



# Halloween (All-Hallows-Eve)

## Sunset Oct. 31 to Sunset Nov. 1

- Roots: Gaelic (Ireland, Scotland) pagan festival of Samhain (sau:in) and the Christian holy day of All Saints.
- Old Irish “summer’s end,” the end of the lighter half of the year and the beginning of “the darker half.”
- Festival of the dead. Ancient Gaels: The border between this world and the otherworld became thin on Samhain, allowing spirits, both harmless and harmful, to pass through.

# Samhain

- Some animals are being slaughtered and plants are dying.
- **Bonfires:** People and livestock walk between them as a cleansing ritual; **bones of slaughtered animals** are cast into the flames.
- **Costumes and masks** are worn to copy the spirits or placate them.
- **Young men with masked**, veiled or blackened faces, dressed in white.
- *Shamhnag*—**turnips** which were hollowed out and carved with faces to make lanterns—were also used to ward off harmful spirits.

# Samhain 2

- Was also called **Feile Moingfhinne** (meaning “festival of Mongfhionn,” a goddess of the pagan Irish worshipped on Samhain).
- In **medieval Ireland**, a principal festival celebrated with a great assembly at the royal court in Tara, lasting for three days.
- **Places are set for the dead** at the Samhain feast and stories and tales of the dead are told of the ancestors.
- Guishers—men in disguise, were prevalent in 16<sup>th</sup> century.
- **Children going door to door “guising” in costumes and masks carrying turnip lanterns and offering entertainment in return for food or coins was traditional.**

# Samhain 3

- Divination is a common folkloric practice that has survived in rural areas.
- The most common uses were to **determine the identity of one's future spouse**, the location of one's future home and how many children a person might have.
- **Apples were peeled, the peel tossed over the shoulder**, and its shape examined to see if it formed the first letter of the future spouse's name.
- Neopagan Wiccans celebrate one of their most important of four "greater Sabbats" as part of the Wiccan Wheel of the Year. A total of eight Sabbats are celebrated.
- **It is the festival of darkness**, which is balanced at the opposite point of the wheel by the spring festival of Beltane, which Wiccans celebrate as a festival of light and fertility.







# All Saints' Day, Nov. 1

- Halloween is a largely secular celebration, but some religions have expressed strong feelings given the tie to the November All Saints' Day.
- In early **medieval times All Saints' Day** occurred May 13, going back in great antiquity to the pagan Feast of Lemures.
- At Lemures malevolent and restless spirits of the dead were propitiated by the ancient Romans with offerings of beans.
- It was a time to **appease or expel the evil spirits** by walking barefoot in or around the house, throwing **black beans, clashing bronze pots** and repeating the chant "Ghosts of my fathers and ancestors be gone" nine times.

# Gilgamesh

- Instructors Note: Readings in the Slides refer to *Gilgamesh: A New English Version*. Translator Stephen Mitchell. 2004 The Free Press: A Division of Simon and Schuster. ISBN-13978-0-7432-6169-2(Pbk)



