



The Song of Achilles

Madeline Miller

Madeline Miller's luminous retelling of the Iliad through Patroclus's voice transforms a myth we think we know into an intimate meditation on love, glory, and mortality.

Reading level: Moderate **Pages:** 385

Best for: Clubs that linger over sentences and love a writer who earns her metaphors

Discussion

WARM-UP

1. Read aloud the opening paragraph. What does Miller's first sentence promise about voice, register, and emotional stakes?
2. Which single image or sentence did you underline, photograph, or return to? What about the cadence or diction made it stay with you?

DIGGING IN

1. Miller filters the entire epic through Patroclus's first-person perspective. How does that POV reshape scenes we expect to feel heroic, and what is gained or sacrificed compared to Homer's omniscient grandeur?
2. Consider Miller's use of present-tense lyric description against past-tense narration. How does her sentence rhythm change in scenes of intimacy versus scenes of war?
3. The novel inherits a 3,000-year tradition (Homer, the Greek tragedians, Ovid, later poets). Where does Miller seem to be in conversation with her sources, and where does she quietly diverge?
4. How does Miller handle prophecy and foreknowledge as a structural device? What craft problems does writing toward a known mythic outcome create, and how does she solve them?

GOING DEEP

1. Miller spent roughly a decade writing this novel and later returned to the same world in Circe. What preoccupations (voice, marginal figures, the texture of divinity) seem to define her body of work as it stands?
2. Critics have placed the book within a recent wave of feminist and queer classical retellings (Atwood, Barker, Haynes). What does Miller's prose style contribute to that tradition that the others do not, and where do you think the novel will sit in twenty years?

On the table

🍷 **Fig and honey crostini with soft cheese**

Figs and honey thread through Bronze Age Aegean tables and Miller's sensory descriptions of Greece

🍷 **Olives, almonds, and warm flatbread with olive oil**

A spare, Mediterranean board echoing the novel's coastal, sun-bleached world

🍷 **Lemon and thyme roasted chicken, served small-plate**

Understated, herbal, evocative of Thessalian hillsides without distracting from the conversation

To sip

🍷 **Assyrtiko or a dry Greek white**

A crisp, mineral wine from Santorini that suits the book's sea-light atmosphere

🍷 **Retsina, served in small pours**

An old, resinous Greek wine for guests who want to taste antiquity, however imperfectly

🍷 **Honey, lemon, and mint cordial over still water (no alcohol)**

A clean, non-alcoholic pour drawn from classical Greek flavors

Run of show

7:00 Arrival and pour

Greet guests with a small glass of Assyrtiko or the honey-mint cordial. Soft playlist underneath.

7:15 Passage reading

Invite each guest to read aloud the single sentence or paragraph they marked. No commentary yet, just the language.

7:35 Warm-up discussion

Move into the two warm-up questions while plates circulate.

8:00 Craft and tradition

Work through the theme questions on POV, prose, and Miller's place in the classical retelling tradition.

8:45 Deep dive and trivia interlude

Pose the two deeper questions, then break the intensity with a short round of trivia.

9:20 Scorecards and farewell

Fill scorecards aloud, hand out bookmarks, propose the next title.

HOST TIPS

- Ask guests in advance to bring one marked passage; the evening lives or dies on close reading.
- Keep food on side tables, not the discussion table. The vibe is conversation first, plates second.
- If talk drifts to plot recap, gently redirect with: 'How does she write that scene?'

Playlist

Spare, string-led, elegiac. Music that lets the prose breathe.

01 Experience - Ludovico Einaudi

03 Saltwater - Beach House

05 Spiegel im Spiegel - Arvo Part

07 Vladimir's Blues - Max Richter

02 On the Nature of Daylight - Max Richter

04 An Ending (Ascent) - Brian Eno

06 Avril 14th - Aphex Twin

08 Opus 23 - Dustin O'Halloran

Trivia

1. In what year was *The Song of Achilles* first published? (2011)
2. Which major UK literary prize did the novel win in 2012? (The Orange Prize for Fiction (now the Women's Prize))
3. Roughly how many years did Madeline Miller spend writing the novel? (About ten years)
4. What is Miller's academic background? (Classics; she studied and taught Latin and Ancient Greek)
5. Which ancient epic is the novel's primary source text? (Homer's *Iliad*)
6. What is the name of Miller's second novel, also drawn from Greek myth? (*Circe* (2018))
7. Who is the first-person narrator of *The Song of Achilles*? (Patroclus)
8. Who is Achilles's divine mother in the novel and in myth? (The sea-nymph Thetis)

Rate the book

Prose and Style

☆☆☆☆☆

Voice and POV

☆☆☆☆☆

Use of Source Material

☆☆☆☆☆

Emotional Resonance

☆☆☆☆☆

Staying Power

☆☆☆☆☆

One sentence I will carry with me: _____

A single word for Miller's prose: _____

Where this sits in the canon of myth retellings: _____

YOU'RE INVITED

An Evening with Patroclus and Achilles

Join us for a literary night devoted to Madeline Miller's *The Song of Achilles*. Bring a marked passage, an appetite for prose, and patience for beautiful sentences.



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