

Zeus

The Gift of Fire

Zeus and Prometheus

From the very first, humans had trouble with the gods. Most gods thought of humans as toys. But some gods found themselves interested in the human race. Some gods even made friends with the humans. One of those gods was named Prometheus.

The first people created by the gods lived happily together. They thought the gods were wonderful. But their children were not as grateful or as content. The children argued among themselves, and sometimes even argued with the gods.

Zeus was very disappointed at mankind. He decided he was not going to give mankind a most important tool - fire! Without fire, humans were not going to last very long.

Prometheus felt sorry for his human friends. Fire was important for many things - like heat and cooking, and hundreds of others. Prometheus stole a lightning bolt from Zeus and gave it to mankind. That's when man discovered fire.

Zeus was furious. He ordered Prometheus chained to a rock as punishment for stealing his lightning bolt, and for going behind his back to help the humans. To make Prometheus even more miserable, Zeus sent storms to beat angry waves against Prometheus, helplessly chained to his rock. Zeus made the sun shine really brightly now and then to burn his skin. Zeus even sent an eagle to nibble at poor Prometheus' body. It was quite a punishment for a god who had only tried to help mankind. But he had defied Zeus, and that was what made Zeus so angry.

It was Hercules who finally released the helpless god from his chains. By the time Hercules saved him, nearly a thousand years had passed. That's probably not a lot of time if you happen to be immortal. But humans had changed a great deal over 1000 years. By then, Zeus found humans quite entertaining. Zeus no longer cared if anyone rescued Prometheus or not.

Zeus

The Gift of Fire

1. What did most gods think of the humans?

2. Who decided not to give the humans fire? Why?

3. How did the humans eventually get fire?

4. What different ways did Zeus punish Prometheus?

5. Who finally saved Prometheus? After how many years?

Pandora's Box

As the story goes ...

Once up a time, a long time ago, there were two brothers named Epimetheus and Prometheus. They were good gods. They had good hearts. They were good friends.

One day, Prometheus got in trouble with Zeus. Angry over something or other, Zeus had declared that man did not deserve fire. Because he had a kind heart, and he knew how much man needed fire for food and warmth, Prometheus gave man the secret of fire even though Zeus had told all the gods not to do that. Zeus was furious that his order had been ignored. As punishment, Zeus chained Prometheus to a rock for many years.

But that was not enough punishment, not for Zeus. Once Prometheus was chained to a rock, Zeus went after Prometheus' brother, the gentle, kind-hearted Epimetheus. Zeus did not chain Epimetheus to a rock. Zeus had a more sneaky punishment in mind.

First, Zeus ordered the gods' handyman, the maker of things - Hephaestus - to make Zeus a daughter. Hephaestus made a woman out of clay, a beautiful woman. He brought her to life, and then brought her to Zeus. Zeus named his lovely new daughter Pandora.

Zeus knew that Epimetheus was lonely. Zeus told Epimetheus that his brother had to be punished and that's why he was chained to a rock. But Zeus felt sorry that this punishment left Epimetheus without the company of his brother. That's why Zeus had decided to give Pandora in marriage to Epimetheus.

Epimetheus was kind-hearted and gentle and thoughtful, but he was no fool. He knew Zeus was up to something. But he loved Pandora at first sight.

Zeus gave the newlyweds a gift. Some say it was a jar. Some say it was a box. Whatever it was, it was locked. It came with a note. The note said: "DO NOT OPEN." Attached to the note was a key. It was all very curious.

You can guess what happened next. It was Pandora whose curiosity got the better of her. One day, she used the key to open the box. As she raised the lid, out flew all the bad things in the world today - envy, sickness, hate, disease. Pandora slammed the lid closed, but it was too late.

Epimetheus heard her weeping. He came running. Pandora opened the lid to show him it was empty. Quickly, before she could slam the lid shut, one tiny bug flew out. He gave Pandora a big buggy smile in thanks for his freedom and flew away. That tiny bug was named Hope. And Hope made all the difference in the world.

Pandora's Box

1. Other than Prometheus, who else was Zeus angry?

2. Who made Zeus a daughter and what was she made of?

3. What did Zeus name his new daughter?

4. Who does Epimetheus marry? What did they get as a wedding present from Zeus?

5. What came out of the box?

Zeus & the Great Flood

Deucalion & Pyrrha & Prometheus

Pandora's box had caused quite a few problems. Zeus was horrified at what had happened. After the box was opened, Zeus looked down on earth from Mount Olympus. He saw fights and riots and wars and murders. Even though it was Zeus himself who had loaded Pandora's box with all kinds of terrible things, Zeus was determined to punish mankind for the terrible behavior he saw.

He decided man had to go. Man was a mistake. Zeus ordered the waters to rise and flood the earth. Everyone drowned except two people. One was King Deucalion, who was considered the most honest man on earth. The other was the king's wife, Pyrrha.

Some say the god Prometheus warned King Deucalion that a flood was coming. This was the same Prometheus who had given mankind the gift of fire. Not only did Prometheus have a kind heart, but King Deucalion was Prometheus' son. He knew how much his son loved his mortal wife.

Prometheus told his son to build a sturdy boat and stock it well. His son knew that Prometheus could see into the future. (He also knew that his father had trouble explaining what he saw in his visions.) Prometheus told his son that when the waters receded, he must throw the bones of the Great Mother over his shoulder and to have his son's wife do the same.

King Deucalion loved his father. He trusted his father. He did not always understand all of his father's instructions, but he certainly could built a sturdy boat.

Just as his father predicted, the flood came. King Deucalion and Pyrrha sailed away on their boat for 9 days and 9 nights. When the waters receded, the boat settled down on the tallest peak in Greece, at the very tip top of Mount Parnassus.

