

### Discussion Questions

- Why does King Aeson choose Chiron as his child's mentor?
- List the magical help that Jason receives before and during his quest. Why is he favored by the Olympian gods?
- How does Jason obtain a crew for the Argo? Why do you think so many people were willing to join him on an impossible quest?
- Would Jason have been able to accomplish his quest without the help from Medea? Discuss your answers.
- What purpose would stories about a hero's quest like this one serve the ancient Greeks?

### Follow-up Activities

- Have students read a different version of Jason's adventures. Use [www.mythweb.com](http://www.mythweb.com) for an animated retelling. Chart similarities and differences between the versions.
- Jason is characteristically portrayed as a mortal hero fighting and outwitting unbelievable creatures and events. He does many of these acts with the help of gods and goddesses. Put your students in Jason's role. They have to tackle one of Jason's adventures without the help from Mt. Olympus. Have students write a "how-to" story or set of instructions to accomplish one of Jason's adventures.
- Since myths were part of the oral tradition, most of them make for great storytelling opportunities. Students can give an oral rendition of *Jason & the Golden Fleece* or one of their favorite myths.
- It is essential for a Greek hero to have a shield and helmet for protection during his quest. Research symbolic crests, animals and objects associated with Greek heroes and the gods of Mt. Olympus. Have your students design their own shields and helmets.
- Place your students in charge of building and supplying the Argo. What special features would be included on this wooden ship to aid in the success of Jason's quest? What supplies would be stocked on the ship? What would these heroes need as they face these monsters of Greek legend? Have students share their ship plans and lists of supplies.
- Have students use print and electronic sources to research ancient Greek monsters like the unsleeping dragon that guards the Golden Fleece or the Harpies that plague Phineus. What are the strengths and weaknesses of each of these monsters? Have students create their own monsters giving details of their habitats, behavior, strengths and weaknesses. Use [www.clarkson.edu/~maliszpj/LF310/main.html](http://www.clarkson.edu/~maliszpj/LF310/main.html) to learn about monsters and their importance in Greek mythology.

### Suggested Internet Resources

Periodically, Internet Resources are updated on our Web site at [www.LibraryVideo.com](http://www.LibraryVideo.com)

- [www.mcli.dist.maricopa.edu/smc/journey](http://www.mcli.dist.maricopa.edu/smc/journey)  
This site allows you to create your own heroic adventure and explore classic mythological story structure.
- [www.bulfinch.org/fables/bull17.html](http://www.bulfinch.org/fables/bull17.html)  
Read the classic tales of Greek mythology, descriptions of individual heroes and monsters, and even the crew list of heroes aboard the Argonaut.
- [www.pantheon.org](http://www.pantheon.org)  
"Encyclopedia Mythica" supplies definitions, images, and pronunciation guides for gods and heroes.

### Suggested Print Resources

- D'Aulaire, Ingri and Edgar Parin D'Aulaire. *Ingri and Edgar Parin D'Aulaire's Book of Greek Myths*. Doubleday, Garden City, NY; 1962. One of the best-loved classical collections of Greek mythology.
- January, Brendan. *The New York Public Library Amazing Mythology: A Book of Answers for Kids*. Wiley, John & Sons, Inc., New York, NY; 2000.
- Yolen, Jane and Robert Harris. *Jason and the Gorgon's Blood*. HarperCollins, New York, NY 2004. A young Jason leads a quest to save his kingdom.

#### TEACHER'S GUIDE

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| • THE GODS OF OLYMPUS       | • PERSEUS & MEDUSA       |
| • JASON & THE GOLDEN FLEECE | • THESEUS & THE MINOTAUR |
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## JASON & THE GOLDEN FLEECE

### Grades 4–8

Thousands of years ago, the ancient Greeks created a galaxy of myths to explain the mysteries and complexities of the world around them — the seasons, stars and planets, human society, war and peace, feast and famine, good luck and bad — even the creation of the world itself. They believed gods and goddesses, each with special powers, controlled and protected all humans. Many colorful stories about heroes, gods and monsters were memorized and sung by traveling poets long before they were ever written down. As they were passed down from generation to generation, aspects of the stories sometimes changed. These myths provide insight into the history, legends and religion of an ancient civilization, but also highlight fundamental similarities between modern people and those who lived long ago.

This guide provides a summary of classical retellings of Greek and Roman mythology, vocabulary, discussion questions, activities, and print and Internet resources for students and teachers to explore.



## Program Summary

The ancient Greeks loved adventures involving heroes. Their myths often focused on a man who had the bravery, intelligence, and physical strength to face a long and difficult journey, or quest, filled with peril and excitement. *Jason & the Golden Fleece* is considered to be the oldest heroic epic in Greek mythology, and it set the pattern for all hero stories which followed.

In this retelling, the story begins with King Aeson, who hides his infant son, Jason, from his evil brother, Pelias, who has just overtaken the throne of the kingdom. Aeson is able to leave Jason in the care of the centaur, Chiron, who raises the young hero and teaches him about the arts, medicine, and warfare. The Olympian gods begin to watch Jason for signs of heroism. After Jason grows up, he leaves Chiron to take back his rightful place on the throne. On his journey, he helps an old woman across a river. The woman turns out to be the goddess Hera, who tests Jason's qualities as a future hero. He passes her test, but as he carries her through the rushing water, he loses a sandal. It is the arrival of Jason wearing one shoe that frightens King Pelias. An oracle has prophesized that a man with one shoe will bring ruin upon Pelias' kingdom. Pelias knows he must get rid of Jason. He challenges Jason to an impossible quest which will surely kill the young man. Jason must bring back the Golden Fleece, a magical skin from a golden ram guarded by an unsleeping dragon, which will bring good luck upon his people. It is only then that Pelias will relinquish his throne to Jason.

