**Name: KEY (Teacher’s Copy)**

**Epic.** An **extended narrative poem** recounting **actions**, **travels**, **adventures**, and **heroic episodes** and written in a **high style** (with ennobled diction, for example). It may be written in **hexameter verse**, and it may have twelve books or twenty four books. Characteristics of the classical epic include these:

* The main character or **protagonist** is heroically **larger than life**, often the source and subject of **legend** or a **national hero**
* The deeds of the hero are presented without favoritism, revealing his **failings** as well as his **virtues**
* The action, often in **battle**, reveals the **more-than-human strength** of the heroes as they engage in acts of heroism and courage
* The setting covers several **nations**, the **whole world**, or even the **universe**
* The episodes, even though they may be fictional, provide an **explanation** for some of the **circumstances** or **events** in the **history** of a nation or people
* The **gods** and lesser divinities play an active role in the outcome of actions
* All of the various adventures form an organic **whole**, where each event relates in some way to the central **theme**

Typical in epics is a set of conventions (or epic machinery). Among them are these:

* Poem begins with a **statement** of the **theme** ("Arms and the man I sing")
* **Invocation** to the **muse** or other **deity** ("Sing, goddess, of the wrath of Achilles")
* Story begins **in medias res** (**in the middle of things**)
* Catalogs (of **participants on each side**, ships, sacrifices)
* **Histories** and **descriptions** of **significant items** (who made a sword or shield, how it was decorated, who owned it from generation to generation)
* **Epic simile** (a **long simile** where the **image** becomes an object of **art** in its own right as well as serving to clarify the **subject**).
* Frequent use of **epithets** ("Aeneas the true"; "rosy-fingered Dawn"; "tall-masted ship")
* Use of **patronymics** (calling son by father's name): "Anchises' son"
* Long, **formal speeches** by important characters
* Journey to the **underworld**
* Use of the number **three** (attempts are made three times, etc.)
* Previous **episodes** in the story are later **recounted**

Examples:

* **Homer**, *Iliad*
* Homer, ***Odyssey***
* **Milton**, *Paradise Lost*