King Deucalion had listened carefully to his father's directions. They had not made much sense to him, but he had listened. The king mumbled to himself, "The *earth* is the Great Mother. Since the earth is the Great Mother of humans, her bones must be *stones!*"

King Deucalion picked up some stones and threw them over his shoulder. Magically, the stones became men! Pyrrha did the same. Her stones became women. Many stones later, the human race had started again.

Zeus & the Great Flood
Deucalion & Pyrrha & Prometheus

1. How did Zeus destroy the Earth? Who were the only 2 people allowed to survive?

2. How many days were they on the boat? Where did the boat land?

3. What did the stones become?

Helios and Phaethon

The Sun Chariot

Some people say it was Apollo who brought up the sun each day. Some people insist it was Helios. Still others believe Helios and Apollo were the same god. That's the thing about myths. It all depends on who is telling the story.

As one story goes

Phaethon was the son of Helios. Both father and son had curly golden hair and sparkling bright eyes. Both bragged about the other all the time.

Helios thought his son was the brightest and bravest kid in the world. He named his son Phaethon, because Phaethon meant "brilliant" in the ancient Greek language.

Phaethon was equally proud of his Dad. He thought his Dad had the most important job in the world. His Dad's job was to bring out the sun each day. If the sun did not come up, the crops would die and everyone would starve.

Each morning, the Hours, his Dad's servants, would harness four white horses to the most splendid golden chariot. It was so splendid that it even had a nickname. The people called it The Sun Chariot.

Each morning, without fail, his Dad would leap aboard his golden Sun Chariot and begin his perilous journey across the sky. (It's not easy to haul a burning sun behind a chariot, even a special golden one, without getting burnt yourself.) No matter how tired he was, or how jarred by the jerking of the chariot, his Dad always managed to reach every corner of the earth, to bring light and warmth to all the crops and all the people and everything on earth every single day.

In the evening, after his Dad had tucked the sun out of sight, to give the sun time to rekindle, he returned home, weary but content. Each evening, he would gather his beloved son and his equally beloved wife and daughters, and together they would watch the moon appear in the sky. The next morning, without fail, his Dad would leap again aboard his glowing chariot, and fly off to bring out the sun.

Phaethon bragged about his father to anyone who would listen, and even sometimes to those who were not listening at all. He bragged about the golden chariot. He bragged about the four wild horses. He bragged that one day his father would let him drive the chariot across the sky. Phaethon bragged so much that after a while his friends no longer believed him. They knew his Dad brought up the sun.

But they did not believe his Dad would turn over such an important job to a mere boy, not even for one day. The job was too important to risk.

First, his friends began to tease Phaethon. Then, after a while, his friends began to scatter away as Phaethon approached. They were tired of his incessant bragging.

Phaethon begged his father to let him drive. He knew he was ready. He knew he could handle the horses. He knew he could do the job without getting burnt. But mostly, he wanted to prove to his friends that his father trusted him enough to give him the reins. Finally, one evening, exhausted by his son's perpetual pleading, his father said yes.

The next morning, Phaethon eagerly climbed aboard the golden chariot. He took the reins tightly in his hands. The horses knew at once that the driver was not the capable Helios. They jerked and reared but Phaethon hung tightly to the reins.

Phaethon caught the sun up behind him on his first swing by, and began to drag the sun across the sky. Bursting with pride, he dipped down towards the earth. He wanted his friends to see him. But he flew too close. The hot sun began to dry up oceans and rivers and left deserts in their place.

When Phaethon realized his mistake, his eyes widened with panic. He yanked the reins to pull the horses higher in the sky. The horses reared in anger at being jerked so hard. The reins were ripped from Phaeton's hands. The runaway chariot tore across the sky, burning a trail behind it, a trail some call the Milky Way. The horses slowed finally to an amble, and turned towards home, eager for oats.

High on Mount Olympus, Zeus was sitting outside on his front porch. He had been enjoying his breakfast. But now, he was watching the sky. Something was definitely wrong. It looked like Helios' horses were headed for home, but it was too early for them to go home. Could Helios have fallen asleep? Zeus hurled a lightning bolt at the chariot as it flew by to wake Helios up. It hit the side of the chariot with incredible force. The chariot tilted. Something or someone dropped out of the chariot, and fell into the Po River.

Zeus called for his magical horse, Pegasus. They quickly caught up with the sweating horses, who had slowed nearly to stop. Pegasus took the lead. Zeus grabbed the reins. Together, Zeus, Pegasus, and the four white horses finished dragging the sun around the earth. By the time they had tucked the sun in for the night, Zeus was in a raging temper. Pegasus had been nipped three times, which did not help matters any. Zeus roared towards Ethiopia, where Helios kept his palace.

Once Zeus understood that the young boy, Phaethon, had been driving and had probably been what Zeus had noticed dropping out of the chariot into the Po River, Zeus sent Hermes to organize a search party. It was no use. Phaethon had disappeared. No one knew if he was drowned. Perhaps he had made it to shore and was hiding, ashamed. No one ever heard from him again.

As for Helios and his family, their sadness was great. Some say his daughters cried so much that Zeus, as punishment for Helios' bad judgment, changed his daughters into the poplar trees that lined the Po River. Some insist it's only the wind, but others say you can still hear them crying even today.

Helios continued to bring out the sun, but his heart wasn't in it. He flew too high and let clouds cover the earth. The earth suffered gloomy day after gloomy day. He flew too low, and burned rivers down to creeks.

Finally, Zeus had to intercede. He made Helios give up his job, the job that had made him so proud, and give the job of bringing out the sun each day to Apollo. Some say he gave his golden chariot to Apollo as well. But others insist he gave his splendid chariot to Hades in exchange for a favor - that Hades would keep an eye out for his son.

