

INTRODUCING MYTHOLOGY

18 GREEK AND ROMAN GODS, GODDESSES, AND HEROES

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To the Teacher

Mythology in Middle School

Introducing the figures and stories of Greek and Roman mythology in middle school makes great sense. Students at this age are naturally drawn to these adventure-packed tales and the larger-than-life characters that people them.

Some of your students may already have been introduced to some mythological characters through TV superhero cartoons, films, video games, fantasy role-playing games, and so forth. For many, however, this may be their first formal introduction to the study of classical mythology as a whole.

Purposes of This Project

The essential purpose of this project is to offer you a variety of materials to interest your students in the key figures and stories of Greek and Roman mythology. The idea is to help you let the myths sell themselves.

A second aim is to increase student awareness of the many words in our language today that are derived from Greek and Roman mythology. Opportunities for vocabulary enrichment are emphasized throughout the publication.

A third aim is to introduce students to the ways myths have influenced Western culture in the fields of art, literature, science, and even popular brand names so central to the lives of today's middle schoolers.

Since *Introducing Mythology* has been conceived primarily for the language-arts classroom, it emphasizes the word and story elements of the myths rather than their original historical and religious functions. However, in many instances students are encouraged to view these mythological figures as the attempts of another age to make sense of the world. Questions about justice, the origins of the world, and the purpose of life are of interest to the curious middle-school mind; such questions can be productively explored through the study of classical mythology.

Format

- The eighteen illustrated posters present the key gods and goddesses of Greek and Roman mythology through short, easy-to-read descriptions. In those many instances where the deities are shared, the Greek name appears at the top of the poster; the Roman name appears in parentheses above the text. You'll find the text of these posters at the end of this section.

- The sixteen reproducible activity sheets offer a variety of approaches: an introductory mythology information sheet, ten short retellings of major myths or key myth figures, a review sheet of the mythological figures introduced on the posters, two word-study sheets showing how key mythological figures appear in today's science and popular culture, and two sheets of suggested multidisciplinary follow-up projects.

All materials have been written for the average reader. They feature short sentences, easy-to-understand vocabulary, and high-interest dramatic content—all aimed to capture shorter attention spans.

Used as a whole, the posters and blackline masters have been designed to offer you a short introductory unit for the study of Greek and Roman mythology. Separately, the posters or masters can be used to supplement the reading materials included in your curriculum.

Text of Posters

1. **Cronus** (Roman name: **Saturn**) **The Last Lord of the Titans**

Cronus belonged to a race of gods known as the Titans. The Titans were giants—taller than mountains and enormously strong.

Cronus became king of the Titans by killing his cruel father, Uranus. Later he was overthrown by his own son, Zeus, in a terrible war that almost destroyed the universe.

Related words: titanic, saturnine, saturnalia



2. **Zeus** (Roman name: **Jupiter**) **The Thunderer**

The Greeks worshiped Zeus as the ruler of all gods and humans. As the lord of the sky and earth, Zeus reigned over all from the home of the gods on Mount Olympus.

Zeus punished the wicked by hurling thunderbolts down from the sky. He had many love affairs with goddesses and female humans.

Related words: Olympics, jovial



3. **Hera** (Roman name: **Juno**) **The Jealous Protector of Marriage**

Hera was Zeus' wife and the queen of the Immortals. She was known for her beauty as well as for her jealous streak and fiery temper.

Because she often quarreled with Zeus over his love affairs with other goddesses and humans, Hera was worshiped as the protector of marriage and married women.

Related words: Juno's bird (peacock), Junoesque

4. **Poseidon** (Roman name: **Neptune**) **The Earth Shaker**

Poseidon was a brother of Zeus and the second most powerful god on Mount Olympus. As the mighty lord of the sea, he could cause storms, floods, and earthquakes with one stroke of his trident, a three-pronged spear.

Poseidon was also worshiped as the god of horses. He is said to have created the first horse out of the waves of the sea as a gift to humans.

