About the story
The story of the Trojan Horse is one of the most powerful in Western literature, inspiring classic works by Virgil, Marlowe, Goethe and many more, and even giving a name to the “trojans” of contemporary technology. The doomed love of Helen, “the face that launched a thousand ships”, and the brilliant trick played by Odysseus to end the siege of Troy, have fascinated readers and listeners over thousands of years.

Beautiful Helen is married to the warrior-king Menelaus, but falls hopelessly for Paris, prince of the city of Troy, and is persuaded to elope with him. Enraged at his loss, Menelaus gathers an alliance of Greek kings and their armies to declare war on Troy. The Greeks attack, but cannot break through the city’s defences, and the resulting siege lasts for ten years. Finally Odysseus, King of Ithaca, comes up with a plan. The Greeks pretend to retreat, leaving behind a vast wooden statue of a horse, and one man who claims to have deserted the army and explains that it is a gift to the goddess Athene. The unsuspecting Trojans bring the horse inside the city walls, celebrating the end of the siege. That night, however, Odysseus and his men climb out of their hiding place, and open the city gates to the returning Greek army. The Trojans are soon defeated, and Helen is reluctantly reunited with Menelaus and in the end forgiven.

About the author
Nothing certain is known about Homer, if indeed he was a single author living at a specific time. However, the great epic poems attributed to him, the Iliad (about the Trojan War) and the Odyssey (about Odysseus’ journey home from the war), had an enormous influence on writers and artists through the ages. Modern scholarship dates them to around the eighth century BC, relating a mythical version of events around 400 years earlier, and they were undoubtedly passed on orally, in the Classical storytelling tradition, long before they were written down.

For centuries, Troy was not thought to be a real place. However, in 1870 the German archaeologist Heinrich Schliemann sensationally discovered what is now generally accepted as being the site of the city.

Key words
Your students might not be familiar with some of these words in the story.

- runaway
- p16 wild
- [meaning “crazy”]
- p24 nearby
- p25 gasped
- lads
- p33 trap door
- p38 crashed
- p39 stole
- p40 treasure
- p11 stage
- p14 sawed
- p26 gazed
- wonder
- scurried
- silently
- wherever
- p15 planks
- p28 hauled
- guards
- p34 Right
- p41 rushed
- p42 stuck
- p43 escape
- p44 captured
- p45 vanished
- p46 mission
- p47 launched
Before reading
If you can, search in advance for pictures related to Ancient Greece: monuments, statues, artefacts. You can find a useful introduction to Greek life and culture in Usborne Beginners: Ancient Greeks.

Start by showing students the book’s cover. Is anyone familiar with the story? Do they know any of the main characters? [They might say Helen, Odysseus]. What are these characters famous for? [Beauty, cunning, an epic journey.] Does anyone know the name of the original author, or his famous story poems? When were they written, at the time of what ancient civilization? What do we know about Ancient Greece? Show students your pictures; you might also touch on Greek myth and the characters of the Greek gods.

Reading or listening
You can listen to the story on CD or read it aloud to the students, take turns to read or read together silently. Each double page spread in the book is one track on the CD, so that you can pause between tracks or repeat tracks if your students need it. The first reading is in a British English accent, and it is followed by an American English reading. The words are exactly the same. After the story, there is a short selection of key phrases that can be used for pronunciation practice.

During reading: you might like to ask some of these questions.

| p4 | Does Helen look happy to be Menelaus’ wife? | p24 | Why do Menelaus and the rest of the army sail out of sight? What do they want the Trojans to think? |
| p5 | What’s Helen doing here? Can you guess what she thinks of Paris? | p30-31 | Why are the Trojans so happy? |
| p11 | Odysseus is riding in... what? [A chariot] | p33 | How do you think the Greeks are feeling? [Probably excited... but also uncomfortable after a day inside the horse] |
| p13 | What weapons are the soldiers using? [Swords, spears, bows and arrows.] What’s stopping them from getting into Troy? | p38 | How is it so easy now for the Greeks to attack? Were the Trojans prepared to fight? |
| p18 | Does this look like hard work? What makes it easier to build with wood today? [Machine powered tools] | p40 | Why do you think Helen is feeling? |
| p24 | out of sight | p44 | How do you think Helen is feeling? |
| p33 | not a sound | p45 | Would you stay angry with Helen, or would you be glad to have her back and go home? |

After reading
Why do you think this is one of the world’s most popular stories? Is it partly because it has so many different elements – a love story, a war story, a story of a clever trick? Which element did you like best?

Helen is one of the most important characters – but we never know what she thinks or says. Go through the story again, and find places where you could add thought or speech bubbles (see pp4, 5, 6; the celebrations on pp30-31; the Greek attack and the death of Paris on pp40-42; 43, 44, 45, 46).

Imagine the Greeks returning home after ten years at war. What kinds of things do you think will have changed while they were away?