Helios and Pharthon The Sun Chariot

1. Describe Phaethon and Helios' physical appearances.

2. What does the name Phaethon mean in the ancient Greek language?

3. What was Helios' job each day? Why was it important?

4. Describe the sun chariot and how Helios used it each morning.

5. What did Phaethon brag about?

6. What mistake does Phaethon make when driving the golden chariot?

7. How did Zeus respond?

8. What happened to Phaethon?

9. What happened to Helios' daughters?

10. What happened in the end?

Zeus, Hera, and Little Io

Once upon a time, a long time ago ...

Zeus, Poseidon, and Hades were the three sons of Cronos. When Cronos retired, the boys divided the world up between them. Zeus took the sky, Poseidon took the sea, and Hades ruled under the earth, the home of the dead. At first, it was great fun. But things had been just a bit slow lately.

Zeus thought about what he could do.

He could turn himself into an octopus and visit his brother Poseidon under the sea, but he didn't feel much like a swim.

He could visit Hades under the earth, but Hades was such a gloomy fellow.

He could hurl thunderbolts, but it wasn't much fun without a target.

He could hunt up one of the other gods. But the truth was, all the other gods were terrified of Zeus. He did have a terrible temper, but only when someone lied to him. Since the gods often lied, they mostly avoided Zeus.

He could call for his wife, Hera. But the truth was, Zeus was a little frightened of his wife, Hera.

He could find a beautiful woman. But he couldn't let Hera catch him. His wife Hera was very, very jealous. Zeus flew down to earth and looked around for something to do. He spotted two men walking along a lane. Zeus cast his voice to make it sound like somebody else was speaking. He was very good at that.

"Hey stupid," Zeus cast his voice loudly, hoping to start a fight.

One man turned to the other angrily. "What did you say?" And before you could say Zeus, fists were flying. Zeus found that very funny.

A glint on the river caught his eye. It was Io, a lovely river nymph.

"What a lovely young woman," Zeus said. He promptly fell in love.

Hoping to hide himself from the eagle eye of his jealous wife, Zeus covered the world with some really thick clouds. Then he flew down to Io. But Hera was not stupid. The thick coat of clouds made her suspicious immediately.

Zeus looked up. "It's Hera!" he gulped.

Quickly, Zeus changed Io into a cow. When Hera landed, all she found was an innocent looking Zeus standing next to a little white cow.

"This little cow appeared out of nowhere," he told his wife, acting surprised.

Hera was not fooled. "What a beautiful cow," she gushed admiringly. "May I have it as a present?"

Not knowing what else to do, Zeus had to agree. Hera sent the cow away under guard.

Zeus arranged for Io to be rescued and set free. He sent his son Apollo to sing the guard asleep. When the guard closed his eyes, Io ran away.

When Hera heard about it, she sent a gadfly after Io. A gadfly is a fly that bites.

"Moo moo," Io screamed, when the gadfly found her.

Io swam across a sea, hoping the gadfly would drown on the trip. No such luck, although Hera did name the sea between Greece and Rome after Io. Perhaps you've heard of it - the Ionian Sea? No matter.

Feeling very sorry for herself, a dispirited Io traveled next to Egypt.

It was then that Hera decided that Io had suffered enough. First, she made Zeus promise that he would never see Io again. Then she changed Io back into human form, and left her in Egypt.

Egypt was a dismal place for a river nymph. There are crocodiles in the Nile.

Back in Greece, Zeus gave a big sigh. Surely there was *something* he could do

Zeus, Hera, and Little Io

1. Who did Zeus divide the world up between?

2. Why did Zeus not get along with the other gods?

3. Who is Zeus' wife and how does he feel about her?

4. How did Zeus start a fight on Earth?

5. Who is Io and why does she get turned it a cow?

6. What got named after Io?

7. What does Hera do with Io? Where does she leave her?

Hercules

Roman name: Hercules

Hercules was half man and half god. His mother was a mortal. But his father was a king - a very special king, the king of all the gods, the mighty Zeus. But Hercules did not know he was part god until he had grown into a man.

Right from the beginning, Hera, Zeus' wife, was very jealous of Hercules. She tried all kinds of ways to kill him, including sending a couple of big snakes into his crib. Hercules crushed those snakes in a flash! Hercules was incredibly strong, even as a baby!

Zeus loved his little son. He figured that sooner or later Hera might actually find a way to kill little Hercules. To keep his small son safe from attack, Zeus sent him to live with a mortal family on earth. Hercules grew up loved and noble. But he didn't fit in on earth. He was too big and too strong. One day, his earth father told him he was a god, well, part god anyway.

The rest of the story of Hercules is a bunch of little stories that together tell the tale of how Hercules earned his way into the heavens, to take his place with the gods.

As the story goes.....

Hercules had a cousin named Eurystheus (Eury for short). Eury was the king of a little village in the city-state of Argos. Eury was an evil man. He thought everyone wanted to steal his crown, especially Hercules. One day, when Hera and Eury were chatting about their mutual hatred for Hercules, Hera came up with a plan - a plan to kill Hercules!

Hera helped Eury design 12 Labors (missions or tasks) that Hercules had to complete. Supposedly, when Hercules had completed the 12 Labors, he would earn his immortality, or so Hera promised. But really, Hera and Eury were certain that one of their "labors" would surely kill Hercules, probably the very first one.

Hercules was no fool. He asked the Oracle at Delphi if this was a smart thing to do. The oracle agreed that it was. Actually, the oracle had said, "If you complete 12 Labors, immortality will be yours." Being an oracle, she never explained what she meant by "immortality" - would he live forever in legend or for real? Hercules never asked. (She would not have told him anyway.)

Hercules not only lived, he had great adventures, discovered true friends, and rid the world of some really nasty critters.

