Stanford University Undergraduate Application
Question & Answer:

Sharing intellectual interest is an important aspect of university life. Describe an experience, book, class, project, or idea that you find intellectually exciting and explain why.

A story my Latin teacher told two years ago, about the remarkable trust and persistence of a German banker, who did the impossible by finding the ancient city of Troy, struck a chord with me. Heinrich Schliemann was a businessman who read Homer's *Odyssey* and fell in love. Schliemann believed, contrary to the assertion that it was a fairy tale, that *The Odyssey* was a true story, albeit one filled with romantic exaggeration. He believed that the high citadels of Troy once stood and he used Homer's rich description to find their ancient location on the coast of Turkey. There, he established a dig and found the ruins of the "imagined" city. Schliemann's discovery stimulated a great deal of intellectual discussion. Many scholars who previously believed that the mysterious Homer had imagined every detail of the epic adventure were now uncertain; it led many to believe that at least some of *The Odyssey* was true. The reality of Troy and the fact that archaeological evidence suggested that the city had been sacked and burned contributed further to the wave of questions about the Trojan War. Was *The Odyssey* in fact a history, exaggerated, which was based on fact?

Schliemann was not an expert in the classics. He read *The Odyssey* and intuitively felt that the Trojan War was more than a myth. It is amazing to me that one man, believing in a "fairy tale," encouraged so many analytical questions, and opened a previously unknown door on the ancient world.