# Gilgamesh

## The Oldest Story in the World



# Gilgamesh

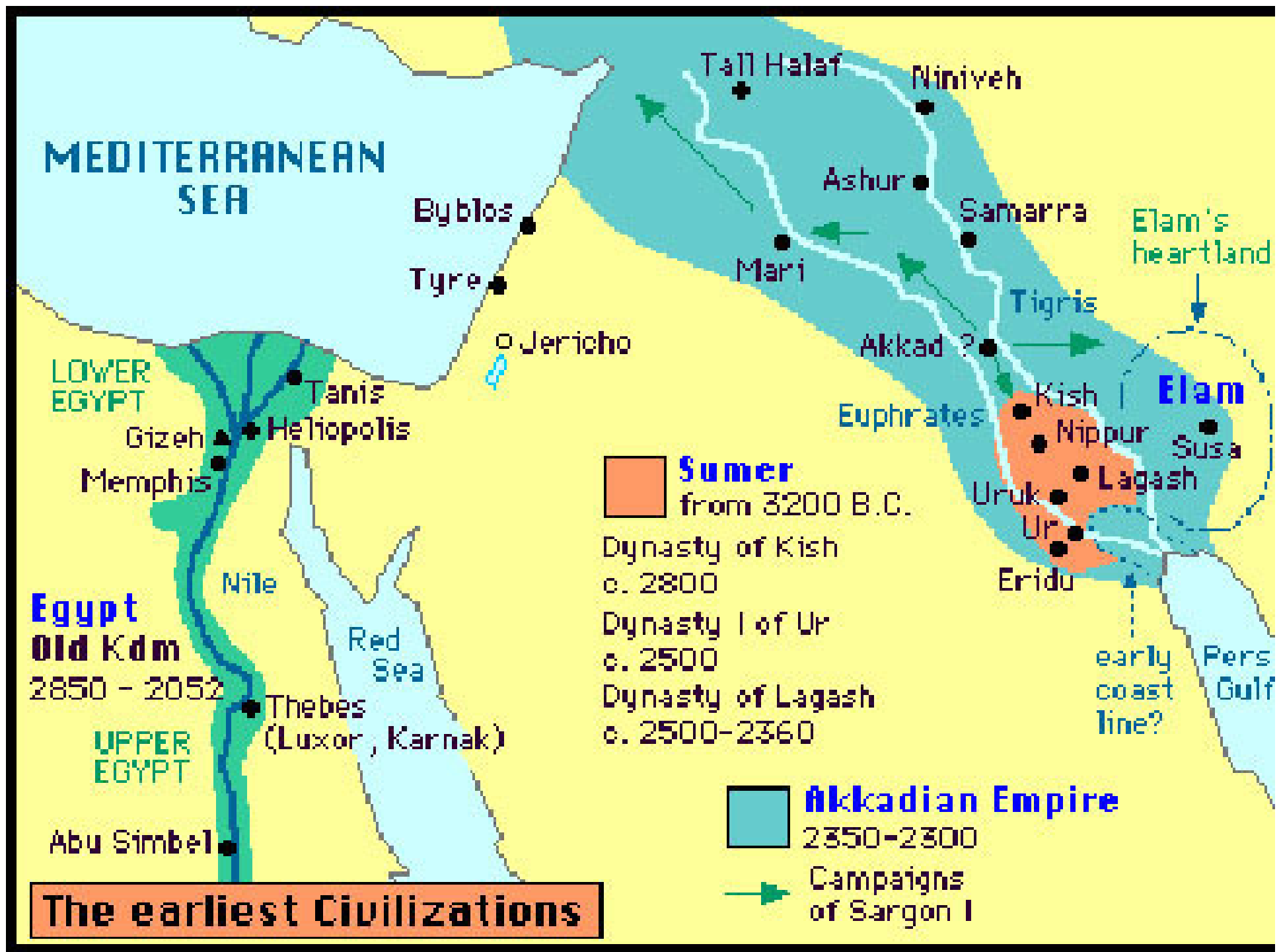
- The Epic of Gilgamesh is an **ancient poem** from Mesopotamia (present day Iraq) and is **among the earliest known works of literature**. It is a **thousand years older than the *Iliad* or the *Bible***.
- It likely originated as a **series of Sumerian legends and poems** about the hero king, which were fashioned into a longer Akkadian epic much later.
- The most complete version existing today is preserved on 12 clay tablets from the library collection of 7<sup>th</sup> century BCE Assyrian king Ashurbanipal.
- Gilgamesh was probably a real ruler in the late Early Dynastic II period (ca. 27<sup>th</sup> century BCE).

# Uruk

- Uruk was an ancient city of Sumer and later Babylonia. It played a leading role in the early urbanization of Sumer in the mid 4<sup>th</sup> millennium BCE.
- The community was the main force of urbanization during the Uruk period (4000—3200 BCE). This period of 800 years saw a shift from small, agricultural villages to a **larger urban center** with a full time bureaucracy, military and stratified society.
- Uruk was located in the alluvial plain area of southern Mesopotamia. Through the gradual and eventual domestication of native grains from the **Zagros foothills** and extensive **irrigation techniques**, the area supported a vast variety of edible vegetation.









