

- Helios is not the only deity working at the palace of the sun. Other minor gods and goddesses help orchestrate the day and night. Eos, goddess of the dawn, announces the arrival of the day. Selene, goddess of the moon, drives her chariot across the night sky. Students can find other ancient cultures with similar gods and goddesses associated with the atmosphere. Native Americans, Egyptians, and many others worshipped deities responsible for the daily passage of the sun and moon. Use The University Corporation for Atmospheric Research site at www.windows.ucar.edu/tour/link=/mythology/planets/Earth/earth_aspects.html
- We use the term "narcissist" to describe a person who shows extreme self-love. In the story of Narcissus, his extreme self-love eventually leads to his destruction as well as the destruction of Echo. With your students, discuss and locate current events in the news and media which illustrate the harmful effects of too much vanity or beauty and the consequences suffered by that person's loved ones. Ask your students how these current events can be linked to *The Myth of Echo and Narcissus* and to the dictionary meaning of narcissism.
- Have students decide if it was right for Hades to abduct Persephone. Why or why not? Some variations of this myth state that Zeus had promised Persephone to Hades as a wife, that Persephone liked being his wife, and that women during that period of history had no personal choice in marriages. Have students research the roles women played in traditional Greek life to better understand these variations of the story.
- Use sources such as *Bullfinch's Mythology* by Thomas Bulfinch (Random House, 1998) or *My Mother's Daughter* by Doris Orgel (Roaring Book Press, 2002) and allow students to discover variations of *The Myth of Persephone* as well as other nature myths. Discuss their differences and brainstorm for alternate ways that Hades, given his powers, could have gained Persephone's love.
- Pomegranates are one type of fruit commonly found in Greece and enjoyed by the gods. Have students find and report on other food and drink mentioned in mythology as well as the geographical influences on native food and vegetation. Have a Greek god food-tasting party to celebrate traditional foods such as hummus, baklava, feta cheese, and fruit juice. Have students create their own version of ambrosia and allow everyone to sample a meal fit for an Olympian god.

Suggested Internet Resources

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

- solar-center.stanford.edu/lessons.html
This Stanford University site shares information, lessons, and myths about the sun.
- www.carlos.emory.edu/ODYSSEY/GREECE/persgame.html
Play the "Persephone Game" and explore Greek civilization on this page sponsored by Emory University.
- www.pantheon.org/mythica.html
Encyclopedia Mythica provides myths, pronunciation guides, and character glossaries.

Suggested Print Resources

- Andrews, Tamra. *Dictionary of Nature Myths: Legends of the Earth, Sea, and Sky*. Oxford University Press, Oxford, NY; 2000.
- Datlow, Ellen and Terri Windling. *Green Man: Tales from the Mythic Forest*. Viking, New York, NY; 2001.
- Muten, Burleigh. *The Lady of Ten Thousand Names: Goddess Stories from Many Cultures*. Barefoot Books, New York, NY; 2001.
- Powell, Patricia Hruby. *Blossom Tales — Flower Stories of Many Folk*. Moon Mountain Publishing, N. Kingstown, RI; 2002.

TEACHER'S GUIDE

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COMPLETE LIST OF TITLES

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NATURE MYTHS

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

Many Greek myths explained the cycles of nature, plants and animals on earth. Certain animals and natural occurrences were associated with the gods and goddesses. For example, Zeus was known for throwing lightning bolts and Athena was associated with an owl for wisdom. For creatures and phenomena that the ancient Greeks didn't understand, they created stories. These three tales demonstrate the way myths were used to explain unknown occurrences in nature.

Why do the seasons change? Why do leaves and plants wilt and die during the winter and grow in the spring? The changing of the seasons is explained in *The Myth Of Persephone*. Hades abducts Demeter's daughter, Persephone, and brings her to the underworld as his bride. A distraught Demeter searches the world for her daughter and nature feels her grief. Flowers wilt, leaves fall off the trees, and cold descends upon the land. Zeus decides that Persephone should be allowed to rejoin her mother. Hades, however, tricks Persephone into eating the seeds of a pomegranate. Persephone learns that she is beholden to Hades forever because she ate the food of the dead. Zeus insists that Persephone spend three months every year with Hades because of the seeds she ate while in the underworld. This decision results in changing seasons. Every year when Persephone leaves Demeter, winter arrives, nature grieves, and nothing grows on earth. When Persephone returns, summer arrives and the world comes into bloom again as Demeter and nature rejoice.

