

College Guild  
PO Box 696, Brunswick, Maine 04011  
**World Mythology**  
Unit 1 of 5

**Greek Mythology**

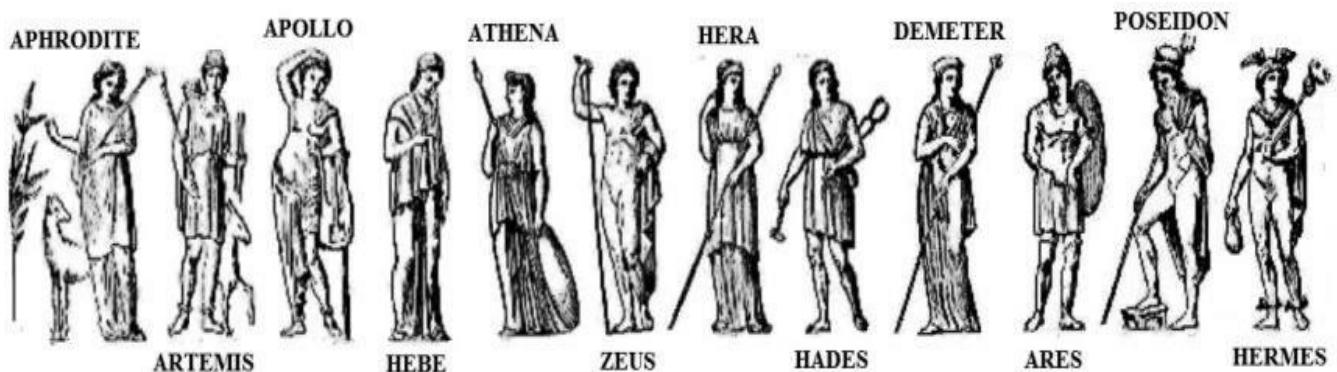
Welcome to the College Guild course World Mythology.

**Guidelines for all College Guild courses:**

1. **Answer all the questions in bold print, using black or blue ink or dark pencil if possible.** After we receive and review your completed Unit, we will send you feedback from your reader along with your original work and the next Unit. You don't need to return the questions – it saves us both postage.
2. There is **no specific deadline** to complete any Unit, but we would get concerned if we hadn't heard back from you after two months.
3. Remember how often the mail service loses things. **If you don't hear back from us within 2 months, please write to ensure we received your Unit** and sent out the next one.
4. Let us know if you need a dictionary, free to students who complete the first unit.
5. Several questions ask you to **draw/sketch** something...please TRY these! It does not matter if you think you are a terrible artist; even stick figures are fine with us.

**Introduction to Mythology** - Mythology is a collection of myths associated with a particular religion or cultural background. These myths frequently include powerful **deities** who represent aspects of people's lives and help them to understand what is going on in their world. When we think about mythology, we often think of the iconic Greek mythology, full of powerful gods and goddesses with captivating storylines. However, there are myths from other cultures that must also be explored! In this course, we explore five cultural perspectives on mythology worldwide. We will begin each unit with the creation mythology of that culture and end with the mythological understanding of death and the underworld. The first unit will focus on Greek Mythology, the second on Ghana, the third on Mayan, the fourth on China, and the fifth on Egyptians.

This first unit is dedicated to Greek mythology which is a collection of stories about Gods, Goddesses, heroes, creatures, and rituals that the ancient Greeks utilized to better understand the universe. Most of these stories were passed down through generations of Greek families and acquaintances through oral storytelling.



At the beginning of each unit, you will find a 'Glossary of Terms,' which is meant to help you by providing definitions for words that are bolded throughout the unit. Use this as a reference when a bolded word's meaning is unclear.

### Glossary of Terms:

1. **Aegis** - A protective cloak, one of Zeus's symbols.
2. **Ceased** - To bring or come to an end.
3. **Deity** - A god or goddess characterized by their divine status, quality, or nature.
4. **Destiny** - A series of events that will necessarily happen to a particular person or thing in the future.
5. **Elysian Fields** - Also Elysian Plain- originally the paradise to which heroes on whom the gods conferred **immortality** were sent.
6. **Hubris** - Extreme or excessive pride or dangerous overconfidence.
7. **Immortal** - This usually refers to a God or Goddess that lives forever, never dying or decaying.
8. **Mortal** - A being naturally subject to death (i.e., humans), often contrasted with a divine or **immortal** being (i.e., Gods).
9. **Mt. Olympus** - Home of the 12 Greek gods and the throne of Zeus. Created after the battle between Olympian gods and Titans.
10. **Natural Phenomena** - An occurrence or manifestation that happens without human input (i.e., earthquakes and tidal waves).
11. **Panhellenic** - Concerning, or representing all people of Greek origin or ancestry.
12. **Scepter** - A staff, one of Zeus's symbols.
13. **Theory** - Rational, abstract thinking about a phenomenon or the results of such thinking.
14. **Toiler** - A person who works long and hard.
15. **Titans** - Family of powerful giants who preceded the Olympians and were the children of Uranus (heaven) and Gaea (earth).