# Uruk 2

- Uruk's **agricultural surplus** and large population base facilitated processes such as **trade**, specialization of crafts and the **evolution of writing**.
- Evidence from excavations such as extensive **pottery** and the earliest known tablets of **writing** support these events.
- At its height c. 2900 BCE, Uruk probably had **50,000 to 80,000 residents** living in four square miles of walled area, the **largest city in the world at the time**.
- The semi-mythical king or king-priest Gilgamesh, according to the chronology presented in the Sumerian king list, ruled Uruk in the 27<sup>th</sup> century BCE.

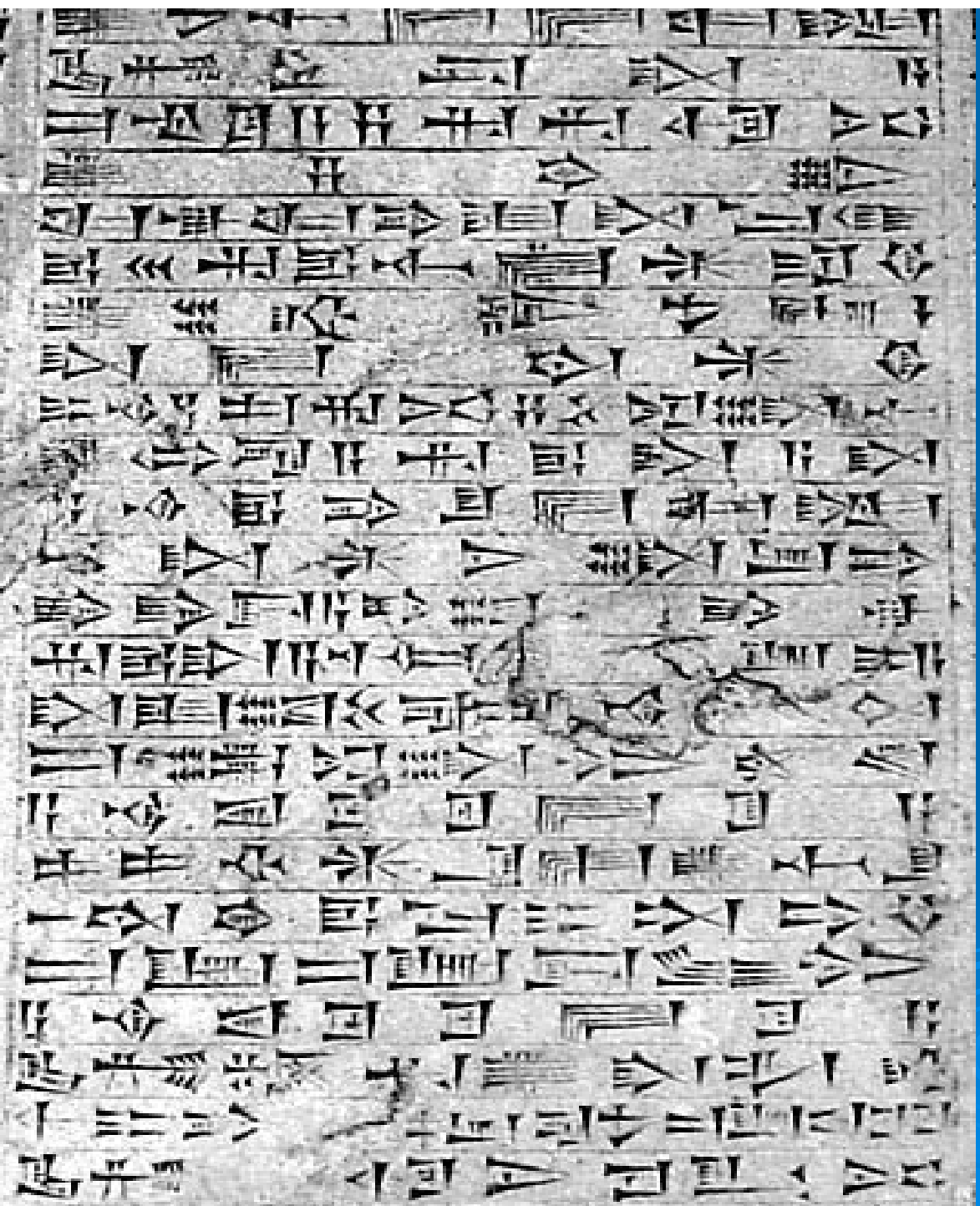




# Cuneiform Script

- The earliest known writing system in the world.
- **Cuneiform writing** emerged in the Sumerian civilization of southern Iraq around **34<sup>th</sup> century BCE** during the middle Uruk period, beginning as a pictographic system of writing.
- Clay tokens had been used for some form of record-keeping in Mesopotamia since perhaps as early as c. 8,000 BCE, according to some estimates.
- Cuneiform documents were written on clay tablets, by means of a **reed stylus**.





# Epic Poetry, Ancient Mesopotamia

- Epic poetry is a lengthy narrative poem concerning details of heroic deeds and events significant to a culture or nation.
- **Oral poetry** can qualify and makes it feasible to remember and pass along mythologies and stories from generation to generation.
- **Earliest epic poems** of the 20<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> century BCE include the ***Epic of Gilgamesh, Atrahasis and Enuma Elish*** (all Mesopotamian or Babylonian) covering ancient gods, creation, great floods and history/mythology.
- Many scholars believe that the **flood myth** was added to **Tablet XI** in the “standard version” of the Gilgamesh epic by the editor who utilized the flood story from the epic of **Atrahasis**.



# Gilgamesh Tablets

- The **earliest Sumerian Gilgamesh poems** are now considered to be **distinct stories** rather than constituting a single epic. They date from the Third Dynasty of Ur (**2150-2000 BCE**).