Why do sounds echo? Why are names for flowers so unusual and different? In *The Myth of Echo and Narcissus*, a sound phenomenon and the origin of a flower are both explained. Hera comes to earth and finds Echo, a lovely nymph, whose incessant chatter irritates the goddess. As a punishment for her talkativeness, Hera takes away Echo's ability to form words. Echo can only repeat the last few words that others say. Lonely and sad, Echo wanders through the forests and discovers handsome Narcissus. Narcissus drinks at a pool of water and falls deeply in love with his reflection. He is so mesmerized by his beauty that he falls into the pool and disappears. A lovely flower grows in his place and is named the narcissus. Echo, devastated by the loss of Narcissus, wastes away until nothing is left of her but her voice, which now can be heard in caves and mountains and is known as an echo.

Why are there different landforms on earth? How does the sun pass from the east to the west every day? These events are explained in *The Myth of Phaethon*. Phaethon arrives at his father's palace and insists that he be allowed to drive his father's fiery chariot of the sun across the sky. Helios cannot deny the request. Phaethon takes the reins and sets out for his journey across the heavens at daybreak. He cannot control the powerful horses and he and the sun are taken on a wild ride through the sky. The chariot gets too close to the earth and burns the land to form deserts and volcanoes. It gets too far from the earth and creates frozen icecaps. Zeus shoots down the chariot with a lightning bolt and the horses and driver fall into a river.

Vocabulary

echo — A repetition of sound.

Mount Olympus — A mythological mountain in Greece that was believed to be the home of the gods and goddesses.

mortal — A human being.

narcissist — A person who is in love or infatuated with his/her body.

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

pomegranate — A thick-skinned, reddish berry that is about the size of an orange.

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.

Demeter (de-MEET-ter) — Goddess of the harvest and vegetation; known as Ceres in Roman mythology.

Echo (EK-oh) — Cheerful mountain nymph whose talkativeness gets her into trouble.

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

Helios (HEE-lee-os) — A minor god representing the sun and its daily journey from east to west; known as Sol in Roman mythology.

Hera (HAYR-ah) — Wife and sister of Zeus; she is very jealous and frequently petty and cruel to anyone who spends time with her husband; known as Juno in Roman mythology.

Hermes (HER-meez) — Messenger of the gods; known as Mercury in Roman mythology.

Narcissus (nar-SIS-sus) — An extremely handsome and conceited man whose beauty leads to his downfall.

nymphs (nimfs) — Nature spirits in human form which live in forests, fields, streams and oceans.

Persephone (per-SEF-o-nee) — The maiden of spring and summer and the beautiful daughter of Demeter; queen of the underworld; known as Proserpina in Roman mythology.

Phaethon (FAY-uh-thuhn) — The mortal son of Helios.

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

Pre-viewing Discussion

- Encourage students to discuss myths. What are they? Why did ancient people develop myths?

(Continued)

- Examine a map of the world. Locate Greece and its neighboring countries. What landforms are found in this area of the world? How would you explain the formation of these landforms?
- Discuss what causes the change of seasons.

Focus Questions

Myth of Persephone

1. How is Persephone abducted?
2. How does Zeus help Persephone?
3. Name four things in nature that change when Demeter loses Persephone.

Myth of Echo and Narcissus

1. How does Hera punish Echo? Why?
2. With whom does Narcissus fall in love?
3. What does Echo do after losing Narcissus?
4. What marks the spot where Narcissus falls into the pool?

Myth of Phaethon

1. Why does Helios let Phaethon take his horses?
2. What happens when the horses become uncontrollable?
3. How is Phaethon stopped?

Discussion Questions

- What were the landforms and climatic changes created by Phaethon's wild ride across the skies? Compare and contrast the ancient Greeks' story to the scientific reasoning for these natural occurrences.
- Why did Helios give his son, Phaethon, the reins to his chariot? Could Helios have come up with a safer alternative that might have spared Phaethon's life? Why or why not?
- Some Greek myths were created to explain events in nature which, at that time in history, had no scientific explanation. Discuss the themes of these nature myths. What other nature themes could have been explained using these characters and settings?

Follow-up Activities

- Create a class anthology of nature myths. Have the students write a myth explaining a natural phenomenon like drought or earthquake. Suggest using mythological characters or developing their own Greek "super powers." To get started, have your students take a myth-writing workshop with author Jane Yolen at www.teacher.scholastic.com/writewit/mff/mythswshop_index.htm

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