### The Immortal Gods

Myths can best be described as traditional stories, folk tales, or legends passed down from one generation to the next. Writing did not exist thousands of years ago when the world was new. The ancient Greeks did not have scientific knowledge about the "why" of things that occurred in nature. For example, they did not know why the seasons changed, where the sun disappeared to at the end of the day, or what made it look as if the moon had a face (the "man in the moon"). Their curiosity led them to control their narrative by creating stirring and sometimes outrageous stories to explain the "why" of natural events; we call these stories "myths." Every culture has its own mythology or myths.

#### 1. List at least five natural phenomena that you believe would have puzzled the ancient Greeks. Explain why.

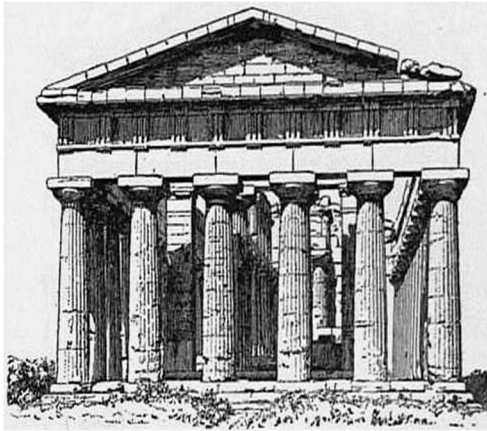
Ancient Greeks believed that there were superhuman beings – gods and goddesses – who controlled everything that happened on earth. They were invincible and **immortal**. No **mortal** dared to ignore the "Voices of Heaven." Of course, this meant that the **mortals** did not completely control their own lives because they sought guidance from gods and goddesses. This belief system is essential to the understanding of all myths. Myths are the **precursor** for art, religion, and languages. The fear of the unknown encouraged early civilizations to come up with stories offering answers to so many questions that seemed unanswerable. Myths taught youth and even the elderly, a sense of moral obligation and gave them something to look up to. Some people call it "**destiny**."

#### 2. Are we ever in complete control of our lives and futures? Provide an example to support your answer.

### **Gods and Goddesses as Leaders**

The Greek gods lived in palaces on the towering peak of **Mt. Olympus** in Greece. Dense clouds obscured any view from the earth -- all the more mysterious! They lived, loved, hated, quarreled -- exhibiting the very same range of emotions that we do. They could be kind and helpful but also mean, spiteful, and cruel. In fact, the excessive pride and defiance of Greek heroes' **hubris** led to their downfall at the hands of the Gods.

### **3. What personality traits would your "perfect" God/Goddess have? How might those traits relate to good leadership styles you have encountered?**



One of the Seven Wonders of the World is the temple of Zeus, the King of the Gods, which is annually visited by millions of people. It is located in Olympia, Greece, the site of the first Olympic games. To the left is an artist's concept of the temple, which once housed a forty-foot gold and ivory statue of Zeus (also known as Jupiter), in whose honor the Ancient Olympic Games were held. During the games, wars **ceased**, and athletes came from Asia Minor, Syria, Egypt, and Sicily to celebrate the Olympics and worship Zeus. Today, all that remains are crumbling ruins.

Each god had symbols with which they were always associated. Zeus's symbols included the eagle, **scepter**, lightning bolts, oak leaves, and his **aegis**, all representing his majesty as the king. Zeus was the supreme god of the Greeks, a mighty **deity** who administered justice from atop Mount Olympus. Hailed as the father of both mortals and **immortals**, Zeus was the god of the sky and weather, and he was also associated with law and order, the city, and the household.

The numerous other gods of the Greek pantheon were all subordinate to Zeus, and none could rival him in power. Zeus' wife and queen was Hera, goddess of women and marriage. The two had several divine children together, although Zeus also fathered numerous children through other marriages and affairs.

Greek myth and religion emphasized Zeus' supreme power, as well as his role as a source of justice. To the Greeks, Zeus represented the world order as they saw it. He was worshiped throughout the Greek world, with major **Panhellenic** sanctuaries at Olympia and Dodona.

### **4. What would you choose as a symbol for yourself and why? Feel free to sketch an image.**

### **5. Do we have an equivalent to Zeus in current times? Why or why not?**

## In The Beginning

### Theory of Prometheus, The Fire-Bearer

What was the origin of man? In Greek mythology, Prometheus, the supreme trickster and god of fire, refused to battle alongside his fellow **Titans** against Zeus, resulting in his imprisonment. He was given the responsibility of creating man while in captivity. According to legend, Prometheus created man out of mud, and Athena, goddess of wisdom, skills, and warfare, breathed life into the clay figure. Prometheus created man in the image of the gods and gave him fire.

#### **6. Explain three theories of creation and why or why not you believe those theories are more realistic.**

Prometheus is considered one of the great benefactors of mankind. His name means "forethought" (having the ability to foresee the future for everyone but oneself). Life did not exist on earth at this time, so the first task that Zeus gave Prometheus and his brother Epimetheus was to create animals and then, with enough clay and water left over, to create man by molding him into the image of the gods. Man was always to be dominant over animals.