- The earliest Akkadian versions of Gilgamesh are dated to the early 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium, most likely in the 18<sup>th</sup> or 17<sup>th</sup> century BCE, when one or more scholars used existing library material to form the epic. The “**standard**” **Akkaidian version** consisting of **12 tablets** was edited by **Sin-liqe-unninni** sometime between **1300 and 1000 BCE**.
- As of now, with 73 fragments discovered, slightly fewer than **2,000 of the 3,000 lines** of the original text exist in readable, continuous form; the rest are damaged or missing, and there are many gaps in the sections that survived.
- The tablets were found in the ruins of the **library of Ashurbanipal**, last great king of the Neo-Assyrian Empire, 668 – ca. 627 BCE in Nineveh. Ashurbanipal established the first systematically organized library in the ancient Middle East.





# Gilgamesh: The Story

- The story revolves around a relationship between **Gilgamesh** and his close companion, **Enkidu**.
- Enkidu is a wild man created by the gods as Gilgamesh's equal to distract him from oppressing the citizens of Uruk.
- Together they undertake **dangerous quests** that incur the displeasure of the gods.
- First, they journey to the **Cedar Mountain to defeat Humbaba**, its monstrous guardian.
- Later they kill the **Bull of Heaven** that the goddess Ishtar has sent to punish Gilgamesh for spurning her advances.



# Gilgamesh: The Story 2

- The latter part of the epic focuses on Gilgamesh's distressed reaction to **Enkidu's death**, which takes the form of a **quest for immortality**.
- Gilgamesh attempts to learn the **secret of eternal life** by undertaking a long and perilous journey to meet the immortal flood hero Utnapishtim.
- Ultimately the poignant words addressed to Gilgamesh in the midst of his quest foreshadow the end result: "**That life that you are seeking you will never find**. When the gods created man they allocated to him death, but eternal life they retained for their own keeping."
- Gilgamesh, however, was celebrated by posterity for his building achievements, and for bringing back long-lost cultic knowledge to Uruk as a result of his meeting with Utnapishtim.

