

**from the *Iliad*: from Books 22, “The Death of Hector,”
and 24, “Achilles and Priam,” by Homer**

Literary Analysis: Epic Similes

Epic similes are a common device in the *Iliad*. By making comparisons using such words as *like* and *as*, Homer draws the reader into the poem with vivid visual evocations of nature. For example, in describing Hector’s tensed, alert readiness for battle, he writes,

As a snake in the hills, guarding his hole, awaits a man—
bloated with poison, deadly hatred seething inside him,
glances flashing fire as he coils round his lair . . .
so Hector, nursing his quenchless fury, gave no ground,
leaning his burnished shield against a jutting wall,
but harried still, he proved his own brave heart. . . .

Notice how *as* and *so* mark the elements of the comparison. Hector is like a snake coiled to attack his prey, Achilles. By comparing Hector’s vigilant waiting to the attack mode of a snake, Homer emphasizes not only the combatant’s lethal intent but also his unquenchable pride: Like a snake, he seeks not merely to vanquish or subdue but to annihilate his opponent.

DIRECTIONS: Read the following passage, in which Homer describes Hector springing to the attack against Achilles. Then, answer the questions on the lines provided.

And on that resolve
he drew the whetted sword that hung at his side,
tempered, massive, and gathering all his force
he swooped like a soaring eagle
launching down from the dark clouds to earth
to snatch some helpless lamb or trembling hare.
So Hector swooped now, swinging his whetted sword. . . .

1. To what is Hector’s attack compared?

2. What does the image convey about Hector’s attitude toward Achilles at the moment of attack?

3. What mood or feeling is conveyed by the image in the simile?
