

- Heracles struggles to contain his strength as well as his anger. Discuss events in your own life where you had to struggle to contain your anger, strength, or emotion. How did you manage to do it? What advice could you give Heracles?

Follow-up Activities

- Have your students find out more about Heracles' long and adventurous life. Other mythological sources go into varied detail regarding who this superhero's relatives were, why Hera tormented him, what happened with his uncontrollable anger, and how he joined the gods on Olympus. Use www.mythweb.com or www.sacred-texts.com/cla/bulf/bulf18.htm to begin reading other stories about this hero.
- The Hydra and Cerberus were two monsters Heracles defeated, but many other hideous and deadly monsters played important roles in ancient myths. Students can research other fearful creatures like Ladon and the Geryon. Chart their strengths, weaknesses, size, animal qualities and other attributes. Students can compare and discuss which creatures were the most formidable and write a descriptive paragraph about their own mythological monsters.
- Students can develop map skills by connecting Heracles' travels to real geographic locations with maps of ancient Greece. Research his adventures and compile a list of the areas he traveled to in Europe, Africa, and the Middle East. Students can use Tufts University site www.perseus.tufts.edu/Herakles/maps.html to create a map marking these areas.
- Students can discuss the various meanings of the word "hero" and use this information to stimulate thoughts for an opinion paper based on the question, "Who is your hero and why?" What are some traits that make this person a hero to you? Are these heroic traits parallel in some way to those of ancient Greek heroes like Heracles? Does your hero suffer from human weaknesses as well as possessing special abilities?

Suggested Internet Resources

Periodically, Internet Resources are updated on our Web site at www.LibraryVideo.com

- www.educ.uvic.ca/Faculty/sockenden/edb363/internetprojects/ancientgreece/myths.html
This site from the University of Victoria provides resources and activities for teachers and students.
- www.mcli.dist.maricopa.edu/smc/journey
This Web site allows you to create your own heroic adventure and explore classic mythological story structure.

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- www.mythman.com
A humorous homework help site for students with classical myth retelling.
- www.perseus.tufts.edu/Herakles/
This site is a subset of materials from the Perseus Project containing detailed stories of Heracles' labors as well as his other adventures.

Suggested Print Resources

- Barron, T.A. *The Hero's Trail: A Guide for a Heroic Life*. Philomel Books, New York, NY; 2002.
- Richardson, Adele D. *Hercules (World Mythology Series)*. Capstone Press, Mankato, MN; 2003.
- Yolen, Jane. *Mightier Than the Sword: World Folktales for Strong Boys*. Harcourt, San Diego, CA; 2003.
- Yolen, Jane. *Not One Damsel in Distress: World Folktales for Strong Girls*. Silver Whistle Books, San Diego, CA; 2000.

TEACHER'S GUIDE

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THE LABORS OF HERACLES

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.

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Program Summary

Greek myths contain an abundance of great heroes and heroines. These characters often possess a superhuman gift that sets them apart from the average man, but they also have human weaknesses that cause them to misuse or misunderstand these gifts. No other legendary hero is as famous as Heracles, whose great strength and bravery have made him a cult figure throughout the world. Even though his father, Zeus, is the greatest of gods, Hercules still suffers like a mortal. The stories of Heracles highlight not only his gift of incredible strength, but also his constant struggle to control his human emotions.

In *The Labors of Heracles*, our hero proves his superhuman strength while still in the cradle. A jealous Hera, queen of the gods, sends two snakes down from Olympus to kill him, but the baby strangles the snakes with his bare hands. As Heracles grows up, he faces constant difficulty to control his strength, his highly volatile anger, and the hard situations Hera continually places upon him. His anger hurts the people around him, and Heracles consults the Oracle at Delphi for guidance. The Oracle tells Heracles that in order to make amends for his behavior, he will be challenged with a series of impossible labors.

Heracles arrives at the palace of King Eurystheus, where the cruel king assigns him many unpleasant and extremely dangerous tasks. Because of Heracles' first success at slaying the Nemean lion, the weak and jealous king increases the difficulty and danger of each task in the hope that Heracles will fail. For years, Heracles refuses to give up and completes one impossible challenge after another. He slays a nine-headed swamp monster with poisonous blood, captures a man-eating boar, rids a terrorized village of vicious birds, and traps rampaging wild cattle. Stories of his successful adventures spread throughout the countryside, making him more and more famous and inspiring normal people to persevere through their own hardships.