# Stephen Mitchell on the Oldest Story in the World

- I can recommend **the Stephen Mitchell version of *Gilgamesh: A New English Version***, which has an extensive and helpful introduction, detailed explanatory notes and very readable verse that keeps fairly close to the literal meaning but adapts when necessary to help the modern reader.
- Mitchell comments “Part of the fascination of *Gilgamesh* is that, like any great work of literature, **it has much to tell us about ourselves.**”
- In giving **voice to grief and the fear of death**, perhaps more powerfully than any book written after it, in portraying love and vulnerability and the quest for wisdom, it has become a personal testimony for millions of readers in dozens of languages.
- But it also has a **particular relevance in today’s world** with its **polarized fundamentalism**, each side fervently believing in its own righteousness, **each on a crusade, or jihad, against what it perceives as an evil enemy.**”

# Stephen Mitchell on the Oldest Story in the World 2

- “The hero of this epic is an antihero, a superman (a superpower, one might say) who doesn’t know the difference between **strength and arrogance** (US and Iraq, my note).”
- By preemptively attacking a monster he brings on himself a disaster that can only be overcome by an agonizing journey, a quest that results in wisdom by proving its own futility.
- The epic has **extraordinary sophisticated moral intelligence**. In its emphasis on balance and in its **refusal to side with either hero or monster**, it leads us to **question our dangerous certainties about good and evil.**”
- “Gilgamesh is a work that in the **intensity of its imagination stands beside the great stories of *Homer* and the *Bible*.**”

# Prologue

- The prologue written by “**Sin-liqe-unninni**” tells of a hero’s journey with its huge uninhibited mythic presences moving through a landscape of dream.
- Gilgamesh shows how a man becomes civilized, how he learns to rule himself and therefore his people and to act with temperance, wisdom and piety.
- READING PAGE 69-70
- The poem begins with the city and ends with it.







# Book I

- Surpassing all kings, powerful and tall...
- Two thirds divine, one third human
- **But to begin with, he is manic and a tyrant**
- He **oppresses young men**, perhaps with forced labor or military service
- **Oppresses the young women**, perhaps with his ravenous sexual appetite
- Because he is an **absolute monarch**, no one dares to criticize him
- **Gilgamesh**, the man of unsurpassable courage and inexhaustible energy, has become a **monster of selfishness.**

# Book I Continued

- The people call out to heaven and their cry is heard.
- Anu, father of the gods, asks the great mother goddess Aruru to reenact her first creation of human beings:

“Now go and create a double for Gilgamesh, his second self,  
a man who equals his strength and courage,  
a man who equals his stormy heart,  
Create a new hero, let them balance each other  
perfectly, so that Uruk has peace.”

- Thus begins—a thousand years before Achilles and Patroclus, or David and Jonathan—**the first great friendship in literature.**



# Enkidu

- Where Gilgamesh is arrogant, Enkidu is childlike; where Gilgamesh is violent, Enkidu is peaceful, a naked herbivore among the herds.
- He is the original animal activist, setting his animal friends free from human pits and traps.
- The trapper complains to Gilgamesh about the wild man, Enkidu. Gilgamesh tells the trapper to “Go to the temple of Ishtar,” (goddess of fertility, love, war and sex).
- READING PAGE 76 AND 77



# Shamhat

- Shamhat, Ishtar's priestess, leads Enkidu into the glories of sexuality, the intimate understanding of what a woman is and self-awareness as a human being.
- There is no serpent in this garden, no anxious deity announcing prohibitions and punishments.

# Enkidu 2

- In knowing Shamhat sexually, his mind has been enlarged, he has begun to know himself.
- He can understand human language; Shamhat gives him human clothing, teaches him to eat human food, acts as a patient, loving mother and guides him through rites of passage.
- Reading 80 and 81

# Book II

- Enkidu and Shamhat travel to Uruk.
- **Enkidu's heart sang** with joy and he became fully human. **He had his hair cut.**
- Enkidu meets a man who was on his way to a wedding.
- The man indicates the priest will bless the young couple, but Enkidu learns it is **Gilgamesh, king of the great-walled city Uruk** who **mates first with the lawful wife**. This is the order the gods have decreed.
- **Enkidu's face went pale with anger. I will challenge him!**
- He stood like a boulder at the door of the bride. **Gilgamesh and Enkidu fought like wild bulls**, doorposts trembled, they careened through the streets.

# Book II continued

- Finally Gilgamesh threw the wild man and with his right knee pinned him to the ground. Gilgamesh's anger left him.
- Enkidu said to Gilgamesh: "Your mother, the goddess Ninsun, made you stronger and braver than any mortal. You are destined to rule over men."

