

### Follow-up Activities

- Perseus has many adventures both before and after his trip to the island of the Gorgons. Encourage students to find his other accomplishments and heroic deeds including the events he changes by using Medusa's magic. Use [www.mythweb.com](http://www.mythweb.com) to see an animated view of these adventures.
- Brainstorm a list of impossible journeys or quests and the heroes associated with them. Students, writing from the perspective of favorite heroes, should create stories about completing a dangerous journey. Use the following questions to stimulate your writers. What is the task? What supplies or magical help will be needed? Will monsters be encountered along the way? How will the quest be completed?
- Compare the characters in *Perseus & Medusa* to those in a more contemporary work of literature involving heroes like Prince Caspian, Hermione, or Frodo Baggins. Students can discuss and present the similarities and differences between the main characters, plot, names, and locations.
- Pegasus has more adventures after flying off with Perseus on his back. Have students read about Bellerophon, another brash young man who uses Pegasus' help to battle a monster. Use *Bulfinch's Mythology* by Thomas Bulfinch (Random House, 1998) to discover Bellerophon and more of Pegasus' adventures.
- Perseus uses magical weapons, gifts, and advice from the gods in order to kill Medusa. Discuss with students what would happen if Perseus didn't have magical or mythical help. Have them write a story in which Perseus must find other ways of slaying Medusa without help from supreme forces.
- Shields were extremely important items to have for protection. Perseus needs a powerful shield to fight the Gorgons. Athena decorates her shield with the image of Medusa in order to terrify opponents. Students can research the importance of shields throughout history using library and electronic sources. Students can design their own shields from poster board. Have them choose colors, decorations, and symbols which truly describe their personalities and special powers.
- Medusa was once a beautiful maiden. Have students research other female monsters in classical mythology, like the Harpies, the Lamiae, Charybdis and Scylla. Encourage them to create theater masks depicting their favorite creatures. The following Web link contains simple directions for creating a striking Medusa mask:  
[www.clemusart.com/educatn/kidsprojects/mask/directions.html](http://www.clemusart.com/educatn/kidsprojects/mask/directions.html)

### Suggested Internet Resources

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

- [www.education-world.com/a\\_sites/sites047.shtml](http://www.education-world.com/a_sites/sites047.shtml)  
"Education World" offers sites about teaching the Olympics for educators.
- [www.mythman.com](http://www.mythman.com)  
Homework help site for students with classical myth retelling.
- [www.pantheon.org/mythica.html](http://www.pantheon.org/mythica.html)  
"Encyclopedia Mythica" offers definitions, images, and character glossaries for classical mythology as well as folklore and legend from around the world.
- [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.

### Suggested Print Resources

- January, Brendan. *The New York Public Library Amazing Mythology: A Book of Answers for Kids*. Wiley, John & Sons, Inc., New York, NY; 2000.
- McMullan, Kate. *Say Cheese, Medusa! Myth-o-Mania Series #3*. Hyperion Books for Children, New York, NY; 2002.
- Powell, Anton & Philip Steele. *The Greek News*. Gareth Stevens Publishing, Milwaukee, WI; 2000. Ancient Greek life stories told through daily newspaper articles.

#### TEACHER'S GUIDE

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## PERSEUS & MEDUSA

### 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

The ancient Greeks believed that their lives and deaths were controlled by the Fates, but how a person arrived at his or her destiny was another matter. Free will and the influence of the gods played major roles in shaping a person's life. In trying to understand their own destinies, people sometimes sought the advice of an oracle — a mystical advisor who supposedly could see into the future. *Perseus & Medusa* shows how one young man uses his free will, bravery, and Mt. Olympian help to fulfill his destiny.

An oracle tells King Acrisius that his grandson will be the cause of his death. In fear, the king locks his daughter, Danae, and her baby, Perseus, into a chest and sets it upon the sea. Zeus, father of Perseus, guides the chest to the shores of Seriphus, where the mother and child are rescued. They live there for many years as Perseus grows into a strong young man.

Perseus boldly and rashly offers his services to King Polydectes, the ruler of Seriphus. The egocentric king, who wants to take Danae as a wife, sends Perseus on an impossible quest to bring back the head of Medusa, a hideous winged monster who turns mortals into stone if they catch sight of her face. It is the king's hope that Perseus will be turned to stone upon looking at Medusa and Danae will then be open to the idea of marriage.

Perseus is brave, yet he is also reckless to think that he can defeat Medusa on his own. He has no weapons, and no idea even how to find her. He is going to need some help from the gods. Fortunately, the mighty Athena is all too happy to help him defeat Medusa. Athena and the great messenger god, Hermes, play a major role in helping Perseus fulfill his heroic destiny. They give him guidance, a magical shield and sword to behead Medusa, and winged sandals to speed his travel.

