

# **Greek Mythology**

## **Introduction**

The ancient Greeks were great storytellers. They were also deeply religious. They believed their gods and goddesses and monsters really existed. They believed these magical beings could interfere in their lives, for good and for bad.

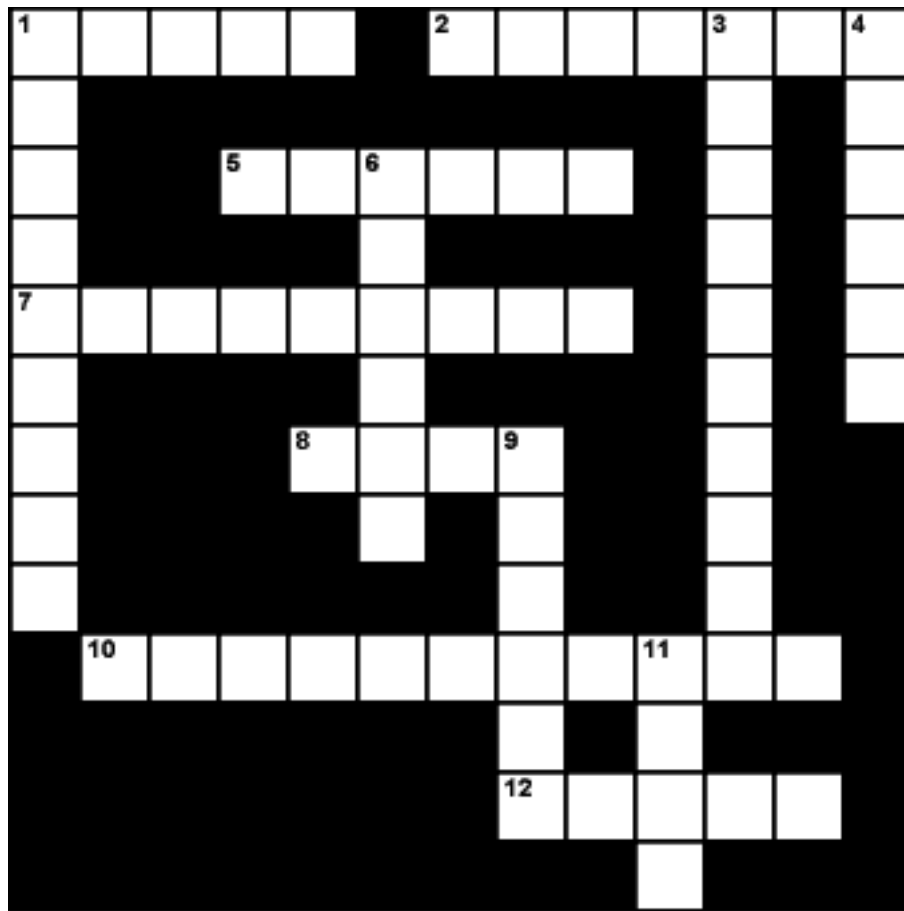
The ancient Greeks built temples to honor their gods. Each temple honored only one god. So there were many, many temples in ancient Greece.

They also told stories about their gods. These stories are called myths (short for mythology, or stories about gods.) Some myths were so good that they have been told over and over, and still are told today. Some are new myths about the ancient Greek mystical world. The thing about myths is that the gods' adventures might change, but the characters remained consistent. Zeus was always the king of all the gods. His wife, Hera, was always jealous. Poseidon, his brother, always ruled the sea. His other brother, Hades, always ruled the Underworld. His sisters ruled the harvest and the home. Their kids ran everything else.

All the gods had magical powers, although not all the gods had the same powers. Whatever powers they had were consistent from story to story. For example, Zeus and only Zeus could throw lightning bolts. But many gods had the ability to shape shift - to change their shape or the shape of others. Some gods could turn into animals, and when they did, you could not tell the difference between a real animal and a god who had shape-shifted.

It was a real world, at least it was to the ancient Greek people, a world full of bickering and fights and wars and compromise and fear and fun and punishment. Many myths were based on the fact that people paid for their bad acts, even if they were gods.

# Crossword Puzzle



## Across

- 1 Writer of "The Odyssey" and "The Illiad". (5)
- 2 Games held every four years. (7)
- 5 A city state. (6)
- 7 Government by the people. (9)
- 8 King of the gods. (4)
- 10 The founder of modern medicine. (11)
- 12 The market place. (5)

## Down

- 1 The "father" of History, known for his accounts of the Persian Wars. (9)
- 3 Demeter's daughter, kidnapped by Pluto. (10)
- 4 Tunic worn by men and women. (6)
- 6 Messenger of the gods. (6)
- 9 Famous for its army. (6)
- 11 Town besieged for ten years by Odysseus. (4)

# Perseus and Medusa



Perseus was a famous Greek hero. Like Hercules, he was part god and part man. Like Hercules, his father was the mighty Zeus, king of all the gods. Perseus had a different mother, though. His mother was a princess. She lived in the city-state of Argos.

Perseus was famous for many things. But he is probably remembered best because he managed to kill the dreadful Medusa, the Gorgon who could turn men into stones, and whose hair was made of live hissing snakes. Medusa was a dreadful monster.

Pegasus, the kind and caring flying horse, was grateful that his mother, the horrible Medusa, was dead! Pegasus remained friends with Perseus all their days.

## 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.

# 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. Because he had a kind heart, Prometheus gave man fire. Zeus was furious. Zeus had announced that man did not deserve fire. Prometheus had ignored him. As punishment, Zeus chained Prometheus to a rock for many years. Then Zeus went after his brother, the gentle, kind-hearted Epimetheus.

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 gave Pandora in marriage to the good hearted Epimetheus.

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.

# Theseus and 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.

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, too, 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."

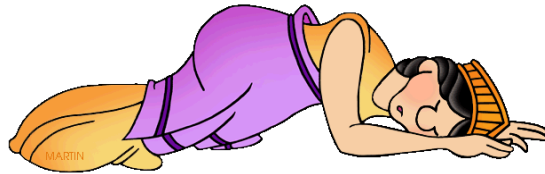
The next morning, the Athenian children, including Prince Theseus, were shoved into the maze. The door was locked firmly behind them. Following Ariadne's directions, Theseus tied one end of the string to the door. He told the children to stay by the door and to make sure the string stayed tied so the 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.