

Core D | Common Greek Myths

Instructions: Read and annotate the myths below. Make notes about the characters involved, possible details about Greek culture, and any themes/lessons offered.

The Mythical Story of Kronos

Kronos was the king of the Titans. He was very afraid that one of his children would kill him just as he had murdered his own father, Uranus. He was so worried he started to eat his own children after they were born - Aïdes (Hades), Poseidon, Hestia, Demeter, and Hera. After the birth of their sixth child, Zeus, Rhea played a trick on Kronos. She gave him a stone to swallow instead of the baby. She hid Zeus in a cave and the young god was brought up by a goat. When Zeus was older, he asked to become Kronos' cup-bearer. He put a potion in his father's wine that caused Kronos to vomit up his children. He also vomited up the stone which he was tricked into swallowing. Then Zeus led his brothers and sisters into battle against Kronos and the Titans. Zeus and his brothers and sisters won the battle and Zeus became the king of the gods.

The Birth of Athena

Zeus fell in love with Metis, one of the Titans, and pursued her. Metis tried to escape, going so far as to change her form into various creatures. However, Zeus continued his pursuit until she relented. She soon became pregnant. An oracle of Gaea then prophesied that Metis' first child would be a girl and that her second child would be a boy that would overthrow Zeus. Zeus took this warning to heart. When he next saw Metis, Zeus opened his mouth and swallowed her and her unborn child. After a time, Zeus developed a terrible headache and his screams of pain so loudly could be heard throughout the earth. The other gods came to see what the problem was. Hermes directed Hephaestus to take a wedge and split open Zeus's skull. Out of the skull sprang Athena, fully grown and in a full set of armor. Due to the circumstances of her birth, she became the goddess of intelligence and wisdom.

The Myth of Echo

Echo was a nymph who talked too much. She was very fond of having the last word. One day she spoke rudely to the great Juno, who said that for this offence Echo should never use her voice again, unless to repeat what she had just heard. Since she was so very fond of last words, she might repeat the last words of others. Echo was very much ashamed, and hid herself in the forest. Narcissus, a young man who had hair as yellow as gold and eyes as blue as the sky, - a very rare thing in Greece, where most people were very dark, - used to hunt in the forest where Echo was hiding. Echo often saw Narcissus, and she admired him very much.

One day Narcissus became separated from his friends, and hearing something rustle among the leaves, he called out, "Who's here?"

"Here," answered Echo.

"Here I am. Come!" said Narcissus.

"I am come," said Echo; and, as she spoke, she came out from among the trees.

When Narcissus saw a stranger, instead of one of his friends as he had expected, he walked quickly away. After this, Echo never came out and allowed herself to be seen again, and in time she faded away till she became only a voice. This voice was heard for many years in forests and among mountains, particularly in caves. It always had a mournful sound and seemed to make lonely places even lonelier.

The Midas Touch

In return for a favor, the god Bacchus granted King Midas whatever he wished. Midas wished that anything he touched might be turned to gold. Midas rejoiced, but his joy turned to grief. On his way, home, he picked up a stone. It turned to gold. Then he touched an apple. It did the same. At home, he tried to eat bread, then drink wine. They too turned to gold. Then Midas asked Bacchus to take back the gift and asked for forgiveness.

The Flight of Icarus

Upon falling from the king's favor, Daedalus and his son found themselves imprisoned in the labyrinth with no way of escape. As King Minos controlled the land and the sea, all seemed hopeless, until an idea came to Daedalus to make wings of feathers. After attaching wings together with wax, he tried out the wings to show his son how to use them. When they were ready to leave, he admonished his son not to fly too close to the sun or too close to the sea, but to keep a middle course. But Icarus failed to heed his father's warning and sailed higher and higher. The hot sun melted the wax, the feathers fell off, and Icarus fell to the sea and drowned.

Prometheus's Sin

Mighty Zeus ordered Prometheus not to help humanity. The Lord of Olympus decreed that fire must remain with the gods, not man. Prometheus, however, opted to disobey the god's order. Knowing the outcome of his actions, the Titan chose willingly to break into Hephaestus's workshop, in order to steal burning coals. Carefully, he placed the coals in the stalk of a fennel plant, in order to bless the human race with fire. As punishment, Zeus ordered him chained to a high mountain rock where each day an eagle came to peck his liver as food.

Pandora's Box

Pandora was forged by the divine blacksmith Hephaestus. All the gods and goddesses showered her with gifts. She was a most desirable female. Then Zeus sent her as a wife to Epimetheus, giving her a sealed jar as dowry for her marriage. Pandora was instructed not to open the vessel under any circumstances. But, of course, Pandora could not refrain from lifting the lid just a little bit. Thus, all evil dashed out of the jar to torture man in eternity allowing Zeus to take his revenge on humanity.