Perseus first flies to the cave of the Graeae, guardians of the Gorgons, and convinces them to give him information about Medusa. He flies to the nymphs of the North to receive more guidance, a helmet of invisibility, and a magical bag in which to place Medusa's head. Perseus arrives on the Gorgon's island, and by using his magical gifts, beheads Medusa. The flying white horse, Pegasus, springs from Medusa's neck. Perseus fights off the other two Gorgons, puts on his helmet of invisibility, jumps aboard Pegasus, and flies back to Seriphus. The shocked and disbelieving king asks to see proof of the head. Perseus pulls Medusa's head out of the magical bag and the king is turned into stone. Perseus then returns the magical gifts and Medusa's head to Athena. Athena places the poisonous head on her shield as a warning to all mortals. Later on in his life, as the oracle had prophesized, Perseus kills his grandfather, King Acrisius, by accident during an athletic competition. After fulfilling this prophesy, Perseus continues with more adventures throughout his life and eventually earns a place of honor in the heavens as a constellation.

## Vocabulary

**Fates** — The goddesses who controlled the destiny of mortals.

**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.

## Cast of Characters

*Includes phonetic spelling in parentheses.*

**Acrisius (a-KRIS-ee-us)** — King of Argos and grandfather to Perseus.

**Athena (a-THEE-na)** — Goddess of wisdom, justice, battle, and crafts; known as Minerva in Roman mythology.

**Danae (DAN-ay-ee)** — Daughter of King Acrisius and mother to Perseus.

**Gorgons (GOHR-guhns)** — Monstrous, feminine creatures named Euryale, Sthenno, and Medusa. Euryale and Sthenno are immortal, and they all share poisonous blood and have snakes instead of hair upon their heads. A mortal is turned to stone upon seeing a Gorgon.

**Graeae (GRAY-ee)** — Their name means “gray ones,” and the three sisters are known as Dread, Alarm, and Horror; they are sisters and guardians to the Gorgons; they share one eye and one tooth which are passed between them.

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

**Medusa (muh-DOO-sah)** — One of the Gorgons; she was originally a beautiful woman who was punished by Athena and forced to live as a hideous creature with snakes for hair; mortals turn to stone at the sight of her face; she is the only mortal Gorgon.

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

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

**Pegasus (PEG-a-suhs)** — Beautiful winged horse known to help heroes battle against Greek monsters; son of Poseidon and Medusa; he is born from the neck of Medusa.

**Perseus (PUR-see-uhs)** — Strong and brash son of Zeus and Danae; he is known for his bravery and courage.

**Polydectes (pah-luh-DEK-teez)** — Cruel and self-centered king of Seriphus; he sends Perseus on an impossible quest in order to romance Danae, Perseus' mother.

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

## Pre-viewing Discussion

- Do you believe in fate or destiny? Why or why not? Do you have any control over the events in your life? What is free will?
- Name and discuss mythological monsters and creatures. What do you know about Pegasus or Medusa?
- *Perseus & Medusa* is a Greek myth loaded with magic and supernatural powers. Discuss how the gods could use their powers and magic to help or hurt mankind. Predict what types of magic could be used in this myth.

## Focus Questions

1. Why does King Acrisius send Danae and Perseus away?
2. Why does Zeus help them to survive?
3. What motivates Perseus to offer King Polydectes his services?
4. Who are the Gorgons? How is Medusa different from her Gorgon sisters?
5. Why does Athena warn Perseus to think before he acts if he is to succeed?
6. Name the magical gifts Perseus receives from the gods for his quest. How does he use the gifts during his travels?
7. Who are the Graeae? How does Perseus convince the Graeae to give him information?
8. Who are the Nymphs of the North? How do they help Perseus fulfill his destiny?
9. Explain how Perseus kills Medusa.
10. Who is Pegasus?
11. How do Perseus and Athena use Medusa's head?
12. How is the oracle's prophesy in the beginning of the myth fulfilled?

## Discussion Questions

- What beliefs did the ancient Greeks share about fate and destiny? What is Perseus' destiny? How do his decisions and actions lead him towards achieving that fate? Discuss how the gods help him.
- Perseus is impetuous. Discuss the events in this myth which illustrate this statement. Is this a necessary quality for Perseus to possess in order to fulfill his fate? Why or why not?
- A beautiful magical horse, Pegasus, springs from Medusa's neck upon her death. How and why can something so beautiful come from something so monstrous? Discuss events and people where something beautiful or good develops from its opposite.