Related words: trident, neptunium



5. **Athena** (Roman name: **Minerva**) **The Gray-eyed Goddess**

Athena was the goddess of wisdom and also of warfare. She is said to have been born full-grown from Zeus' head, wearing a bronze helmet and shield.

Though the goddess of warfare, Athena was also the patroness of wisdom, reason, and justice. The city of Athens was named after her, and the Parthenon was the temple of Athena.

Related words: Athens, Parthenon



6. **Apollo** (Roman name: **Apollo**) **The God of Light and Reason**

This even-tempered son of Zeus was celebrated as the god of the sun, light, truth, and reason. Pictured as exceptionally handsome, Apollo was honored as the protector of athletes.

Apollo was also the patron of many arts, including poetry and music, as well as of medicine, archery, and agriculture. He is often shown playing his lyre.

Related words: Apollonian, lyric



7. **Artemis** (Roman name: **Diana**) **The Huntress**

Artemis was Apollo's twin sister. She was goddess of the hunt and of the moon. She loved hunting and archery.

Artemis was worshiped by hunters. The woods and wild animals were sacred to her.

Related word: artemisia

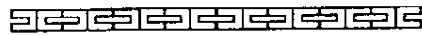
THE STORY OF PANDORA

Prometheus had warned his foolish brother, Epimetheus, never to accept a gift from Zeus. But Epimetheus forgot all about the advice when Zeus sent Pandora down from heaven to be his wife. She was the most beautiful creature he had ever seen.

Her name, *Pan-dora*, means "all gifts" because each of the gods on Mount Olympus had contributed to her beauty. But Zeus also put into Pandora's mind the irresistible trait of curiosity. When he gave her a sealed container with the warning "Never open this," he knew she would not be able to keep her promise.

One fateful day Pandora decided just to peek inside the container that Zeus had given her. When she opened the lid, out flew a storm of buzzing insects. They introduced into the world evils that had never existed before: greed, hate, envy, sorrow, sickness, and many others.

Luckily Pandora managed to put the lid back on just before the only helpful element flew away: hope. Hope remained to help humans, who now had to cope with all the evils resulting from Pandora's insatiable curiosity.



Discussion Questions

Myths have often been used to explain the origin of evil, pain, and suffering in the world. What do you think the world was like before "Pandora's box" was opened? How was it different from today's world?

Writing Assignment

Has your curiosity ever gotten you in trouble? Turn your experience into a short story with you as the central character. Share your finished story with the class.

THE STORY OF PROMETHEUS

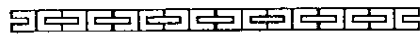
Prometheus was a Titan. He was one of the race of giants who ruled the world before the birth of Zeus and the other gods and goddesses.

Prometheus was very wise. In fact, he was much wiser than his scatter-brained brother, Epimetheus. Epimetheus had been given the task of creating human beings. But he really blundered in doing this. Before starting to work on humans, he gave the best qualities, such as swiftness and strength, to the animals.

Prometheus loved humans and took pity on them. Risking severe punishment, he stole sacred fire from Zeus and brought it down from Mount Olympus to earth. Fire was supposed to belong to the gods alone, but Prometheus could not bear to see humans suffer.

When Zeus found out what Prometheus had done, he was furious! He ordered Prometheus to be nailed to a rock on faraway Mount Caucasus. Zeus then sent an eagle to gnaw on Prometheus' liver each day. To prolong the agony, whatever portion the eagle had eaten during the day grew back that night.

In this way, kind Prometheus suffered greatly for his generous gift to humans.



Discussion Questions

The name Prometheus has come to describe any great rebel against injustice and misuse of power. What traits do you think help make Prometheus such a respected figure?

What famous person whom you know about might be described as a Prometheus? Why?

Writing Assignment

Write about a time when you or someone you know risked punishment or suffering to do something right. Share your writing with the class.