King Eurystheus demands that Heracles steal golden apples belonging to Hera. These grow in a grove guarded by a dragon. Heracles wrestles the sea god, Nereus, and tricks the mighty Titan, Atlas, in order to bring the treasured apples back to the king. The last labor is to bring Cerberus from the underworld to King Eurystheus' palace. Heracles, with Hades' permission, wrestles the three-headed dog to the palace and is released from service.

Although his labors for the king are finished, Heracles continues to be tested, continues to struggle, and has many more adventures. To this day, anyone who struggles valiantly is said to have put forth a "Herculean effort."

Vocabulary

Apples of the Hesperides — Magical fruit from a tree that was a wedding present to Hera from Gaia, goddess of the earth. Evening nymphs tended the tree and Ladon, an immortal dragon, kept watch over it.

demigod — A person with more power than a mortal, but less than a god.

hero — In mythology, a person endowed with great strength or ability who is known for feats of courage.

mortal — A human being.

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

pathos — A state of suffering or severe anguish.

Titans — A family of giants in Greek mythology born from Uranus and Gaia; they ruled until they were overthrown by the Olympian gods.

underworld — The kingdom of the dead ruled by the god Hades and also referred to as Hades.

Cast of Characters

Includes phonetic spelling in parentheses.

Alcmena (alk-MEE-na) — The mortal mother of Heracles.

Atlas (AT-las) — A Titan giant who is condemned by the gods for fighting Zeus and must hold up the heavens on his shoulders.

Cerberus (SER-ber-us) — Fierce and feared three-headed watchdog at the entrance of the underworld.

Charon (KA-ron) — Ferryman of Hades; for a fee, he transports the souls of the dead across the River Styx.

Eurystheus (you-RIS-thee-us) — A weak and cowardly king who ordered Heracles to perform his Labors.

Hades (HAY-deez) — Brother of Zeus and god of darkness and the underworld; known as Pluto in Roman mythology.

Hera (HAYR-ah) — Wife and sister of Zeus and the most powerful Olympian goddess; known as Juno in Roman mythology.

Heracles (HAYR-a-kleez) — The strongest hero of classical mythology; son of the god Zeus and a mortal named Alcmena; also known as Hercules.

Hydra (HI-dra) — A swamp monster with nine heads and poisonous blood.

Nemean Lion (neh-MEE-uhn) — A huge fierce lion with an impenetrable hide; after slaying it, Heracles wears a cloak made of the lion's skin.

Nereus (NEER-ee-us) — An ancient sea god who is able to change his shape.

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Oracle at Delphi (OR-a-kuhl, DEL-fi) — A shrine to the god Apollo where hidden knowledge about the future and the fate of mortals and gods is spoken.

Zeus (ZOOS) — God of the sky and ruler of Olympus; also known as Jupiter in Roman mythology.

Pre-viewing Discussion

- What do you know about Heracles? Have you seen pictures or read stories about him? What does he look like? What are some of his adventures?
- What kind of problems would a superhero like Heracles have to overcome?
- Who are some well-known modern heroes from real life and literature? Do they share the same characteristics as mythological heroes?

Focus Questions

1. What is the first sign that Heracles possesses an incredible gift of strength?
2. Why does Heracles wear a lion's cloak?
3. Which goddess does not like Heracles? How does she show her hatred of Heracles?
4. What was Heracles' human weakness? Give examples of the difficulty he has handling that weakness.
5. Why does Heracles perform the labors for King Eurystheus?
6. Why does the king increase the level of danger in each successive task?
7. Name monsters that Heracles has to capture or slay.
8. How does Heracles trick Atlas?
9. Give three examples of Heracles' great strength.

Discussion Questions

- Heracles possesses the gift of incredible strength. How could this also be considered his weakness?
- "Kleos" is a Greek word meaning "fame and glory." "Heracles" can be translated as "he who has the glory of Hera." If Heracles was not constantly tormented by the jealous queen of goddesses, would he still have become a hero? Why or why not?
- What are impossible tasks for you? Cleaning your room? Getting high scores on spelling tests? Babysitting your little sister? Design three incredible labors that Heracles must perform for you. Tell why each labor requires superhuman powers and how Heracles could accomplish it.

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