*They embraced and kissed. They held hands like brothers.  
They walked side by side. They became true friends.*

- **Gilgamesh** knows that **what he dreamed has come true.**
- **The dear friend and mighty hero has appeared**, the longed for companion of his heart, **the man who will stand at his side through the greatest dangers.**

# Books III to V

- Time passed quickly.
- Gilgamesh and Enkidu became true friends.
- Uruk can have peace. The sons can return to their fathers, the young women can return to their mothers. For the time being, all's right with the world.
- Out of the blue, Gilgamesh says

**“Now we must travel to the Cedar Forest,  
where the fierce monster Humbaba lives.  
We must kill him and drive evil from the world.”**





# Books III to V

- Thus begins the fatal adventure that provides the shape for the rest of the epic: an **ascent to an ambiguous victory**, followed by a **plunge into death, unassuageable grief, and the futile search for immortality**.
- We do not know the reason for the preemptive attack.
- Ancient readers, like many contemporary Americans, would have considered it to be unquestionably heroic.
- Read Page 93 and 94
- But the poem leaves us with no moral certainties or solid ground to stand on.



# Fame and Legacy

- **The desire for fame** is at the heart of the ancient heroic traditions, Babylonian, Greek, Germanic. It is one of the nobler delusions, and it can produce great art—and great havoc.
- Human nature hasn't changed much from Gilgamesh—or Enkidu to (my note) George B. and his confidant from the Wyoming cave.
- The poet makes it impossible to see Humbaba as a threat to the security of Uruk or as part of any “axis of evil.”
- Another possible motivation comes from Ninsun, Gilgamesh's mother. She thinks that Shamash, the sun god, god of justice and Gilgamesh's special protector, has put this decision to go to the Cedar Forest into his head.

# Fame and Legacy 2

- Mitchell notes **Humbaba may be defending the Cedar Forest**, the ecosystem, which may not be such a bad thing.
- It is all too easy to see ourselves fighting on the side of the gods and to justify preemptive attacks.
- **Projecting evil onto the world makes me unassailably right**—a position as dangerous in politics as in marriage.
- Ninsun mentions Gilgamesh's "**restless heart.**" What Pascal, 17<sup>th</sup> century French mathematician and philosopher, called the cause of all human misery: **The inability to sit contentedly alone in a room.**

# Fame and Legacy 3

- Book III is in debate form: between Gilgamesh and Enkidu, then between Gilgamesh and the elders of Uruk. It is a debate between bravery (or foolhardiness) and prudence. Gilgamesh decrees. **The heroes depart.**
- Book IV. They walk east, in three-day marches. It is no disgrace to feel fear. Gilgamesh is frozen in his tracks but Enkidu urges him not to retreat and **they walk on to the monster's den** in the Cedar Forest..
- Book V. The battle is over quickly. Humbaba is about to overwhelm the two heroes.
- Shamash, the sun god, sends mighty winds that pin Humbaba down and paralyze him. Shamash wants Humbaba defeated but not destroyed.

# Fame and Legacy 3

- **Humbaba begs both heroes for mercy.** Gilgamesh hesitates; Enkidu has no doubts, even though he is aware that killing Humbaba will enrage not only Enlil, chief deity, Lord of the Open, Lord of the Wind, but their own protector Shamash as well.
- Endiku said:

“Dear friend, quickly  
before another moment goes by,  
kill Humbaba, don’t listen to his words,  
don’t hesitate, slaughter him, slit his throat,  
before the great god Enlil can stop us,  
before the great gods can get enraged,  
Enlil in Nipper, Shamash in Larsa,  
Establish your fame, so that forever  
men will speak of brave Gilgamesh,  
who killed Humbaba in the Cedar Forest.”