Hercules

1. Describe Hercules.

2. Who is jealous of Hercules?

3. Where did Hercules grow up?

4. Describe Eury.

5. What was Eury and Hera's plan?

The 1st Labor of Hercules

The Nemean Lion

The Nemean Lion had huge teeth, and skin so tough that it could not be pierced by arrows. Everyone in the land of Nemean was scared to death of it. Many hunters had tried to kill the beast, but none had succeeded.

The Nemean Lion was also smart. Several hunters had tried to trick it with poisoned meat. The lion never ate the meat. He did, however, eat the hunters.

The lion was strong. But Hercules was stronger. Hercules lured the beast into a trap and strangled it. He made a coat out of the lion's fur. He wore the lion's head as a helmet. With the cheers of the grateful people of Nemean ringing in his ears, Hercules headed for home, delighted with his new clothes.

When King Eury saw the lion's head approaching, he went screaming into his castle. It took Hercules most of one day to convince King Eury that the lion was dead.

1. Describe the Nemean Lion.

2. What did Hercules do with the lion?

The 2nd Labor of Hercules

The Lernaean Hydra

His second labor was to get rid of the Lernaean Hydra.

The Hydra was a big snake, a big big snake. It had nine heads. One of its heads was immortal - you couldn't kill it. King Eury made it quite clear that he did not want Hercules returning with any part of the serpent. No snake skin boots or hat or gloves.

King Eury and Hera both knew that anyone who approached the monster's den in the swamp was killed by the monster's poisonous breath. Hercules did not have a chance!

But Hercules lured the monster out of the swamp. With the help of his servant, Iolaus, he clubbed off the monster's nine heads. He burned them. But one head refused to die. It kept coming back to life. So Hercules crushed that head and buried it deep in the ground, and to this day, it was never seen again.

The Second Labor

1. Describe the Hydra.

2. How did Hercules take on the Hydra?

The 3rd Labor of Hercules The Wild Boar of Erymanthus

His 3rd labor was to bring the wild boar of Erymanthus back to the castle, alive.

Boars are wild pigs with tusks that can cut you. And they're smart. And mean. The wild boar of Erymanthus was a gigantic boar, which made him even more dangerous.

Hercules chased the huge boar up and down the mountains for almost a week before the boar dropped in exhaustion. Hercules was barely winded. He was glad he did not have to kill the boar. Hercules had gotten quite fond of the tricky fellow.

Hercules slung the boar around his neck, and carried him home. By the time he arrived at the castle, the boar had begun to recover. Hercules dropped the boar at King Eury's feet. The boar lifted its heavy head and snorted angrily. King Eury screamed and ran away. No one saw the king for the rest of the day. As for the boar, he disappeared. Some say Hercules gave him a lift home, back to the forest.

The Third Labor

1. Describe the boar of Erymanthus.

2. How long did it take for Hercules to trap the boar?

3. What did Hercules do with the boar?

The 4th Labor of Hercules

The Stag of Artemis

His 4th labor was to capture the stag of Artemis.

There were many stags in the mountains. But this one was special. The stag of Artemis was known for its incredible beauty, its golden antlers, and its remarkable speed. It was not dangerous. It was just fast.

Hercules tried to catch the stag for a very long time without success. He had hoped to catch it without injuring it. But the stag was too fast for him. Finally, Hercules shot the stag with an arrow, being very careful to hit the stag in its leg, so the wound would heal. He tied the stag gently to a tree, and left the stag there, while he looked around for a witness who would agreed to swear to King Eury that the stag had been captured. Hercules intended to let the beautiful animal go free once he could prove he had captured it.

It took a while to find anyone who was willing to speak up to King Eury, or to any king for that matter. By the time Hercules returned, dragging his witness with him, he found the goddess Artemis standing next to the empty tree where Hercules had tied the stag. Artemis was furious when she heard that King Eury had sent Hercules after her favorite stag. But she was not furious with Hercules. She offered to be his witness. As she told Hercules, she was going to be speaking soon with King Eury anyway.

The Fourth Labor

1. Describe the stag of Artemis.

2. What did Hercules do to the stag?

3. Explain who Artemis is and how she helps Hercules.

The 5th Labor of Hercules

The Stymphalian Birds

His 5th labor was to kill the Stymphalian birds.

The Stymphalian birds were just plain nasty. The people in the area spent their days and nights hiding from these scary birds. The Stymphalian birds had pointed beaks and ripping claws and their feathers were made of razor sharp bronze. They were the stuff of nightmares!

What the Stymphalian birds loved to do more than anything was to fly high in the sky looking for anyone or anything they could attack. They especially loved to drop their sharp feathers on children and animals. You can see why everyone kept their children inside, and sheltered their animals as best they could.

Hercules made a large shield of sturdy bronze, to protect his body from the feathers. He used poisoned arrows to shoot all the Stymphalian birds as they flew by overhead. When the last bird fell, the people hiding inside their huts and homes rushed outside.

Hercules made many new friends that day.

The Fifth Labor

1. Describe the Stymphalian birds.

2. What did Hercules do to the birds?

The 6th Labor of Hercules

The Augean Stables

His 6th labor was to clean the Augean Stables in one day.

Augean, the King of Elis, had many sheep and cattle. All his sheep and cattle slept in the royal stables. This might sound nice, but the stables had not been cleaned for several years. It was not nice at all! The most horrible smell greeted Hercules when he stuck his nose in the stable door.

Obviously, it would take a great deal of water to wash away all the filth. Hercules used his mighty strength to push the riverbeds of a couple of nearby rivers and change their course, so that the rivers would rush through the stables and clean them out! It was a clever solution. The job was done in just a few hours.

Hercules put most of the river beds back where they were. But he left one babbling brook for the comfort of the animals.