Jason gathers a group of heroes to help him during his journey. They are called the Argonauts, named after the large ship, the Argo, which is a magical ship built especially for this voyage. One of their first adventures is to save Phineus, a king who is suffering under Zeus' punishment. Bird-like, clawing creatures called "Harpies" are attacking and stealing Phineus' food, and the king is living in a constant state of starvation. The Argonauts fight off the Harpies and in return for saving him, the prophetic king gives Jason advice to sail through the Clashing Rocks, two rocky islands which float about the sea and smash ships and sailors. The Argonauts follow the advice and pass through safely. They experience other adventures until they finally reach Colchis, the land of the Golden Fleece.

Instead of handing the fleece to Jason, the king of Colchis, Aeëtes, challenges him to a test to judge whether the young man is worthy of this prize. Jason has to plow a rocky field using a team of fire-breathing bulls, and sow it with serpent's teeth. Luckily for Jason, the king's daughter, Medea, a sorceress, falls in love with him and concocts a magic lotion to protect him from the fire-breathing bulls. She warns him about the bulls and about the serpent's teeth, which will grow into armed warriors after he plants them in the soil. The next day, Jason struggles with the wild bulls and manages to plow and seed the field. The armed warriors spring up out of the ground and Jason battles them. He starts to lose the battle until he is able to outwit the warriors. He throws a rock into the battling crowd. It bounces off of one, and that warrior begins fighting his fellow warriors, whom he believes actually hit him.

The warriors demolish each other. Aeëtes congratulates Jason, but secretly plots to burn the Argo and kill the Argonauts that night. Medea rescues the Argonauts and helps Jason escape. Medea, Jason, and the Argonauts return to Pelias' kingdom with the fleece, and Jason eventually reclaims his father's throne.

## Vocabulary

**Argo** — Jason's magical ship; it is built with Athena's assistance and is able to give Olympian help to Jason and his crew during their quest for the Golden Fleece.

**centaurs** — These mythological half-man, half-horse beings are followers of Dionysus, the god of wine; they have an unfavorable reputation for drunkenness and carrying off of helpless young maidens.

**Golden Fleece** — A mythical skin of a flying golden ram which saved two children from being sacrificed to the gods; the fleece hangs in Ares temple and is guarded by a dragon who never sleeps; it is thought to bring wealth, fame, and good fortune to those who possess it.

**mortal** — A human being.

**Olympian gods** — A group of immortal supreme beings who dwelt on Mount Olympus and ruled the world during ancient times.

**Symplegades** — Also known as the Clashing Rocks; they are huge cliffs of stone that move randomly about the sea crushing ships and mortals.

## Cast of Characters

*Includes phonetic spelling in parentheses.*

**Aeëtes (AY-ee-teez)** — King of Colchis and father to Medea.

**Aeson (EE-suhn)** — Father of Jason and king of Iolcus until overthrown by his brother, Pelias.

**Aphrodite (a-froh-DI-tee)** — Goddess of love and beauty; she was born from the foam of the sea; known as Venus in Roman mythology.

**Argonauts (AR-go-nawts)** — A group of brave seamen and heroes who accompany Jason on his journey to capture the Golden Fleece; they are named after their ship, the Argo; some of the most famous crewmen are Heracles and Theseus.

**Boreads (BOR-ee-adz)** — Sons of the North Wind; these winged brothers are part of the Argonauts and save the starving Phineus.

**Chiron (KY-rahñ)** — A wise and noble centaur who instructed young Greek warriors like Achilles, Theseus and Jason in the arts, medicine, and warfare.

**Harpies (HAR-peeZ)** — Winged monsters with the faces of ugly, old women and crooked, sharp talons; they are known for being thieves and robbers.

(Continued)

**Hera (HAYR-ah)** — Wife and sister of Zeus and the most powerful goddess on Olympus; she is recognized as the protector of marriage; while beautiful, she is very jealous and frequently petty, cruel, and vindictive to anyone who spends time with her husband; known as Juno in Roman mythology.

**Jason (JAY-suhn)** — Son of King Aeson of Iolcus; he is the first Greek hero to set sail on a quest; he and his crewmen, the Argonauts, are best known for setting the Greek standards for classic hero stories.

**Medea (meh-DEE-uh)** — One of the great sorceresses of the ancient world; she aids Jason in his quest.

**Pelias (PEEL-ee-us)** — King of Thessaly who wishes to gain supreme power over the land; he imprisons his brother, Aeson, in order to take over the kingdom.

**Phineus (FIN-ee-us)** — King of Thrace, who is also a prophet; he is punished by Zeus for making prophecies which are too correct and is saved by Jason and the Argonauts.

**oracles (OR-ah-kulz)** — Prophets inspired by spiritual forces; both gods and mortals used their help to learn about human fate and destiny.

## Pre-viewing Discussion

- What is a hero? What qualities do famous heroes possess? What qualities do common everyday heroes possess? What are the differences and similarities between them?
- What are the elements of a "classic" hero story?
- What do you know about Jason, the Argonauts or the Golden Fleece?

## Focus Questions

1. Why does King Aeson hide baby Jason?
2. What does Chiron teach to Jason?
3. Which god is the first to test Jason's courage and strength?
4. How did Jason lose a sandal? Why is this important?
5. Why does King Pelias send Jason on an impossible quest?
6. What is the object of Jason's quest?
7. Who are the Harpies?
8. How do the Argonauts help King Phineus?
9. What advice does Phineus give to Jason?
10. Once in Colchis, what are the challenges Jason must perform in order to get the golden fleece?
11. How does Medea help Jason?
12. How does Jason outwit the armed warriors?
13. Why is Jason considered to be a hero?