# Fame and Legacy 4

- Enkidu is morally responsible for persuading his friend not to spare the monster's life; therefore his own life becomes forfeit.
- When Gilgamesh kills Humbaba, the poet says, **“a gentle rain falls unto the mountains, as if the heavens themselves are weeping for the consequences of that act.”**

# Book VI

- Book VI is a separable episode that could be omitted without any loss of continuity. It is a comic interlude, vulgar, high-spirited, irreverent and rambunctious, letting loose energies but with twists and some sense of **put-downs of the feminine** that seems out of context.
- Almost all the female characters in *Gilgamesh* are portrayed as admirable: intelligent, generous, compassionate. The one exception is Ishtar, goddess of love and patron deity of Uruk, known in Mesopotamian culture as Inanna, the Queen of Heaven.
- She is rejected, insulted, threatened and humiliated by both Gilgamesh and Enkidu. This is surprising in a poem that mentions her Eanna Temple in Uruk with reverence and makes one of her priestesses, Shamhat, a central character in the initial drama.

# Ishtar

- But there is another side. Ishtar is also the goddess of war, and she can be selfish, arbitrary and brutal.
- We just do not know why the abusive portrayal of our heroes toward Ishtar. Is it symptomatic of a religious movement among first the Sumerians and later the Babylonians to displace her with a male deity?
- Why the metaphorical insults, the catalogue of several black-widow affairs in which she turned against her lover and harmed him?
- Is Gilgamesh's response a frightened male reaction to a woman who takes the sexual initiative?

# Ishtar

- Is Ishtar a murderous spoiled brat, exploding with tears of rage and frustration and throwing a tantrum until Anu lends her the Bull of Heaven to kill Gilgamesh and destroy his palace?
- The Bull of Heaven is the constellation we call Taurus.
- Gilgamesh and Enkidu easily kill the Bull of Heaven.
- Read Page 38, 39 40
- Enkidu rips off one of the Bull's thighs and flings it in Ishtar's face; she has no one to avenge her.



# Book VII

## Death and Departure

- Enkidu dream one, they have offended the gods, one must die.
- Read Page 141-142
- Enkidu dream two, how Mesopotamians imagine the dead.
- Read Page 143-144
- Enkidu curses the trapper, curses Shamhat for taking him out of the wilderness; (It never occurs to him to curse Gilgamesh as well, though this was Gilgamesh's idea).



# Book VII: Death

- Shamash, the sun god, provides Enkidu with a more balanced view that calms his “raging heart.”
- Civilization, the god points out, has been just as much a paradise for Enkidu as the wilderness was. And wasn't it Shamhat who brought Enkidu the greatest joy of all, his friendship with Gilgamesh?
- Enkidu acknowledges this and turns his curse into a blessing.
- After 12 days of agony, Enkidu dies and leaves Gilgamesh alone with his grief.
- One might say his death was caused by Gilgamesh's monster-hunting, but more accurately, Enkidu caused his own death by insisting that Gilgamesh kill Humbaba; if they had let the monster live all would have been well. Neither recognized this, the pathos of the situation.

# Book VIII Grief

## ➤ Gilgamesh's lament:

- “My beloved friend is dead, he is dead, my beloved brother is dead, I will mourn as long as I breathe, I will sob for him like a woman who has lost her only child.
- Beloved friend, swift stallion, wild deer, leopard ranging in the wilderness— together we crossed the mountains, together we slaughtered the Bull of Heaven, we killed Humbaba, who guarded the Cedar Forest.”

## ➤ Gilgamesh as a great warrior has seen and caused many deaths. But now for the first time, death is an intimate reality, and he can barely recognize it.

# Gilgamesh and Grief

- “O Enkidu, what is this sleep that has seized you, that has darkened your face and stopped your breath?”
- He reacts like a young child, or even an animal sniffing at the body of its mate, bewildered. He half-expects Enkidu to answer.
- Finally, it's over. He goes through all the **necessary rituals** to ensure that the gods of the underworld will welcome Enkidu and help him to “**be peaceful and not sick at heart.**”
- This is poor comfort. So abandoning all his privileges and responsibilities, Gilgamesh **puts on an animal skin and leaves the city.** He feels compelled, like Buddha, to search for the secret of life and death.