When all of the animals who lived in the stable came home that night from the fields, they found clean beds of hay, warm buckets of oats, and fresh running water. They could not have been more happy.

The Sixth Labor

1. Describe the King Augean and his stable.

2. How did Hercules clean the stable?

3. How is this labor different than the other five that you read?

The 7th Labor of Hercules

The Cretan Bull

His 7th labor was to capture the Cretan bull.

The Cretan bull had walked out of the sea. The bull found himself on the island of Crete. It was a beautiful island and a beautiful bull. The island sparkled with sunshine and happy people. The bull was huge, with silvery horns, and snow white skin. They seemed to fit.

There was a tribe of people on the lovely island of Crete. These people, the Minoans, had a favorite sport enjoyed by both boys and girls - bull jumping. Shortly after it arrived, the Cretan bull had been captured to use in the games. But the bull was not happy to be captured. The bull tossed and gored and trampled anyone who tried to leap over it. One day, it escaped.

To the Minoans, bulls were sacred. It was against their religion to kill a bull. They tried to recapture it, without harming it, but they did not succeed. The bull hid during the day. At night, it ripped destruction from one end of the island to the other.

When Hercules finally found the bull, who was hiding in the forest at the far end of the island, the bull threw its head down and pawed the earth. While the bull has its head down, and was not looking, Hercules quickly grabbed the bull by its horns and threw it to the ground. It made the bull dizzy for a minute. Before the bull could recover, Hercules had him tied tightly up with rope. Hercules carried the bull back to King Eury, much to the relief of the Minoan people of ancient Crete.

The Seventh Labor

1. Describe the Cretan Bull

2. Why did the Minoans not kill the bull?

3. What did Hercules do with the bull?

The 8th Labor of Hercules

The Girdle of Hippolyta

For his 8th labor, King Eury told Hercules that he had to bring back the golden girdle of the Amazon queen. A girdle is like a belt. The Amazons were a tribe of fierce women. They were very warlike. Any men they met, they captured and kept as slaves.

This was not King Eury's idea actually. It was his daughter's. Hera had told her that wearing the girdle would make her as strong as an Amazon. That was pretty strong. King Eury's daughter wanted to wear the girdle. She wanted to be as strong as the Amazon queen. King Eurystheus' daughter did not care that this was an especially difficult mission, even for Hercules. She thought only of herself.

Hercules also thought this might be a difficult labor, but he was surprised. It was not difficult, not at first anyway. Hippolyta, the Amazon queen, had heard tales of the mighty Hercules. She knew Hercules would be a good friend to have in times of war. In the spirit of friendship, she willingly gave the girdle to Hercules to take back to King Eury's daughter.

As Hercules reached for the golden girdle, the Amazon women thought Hercules was reaching for their queen. They attacked him. During the fight, Hippolyta was accidentally killed by her own people. That started a big fight among the Amazon women. While they were fighting among themselves, Hercules managed to escape with the golden girdle.

The Eighth Labor

1. Describe the Amazons.

2. Why did Hera want the girdle?

3. What happened when Hercules tried to take the girdle from Hippolyta?

The 9th Labor of Hercules

The Cattle of Geryon

His 9th labor was to capture the entire herd of the cattle of Geryon and present the herd to King Eury.

The Geryon was part man and part monster. He had two legs, the size of tree trunks. Three bodies grew from his waist, each with its own head and arms. He was very mean. And very strong. He owned a herd of red oxen that he kept on the island of Erythia. The island helped to protect his cattle from thieves. So did his two-headed dog.

Hercules had to fight the Geryon and his two-headed dog. Finally at last, when both lay quietly, either dead or exhausted (Hercules didn't actually care by then), Hercules herded the nervous red oxen aboard his ship and sailed for home.

The Ninth Labor

1. Describe the Geryon.

2. What did Hercules do with the Geryon?

The 10th Labor of Hercules

The Mares of King Diomedes

His 10th labor was to capture the mares of King Diomedes.

The mares were horses. The mares were fed on human flesh. Hercules knew he needed help to capture these fearsome animals. Together with some good friends he had made on his travels, Hercules and his band of volunteers journeyed to the land of Thrace.

The mares were gentle. That surprised Hercules. He led one out of the stable. The other mares followed. Things were moving along nicely when Hercules was attacked by King Diomedes and the king's men. In the heat of battle, the king was thrown from his horse. His horse ate him.

When the king's men saw what had happened, they jumped from their horses and ran away. The mares ran after them. Hercules quickly gathered up the fleeing animals. With the help of his volunteers, Hercules muzzled the mares, then led them to King Eury.

The Tenth Labor

1. Describe King Diomedes' mares.

2. How did Hercules get the mares?

The 11th Labor of Hercules

The Golden Apples of the Hesperides

His 11th labor was bring the legendary golden apples of the Hesperides back to King Eury.

There was a rumor that the apples were hidden in the garden of the Hesperides. It was rumored that the apples gave immortal life to anyone who ate them, but hardly anyone believed the rumor. In fact, no mortal knew if the legendary golden apples really existed.

The Hesperides were magical creatures who lived a long way away. It took Hercules several months to reach the land of the Hesperides. When he finally reached the garden, he had to slay a dragon who was guarding the garden gate, before he could search for the apples.

The apples were poorly hidden. They were in plain sight, hanging on the apple tree in the center of the garden. It took Hercules no time at all to round them up. Hercules was tempted to take a bite and give himself immortal life. But he had heard another rumor. He had heard that the apples did not give immortal life, but rather, took immortal life away. That was not his goal at all.

Several months later, when he reached home, he gave the apples to King Eury. King Eury quickly gave the apples to his wife. His wife returned the apples to the Hesperides with her apologies.

