The Trojan War (summary adapted from www.stanford.edu)

The Trojan War has its roots in the marriage between Peleus and Thetis, a sea-goddess. Peleus and Thetis had not invited Eris, the goddess of discord, to their marriage and the outraged goddess stormed into the wedding banquet and threw a golden apple onto the table. The apple belonged to whomever was the fairest. Hera, Athena, and Aphrodite each reached for the apple. Zeus proclaimed that Paris, prince of Troy and thought to be the most beautiful man alive, would act as the judge. Hera promised him power, Athena promised him wealth, and Aphrodite promised the most beautiful woman in the world.

Paris chose Aphrodite, and she promised him that Helen, wife of Menelaus, would be his wife. Paris then prepared to set off for Sparta to capture Helen. In Sparta, Menelaus, husband of Helen, treated Paris as a royal guest. However, when Menelaus left Sparta to go to a funeral, Paris abducted Helen (who perhaps went willingly) and also carried off much of Menelaus' wealth.

Menelaus, however, was outraged to find that Paris had taken Helen. He wanted to fight to get her back but many Greeks did not want to go to war. Odysseus pretended to be insane to avoid going to war but this trick was uncovered by Palamedes. Achilles was sought after because the seer Calchas had stated that Troy would not be taken unless Achilles would fight.

The Greek fleet assembled, under Agamemnon's inspection, in Aulis. However, Agamemnon either killed one of Diana's sacred stags or made a careless boast. Either way, Diana was outraged and she calmed the seas so that the fleet could not take off.

The seer Calchas proclaimed that Iphigenia, daughter of Agamemnon, must be sacrificed before the fleet could set sail. Agamemnon complied and sacrificed his own daughter, and the Greek ships set off in search of Troy.

Odysseus, known for his eloquence, and Menelaus were sent as ambassadors to King Priam. They demanded Helen and the stolen treasure be returned. Priam refused, and Odysseus and Menelaus returned to the Greek ships with the announcement that war was inevitable.

The first nine years of the war consisted of both war in Troy and war against the neighboring regions. The Greeks realized that Troy was being supplied by its neighboring kingdoms, so Greeks were sent to defeat these areas.

The Greeks won many important battles and the Trojan hero Hector fell, and was even dragged through the city of Troy behind a war chariot. However, the Greeks could not break down the walls of Troy. Patroclus was killed and, soonafter, Achilles was killed by Paris.

Seeking to gain entrance into Troy, clever Odysseus (some say with the aid of Athena) ordered a large wooden horse to be built. Its insides were to be hollow so that soldiers could hide within it. Once the statue had been built by the artist Epeius, a number of the Greek warriors, along with Odysseus, climbed inside. The rest of the Greek fleet sailed away, so as to deceive the Trojans.

One man, Sinon, was left behind. When the Trojans came to marvel at the huge creation, Sinon pretended to be angry with the Greeks, stating that they had deserted him. He assured the Trojans that
the wooden horse was safe and would bring luck to the Trojans.

Only two people, Laocoon and Cassandra, spoke out against the horse, but they were ignored. The Trojans celebrated what they thought was their victory, and dragged the wooden horse into Troy.

That night, after most of Troy was asleep or in a drunken stupor, Sinon let the Greek warriors out from the horse, and they slaughtered the Trojans. Priam was killed as he huddled by Zeus' altar and Cassandra was pulled from the statue of Athena and raped. Aeneas, a Trojan prince, managed to escape the destruction of Troy, and Virgil's Aeneid tells of his flight from Troy. Menelaus, who had been determined to kill his faithless wife, was soon taken by Helen's beauty and seductiveness that he allowed her to live.

The surviving Trojan women were divided among the Greek men along with the other plunder. The Greeks then set sail for home, which, for some, proved as difficult and took as much time as the Trojan War itself (e.g., Odysseus’ 10 year journey home is told in Homer’s Odyssey).