# Book IX Gilgamesh Searching

- Fear is the reverse of the cool warrior ethos. **“Our days are few in number,” Gilgamesh had said, imperturbably. “Why be afraid then, / since sooner or later death must come?”** Why indeed?
- Love has changed everything; it has made Gilgamesh absolutely vulnerable. He thought he knew that only the gods live forever.
- **“Must I die too?”**
- Gilgamesh wants **to find one exception to the rule of mortality**, his ancestor Utnapishtim, who was granted eternal life and dwells somewhere at the edge of the eastern world. There may be a second exception.
- A long run through 12 hours of darkness.

# Book X Searching

- At the edge of the ocean, the tavern keeper, Shiduri: a matron, possibly a goddess, who brews beer in a vat, has a golden pot stand.
- Gilgamesh cries out, Read Page 167-168
- Shiduri gives advice Read 168-169
- She sends him on his way to Utnapishtim across the Waters of Death.
- He is standing face to face with the man who is his last hope. The old and wise man listens and says:
- Read Page 178-179

# XI. When there is no way out, you just follow the way in front of you

- Gilgamesh does slay the monster, but that, it turns out, is a violation of the divine order of things and results in the death of his beloved friend.
- The wise man says Gilgamesh should realize how fortunate he is, that **life is short and death is final. Accept things as they are.**
- But we can't accept things as they are, so long as we think things should be different.
- But author Mitchell suggests, "There is **no consolation in platitudes**, and for Utnapishtim to tell Gilgamesh that he is going to die seems as tactless as it was for St. Paul to tell the Thessalonians that they were not going to die."



# When there is no way out 2

- Gilgamesh asks how did Utnapishtim overcome death and become immortal?
- Utnapishtim tells him about the great flood.
- The flood story postpones the answer to the question on immortality, but also gives us a harrowing picture of the cost of Utnapishtim's eternal life.
- If you had to experience all that terror, and the death of almost every living thing in order to be granted **immortality, would it seem worth it?**

# When there is no way out 3

- Utnapishtim is gruff, almost taunting, in the conclusion to his speech:

“Now then, Gilgamesh, who will assemble the gods for your sake?

Who will convince them to grant you the eternal life you seek?”

- Stephen Mitchell: The more Utnapishtim reveals of his crankiness and cynicism, **the less attractive immortality becomes.**

# When there is no way out 4

- Utnapishtim proposes a test. If Gilgamesh can overcome sleep for seven days—sleep being the likeness of death—perhaps he will be able to overcome death, too. But Utnapishtim knows from the start that Gilgamesh, “**worn out and ready to collapse**,” will fail the test and indeed he does.
  - Gilgamesh sat there, with his chin on his knees, and **sleep overcame him, as it does all men**.
- Gilgamesh recognizes his failure on the test.
  - “What shall I do, where shall I go now?  
Death has caught me, it lurks in my bedroom,  
and everywhere I look, everywhere I turn,  
there is only death?”

# When there is no way out 5

- After making sure Gilgamesh is washed and anointed and given royal robes, Utnapishtim sends him on his way to Uruk.
- He is face to face with the realization that **there is no immortality and no return to youth**: a realization that can result in either despair or freedom. **When there is no way out, you just follow the way in front of you.**
- He returns to Uruk, **realizes how beautiful the city is** and the poem ends where it began.

# A Return to the Beginning

- The opening lines of the poem point us: It is clear that Gilgamesh has completed the final stage of the archetypal hero's journey, in which the hero gives new life to his community, returning to them with the gifts he has discovered on his adventure.

“He brought back the ancient forgotten rites,  
restoring the temples that the Flood had destroyed  
renewing the statutes and the sacraments  
for the welfare of the people and the sacred land.”

# A Return to the Beginning

- We know that for the first time he is acting as a responsible, compassionate king, a benefactor to his people and their descendents.
- Out of the depths, somehow Gilgamesh has managed to “close the gates of sorrow;” he has learned to rule himself and his city without violence, selfishness or the compulsions of restless heart.
- **Gilgamesh has become wise.**
- He has absorbed the deeper wisdom of the poem’s narrative voice, a voice that is impartial, humorous, civilized, sexual, irreverent, skeptical of moral absolutes, delighted with the things of this world and supremely confident in the power of its own language.