The Eleventh Labor

1. What is so special about the Hesperides apples?

2. Describe the Hesperides.

3. What happened to the apples after Hercules got them?

The 12th Labor of Hercules

The Capture of Cerberus

His 12th and final labor was to descend into the underworld, and bring back Cerberus, the three-headed dog who guarded the gate to underworld, home of the powerful god, Hades.

Hercules knew how much Hades loved that fierce, bad tempered dog. Hercules asked Hades' permission to briefly capture Cerberus, and told him why. Hades agreed that Hercules could try, as long as he used no weapons and did not hurt poor Cerberus.

Hercules used his bare hands. He scooped all three heads up at once, and strangled Cerberus until he was unconscious. He gently carried the dog off to King Eury's. Cerberus began to regain consciousness as Hercules approached the king. The king scurried behind his royal throne.

Hercules explained he had to get the dog home right away. King Eury stuck his head out from behind his throne and quickly agreed that Hercules should leave immediately. Hercules promised to be right back.

After Hercules delivered Cerberus safely home, Hercules quickly returned to the palace, eager to be granted immortality. But Hera was nowhere to be found. Neither was King Eury.

It was Zeus who granted Hercules immortality. Zeus proudly brought his son Hercules up to the heavens.

The Twelfth Labor

1. Who is Cerberus and where is he?

2. Did King Eury and Hera give Hercules immortality? Who did?

Hades

Hades, Poseidon, and Zeus were brothers. Each ruled over some part of the universe. Poseidon ruled the seas. Hades ruled the Underworld. Zeus accepted the most demanding job of all - Zeus was chosen to rule over all of the gods and all of the earth and all of the heavens.

Unlike his two brothers, Zeus and Poseidon, both of whom were full of life, Hades was a gloomy fellow. He had a home high on Mount Olympus, but he was rarely there. He was much happier, well, more content anyway, to live in the Underworld.

Hades was not the lord of death. He did not decide who lived and who died up on earth. His job was to run things down in the Underworld, the place where you went after you died.

The Underworld was a big place. Some areas were really nice, and some were not nice at all. The Elysian Fields, for example, was the place heroes were sent after they died. It was a great neighborhood. But parts of the Underworld were scary! People who behaved badly on earth might end up in one of those sections. Hades decided where you were sent. It was not wise to anger Hades, whether you were alive or dead, or you might end up someplace you really did not want to be.

His brothers thought Hades rarely took time to play, but they were mistaken. Hades loved to play. One of his favorite belongings was his invisible helmet. He had a lot of fun with that. More than anything, except for his beloved dog, Cerberus, Hades loved his golden chariot. It was his pride and joy. His chariot used to belong to a god named Helios. But Helios had retired and no longer pulled out the sun each day. (That was one of Apollo's jobs now.) Helios was delighted to give his old chariot to Hades. In exchange, Hades promised Helios a favor, which was all the payment Helios required. Hades and his beloved dog Cerberus would climb aboard his golden chariot and tear across the Underworld. The souls of the dead scattered left and right to get out of their way.

Hades was never lonely. For a long time, he did not have a wife, but he did have a faithful and deeply loved companion, his three-headed dog, Cerberus. His family visited now and then. Zeus popped in whenever he felt like it. His nephew, Hermes, the deal maker for the gods, stopped by, whenever things had to be smoothed over and fixed.

To give his dog a sniff at a new place, Hades even came up to the surface now and then. If it was important enough, Hades would even attend meetings of the gods on Mount Olympus. But he never thought of himself as one of the Olympians. To Hades, home was the Underworld.

Hades

1. Describe the Underworld in detail, particularly the different sections. What did Hades decide?

2. What does Hades like to do?

The River Styx

No one knows much about the River Styx, no one alive that is. The Styx was a special river. To the ancient Greeks, the River Styx separated the world of the living from the world of the dead.

When your soul got to the river, a boatman named Charon would give you a ride. But the ride was not free. If your family had not buried you with a coin to use as payment, you were stuck. Some souls, who did not have a coin, tried to swim across the River Styx. Some made it. Most didn't.

For those souls who received a ride in Charon's boat, or managed to swim across the river, there was little to do on the other side except wait to be reborn into a new body. These souls would not remember their prior life. They would start over as an infant. So, unlike the ancient Egyptians, the ancient Greeks didn't spend a lot of time planning for their afterlife because they did not expect to be there very long.

According to Greek mythology, some people were shocked to discover that they would be stuck there for some time, in some cases, forever. Some souls were sent to the Underworld as punishment. For others, it seemed to take quite a while to find just the right body. The Underworld was not packed, but it was populated.

River Styx

1. Describe the River Styx. What does it divide?

2. What did the ancient Greeks believe would happen to them after death?

Hades Zeus, and the King of Corinth

The people of ancient Corinth believed their king, King Sisyphus of Corinth, was the cleverest king who ever lived! They were always bragging about him.

But no one bragged about the most clever thing their king did. That is because most people knew nothing about it, for a very good reason!

As the story goes

One day, the king of Corinth was busy trying to come up with an idea to solve Corinth's fresh water problem. He saw Zeus fly by, carrying a lovely river spirit in his arms.

"That Zeus," sighed the king. "What a trouble maker!"

Soon after, the river-god Asopus flew by. "Have you seen my daughter?" he bellowed at the king.

"If you will give my city a source of fresh water, I will tell you what I saw," King Sisyphus shouted back. Immediately, a crystal clear stream of fresh water bubbled up.

"Zeus took her that way," the king pointed.

The king knew Zeus would be angry when he heard what the king had done. But Corinth desperately needed a source of fresh water. And now they had one.

Sure enough, Zeus was furious. He told his brother Hades to take King Sisyphus down to the underworld immediately!

"When they tell you I am dead, do not put a gold coin under my tongue," King Sisyphus whispered urgently to his wife. Being a good wife, she did exactly as the king had asked her.

