hero’s Journey
Homer

- Stories originated from a series of poets who each orally composes an entirely different version of the story
- Homer is traditionally a blind author of *The Iliad* & *The Odyssey*
- A wandering bard, holder of myths and history
Epic Poetry Teams

I. Heading #1
   A. Subheading #1
      1. Supporting detail #1
      2. Supporting Detail #2
   B. Subheading #2

II. Heading #2

If you have an A, you must have a B.

If you have a 1, you must have a 2.

• Each team will consist of _____ people.
• Your first task is to read p106-121 in the textbook and create a formal outline of the information.