Because the king was a very important person, Hades himself met the king at the River Styx, the entrance to the underworld. Because no gold coin was placed under his tongue, the king arrived at the entrance to the underworld as a poor beggar.

"Where is your gold coin?" Hades demanded to know. "How can you pay for a trip across the River Styx and arrive in the underworld?"

The king hung his head in shame. "My wife was too cheap to pay for the passage."

Hades mouth fell open. "You go right back there and teach that women some manners." Hades sent the king back to earth immediately, where he was magically alive and well again.

The king and his beloved wife laughed when he told her about it. But he never told anyone else. You never knew when the gods might be listening.

Hades, Zeus, and King Sisyphus

1. What did King Sisyphus do to anger Zeus?

2. What did Hades tell the king to do?

3. How did King Sisyphus outsmart Hades?

The Minotaur

As the story goes ...

Once upon a time, a long time ago, there lived a king named Minos. King Minos lived on a lovely island called Crete. King Minos had everything a king could possibly want. Now and then, King Minos sent his navy to the tiny village of Athens, across the sea to attack them.

The king of Athens did not know what to do. He was desperate. He figured if he had some time, he could build a strong navy, strong enough to send King Minos packing the next time he attacked Athens. The king of Athens offered King Minos a deal. If he would not attack Athens for 9 years, Athens would send 7 boys and 7 girls to the island of Crete to be eaten by the awful monster that King Minos kept as a pet, the dreaded minotaur.

The minotaur lived in the heart of a maze on the island of Crete. King Minos loved that old monster. King Minos only attacked Athens when he was bored. He really didn't want anything. This way, his beloved monster could look forward to a special treat every 9 years or so. King Minos took the deal.

Although Athens did build a navy, King Minos did not attack as the king of Athens had expected. In fact, King Minos kept his word. And now it was time for Athens to keep theirs. Everyone in Athens was crying.

Prince Theseus of Athens knew the importance of keeping your word. He knew that a deal was a deal. But, he was also quite sure that it was wrong to send small children to be eaten by a monster. Prince Theseus told his father (the king) that he was going to Crete as the seventh son of Athens. He was going to kill the Minotaur and end the terror.

"The Minotaur is a terrible monster! What makes you think you can kill it?" cried his father.

"I'll find a way," Theseus replied gently. "The gods will help me."

His father begged him not to go. But the prince took his place as the seventh Athenian boy. Along with six other Athenian boys and seven Athenian girls, Prince Theseus sailed towards Crete.

When the prince and the children arrived on the island of Crete, King Minos and his daughter, the Princess Ariadne, came out to greet them. The Princess Ariadne did not say anything. But her eyes narrowed thoughtfully. Late that night, she wrote Prince Theseus a note and slipped it under his bedroom door.

Dear Theseus (Ariadne wrote)

I am a beautiful princess as you probably noticed the minute you saw me. I am also a very bored princess. Without my help, the Minotaur will surely gobble you up. I know a trick or two that will save your life. If I help you kill the monster, you must promise to take me away from this tiny island so that others can admire my beauty. If interested in this deal, meet me by the gate to the Labyrinth in one hour.

Yours very truly,

Princess Ariadne

Prince Theseus slipped out of the palace and waited patiently by the gate. Princess Ariadne finally showed up. In her hands, she carried a sword and a ball of string.

Ariadne gave the sword and the ball of string to Prince Theseus. "Hide these inside the entrance to the maze. Tomorrow, when you and the other children from Athens enter the Labyrinth, wait until the gate is closed, then tie the string to the door. Unroll it as you move through the maze. That way, you can find your way back again. The sword, well, you know what to do with the sword," she laughed.

Theseus thanked the princess for her kindness.

"Don't forget, now," she cautioned Theseus. "You must take me with you so that all the people can marvel at my beauty."

The next morning, the Athenian children, including Prince Theseus, were shoved into the maze. The door was locked firmly behind them. Following Ariadne's directions, Theseus tied one end of the string to the door. He told the children to stay by the door and to make sure the string stayed tied so the prince could find his way back again. The children hung on to the string tightly, as Theseus entered the maze alone.

Using the sword Ariadne had given him, Theseus killed the monstrous beast. He followed the string back and knocked on the door.

Princess Ariadne was waiting. She opened the door. Without anyone noticing, Prince Theseus and the children of Athens ran to their ship and sailed quietly away. Princess Ariadne sailed away with them.

On the way home, they stopped for supplies on the tiny island of Naxos. Princess Ariadne insisted on coming ashore. There was nothing much to do on the island. Soon, she fell asleep. All the people gathered to admire the sleeping princess. Theseus sailed quietly away with the children of Athens and left her there, sleeping....After all, a deal is a deal.

The Minotaur

1. What deal did the King of Athens make?

2. Describe the Minotaur.

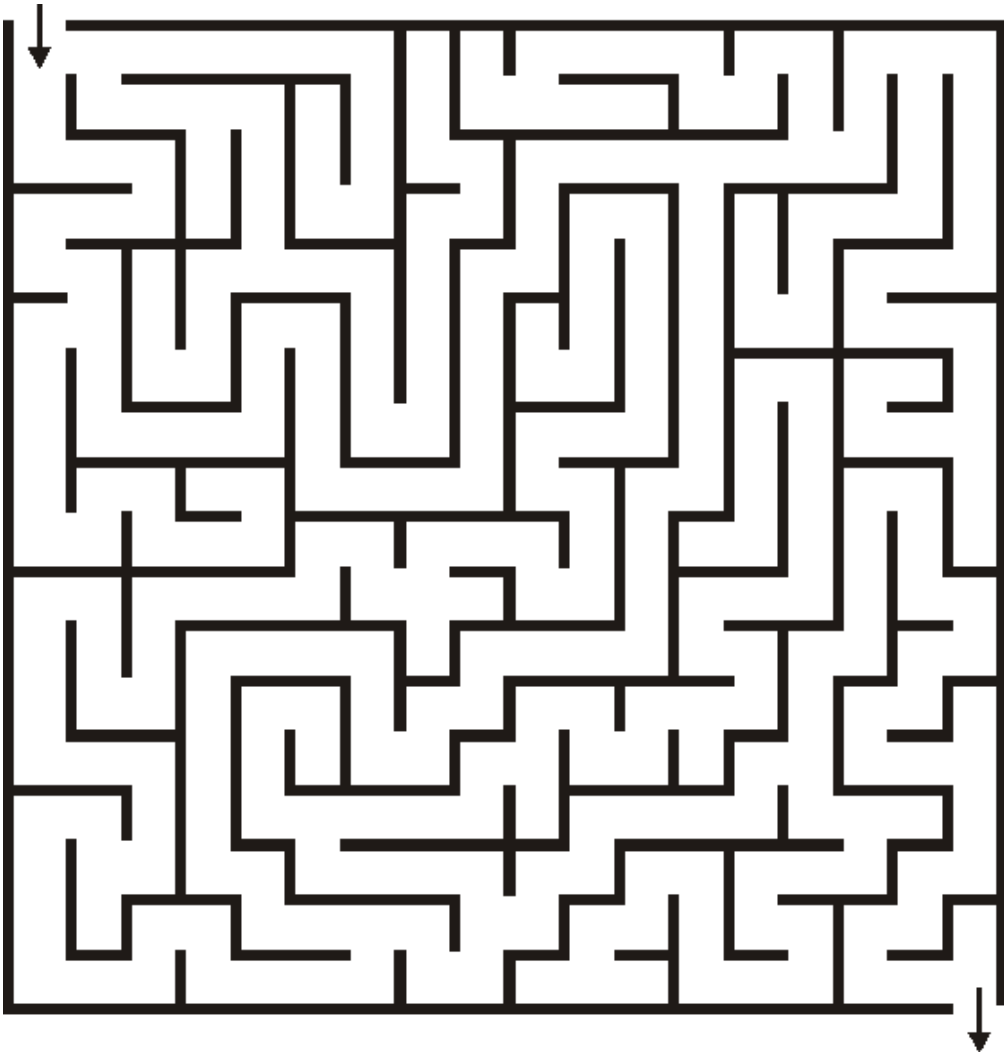
3. What does Prince Theseus volunteer to do?

4. What does Princess Ariadne volunteer to do?

5. What did the Prince do? How is the string important?

6. Where does he leave the Princess?

Can you get out of the Maze?



Medusa

Medusa was a monster, one of the Gorgon sisters and daughter of Phorkys and Keto, the children of Gaea (Earth) and Oceanus (Ocean). She had the face of an ugly woman with snakes instead of hair; anyone who looked into her eyes was immediately turned to stone. Her sisters were Sthenno and Euryale, but Medusa was the only mortal of the three.

She was originally a golden-haired, fair maiden, who, as a priestess of Athena, was devoted to a life of celibacy; however, after being wooed by Poseidon and falling for him, she forgot her vows and married him. For this offence, she was punished by the goddess in a most terrible manner. Each wavy lock of the beautiful hair that had charmed her husband was changed into a venomous snake; her once gentle, love-inspiring eyes turned into blood-shot, furious orbs, which excited fear and disgust in the mind of the onlooker; whilst her former roseate hue and milk-white skin assumed a loathsome greenish tinge.

Seeing herself transformed into such a repulsive creature, Medusa fled her home, never to return. Wandering about, abhorred, dreaded, and shunned by the rest of the world, she turned into a character worthy of her outer appearance. In her despair, she fled to Africa, where, while wandering restlessly from place to place, young snakes dropped from her hair; that is how, according to the ancient Greeks, Africa became a hotbed of venomous reptiles. With the curse of Athena upon her, she turned into stone whomever she looked upon, till at last, after a life of nameless misery, deliverance came to her in the shape of death, at the hands of Perseus.

Medusa

1. Describe Medusa in detail.

2. How did she get to look like this?

3. Where did Medusa flee? What happened to anyone who she looked at?

Perseus and Medusa

Once there was a good king, but he died. His bad brother killed him so that he could be king. The bad brother needed to get rid of the good king's wife (Danae) and baby (Perseus), but he was afraid to kill them too. So he put them in a wooden chest and he dropped the wooden chest in the ocean.

After a long time they drifted ashore in a new kingdom. Perseus and his mother Danae stayed there while Perseus grew up. But after a while the king of the new place wanted to marry Danae, but she didn't want to marry him. This king wanted to get rid of Perseus for awhile so he could make Danae marry him.

So the king sent Perseus on a quest, to kill the monster Medusa and bring back her head.

At first Perseus didn't know where to find Medusa, so he went and asked the three Fates. The Fates were very old and they only had one eye and one tooth between them and they took turns every day, passing the eye and the tooth between them. When Perseus came to them, at first they didn't want to tell him where Medusa was. But Perseus waited until they were passing the eye from one to another, and so none of them could see. Then he quick grabbed the eye! The Fates had to tell Perseus where Medusa was in order to get their eye back.

Then Perseus met the god Hermes, who gave him winged sandals to wear so he could fly to where Medusa was, and fight from the air. And he met the goddess Athena, who gave him a sword and a shield. Athena told Perseus not to look at Medusa or her ugliness would turn him to stone. Instead he should use the shield as a mirror and look in that to cut off Medusa's head. That is exactly what he did.

Perseus and Medusa

1. How did Perseus kill Medusa? Who helped him?