Prometheus grew to love the mortals he helped to create but pitied them because they suffered in the cold, ate raw meat, and lived in caves. Prometheus realized that fire would be beneficial to man. However, gods considered fire to be scary. Zeus never wanted mankind to have fire for fear the mortals would become wise and as strong as the gods, and perhaps eventually overthrow him. Knowing the risk he was taking by defying Zeus, Prometheus flew up to Zeus' palace at night, stole a few embers of fire from his fireplace, and quickly returned to earth, where he demonstrated the many uses of fire to the mortals.

#### **7. List 2-3 risks you have taken, and then explain how you decide whether a risk is too great to take.**

#### **8. Do you think Prometheus was strong or weak because of his actions to help the humans? Explain why.**

When Zeus awoke the next morning, he became so enraged at the sight of smoke rising from the Earth that he ordered Hephaestus (Vulcan) to chain Prometheus to a far distant cliff, guarded by an ugly vulture that tore away at his liver each day. Because Prometheus was **immortal**, meaning that he would never die, his liver grew back each night. He remained there, on the cliff, for ages, freezing in the winter, scorched by the blazing sun in the summer, and never complained about his fate.

#### **9. If given the option, would you choose to be immortal? Explain why or why not.**



Pandora

← Pandora opening the box

According to mythology, it was Pandora, the first woman created, who was responsible for all the miseries in the world. Her name means "all-gifted." Zeus wanted to further punish Prometheus, so he ordered the gods to create a ravishingly beautiful woman and tasked the goddesses with dressing her in lovely garments. She was given in marriage to Epimetheus, the brother of Prometheus. As one of her wedding gifts, she received a box, which she was warned not to open.

However, driven by overwhelming curiosity, she carefully opened the box. Out flew horrible little monsters in a black, stinking cloud, representing the evils and torments that would plague mankind forever. Each of the gods had placed the worst things possible within — sickness and suffering, death, envy, hatred, lying, jealousy, vengeance, anger, and many more. Hera, the queen of the gods, couldn't change what the other gods had already done, but she could try to help, so she placed HOPE in the box.

**10. Looking at the world today, what evils that Pandora released still exist today? Where do they exist and how do they operate? Or Draw Pandora's reaction when she realized she had opened the box.**

Terrified at what she had done, Pandora quickly slammed the lid on the box and managed to keep one last thing inside: HOPE.

**11. If HOPE had flown out of the box, how might HOPE look today? Draw a picture or write a poem that describes what hope would look like today if it had flown out of Pandora's box.**

The term "Pandora's box" is commonly used to refer to a source of trouble or difficulty, creating an uncontrollable situation that would cause great grief. It also represents anything best left unopened or not discussed for fear of what might come of it.

**12. What might the following New York Times headline mean: "The President Has Opened Up a Pandora's Box"? Give an example.**

A stereotype is a preconceived opinion about persons who typify or conform to the same pattern or who are "cast in the same mold." For example, the saying that "blondes have more fun" is a stereotype.

13. Does the myth about Pandora have a stereotype about females? Explain.

### The Underworld

Hades/Persephone/Cerberus



The ancient Greeks had a deep concern for death and the welfare of the dead. They believed that the spirit of the dead might return and bring misfortune if they were not properly buried. Hades is often incorrectly used as another name for the Underworld when, in reality, Hades (known as Pluto to the Romans) was the King of the Underworld and the god of the dead, while Persephone was his wife and the Queen.

When someone passed away, they were escorted to the Underworld by Hermes (Mercury), the very busy Messenger of the Gods, to the River Styx. Here, an old boatman named Charon awaited to ferry the souls across, but they had to have a penny in their mouths. Otherwise, they would wander in lonely desolation

on the wrong side of the river forever. Once across the Styx, they were met by Cerberus, a fierce three-headed guard dog with a hissing snake for a tail, who guarded the dark and gloomy palace of Hades. He was far from your idea of a fancy groomed poodle. Cerberus didn't bother anyone upon entry, but he was ferocious to anyone who attempted to leave.

14. Describe what the journey down the river must be like. Use imagery and detail, and feel free to draw a picture if you'd like.

Today we refer to the Underworld as "Hell." Commonly heard are the expressions: "all hell broke loose," "hot as Hades," "the road to hell is paved with good intentions," "until hell freezes over," "oh, go to hell!," "hell hath no fury like a woman scorned," "war is hell." Many of us mortals believe this is a place that embodies the worst-case scenario after we die.

The Underworld was divided into different regions. First, the spirits of the dead appeared for trial before judges. Their deeds in the world above were examined, and sentences were passed upon them. The innocent then passed on to the **Elysian Fields**, where each one enjoyed a happy life. Near these fields flowed the river Lethe, the river of forgetfulness, and anyone who drank of it forgot everything that had happened to him in life. The very wicked, who had sinned greatly, were condemned to the Tartarus region, where all manner of torture awaited them. This is where the **Titan** Uranus sent his horrible monster children.

The following two stories tell of two who suffered untold misery because they had offended the gods. One was a son of Zeus and the other a mortal man:

Tantalus, son of Zeus and a cruel king, once served his sons to the gods for dinner, so his punishment was to be forever hungry and thirsty. He stood in a pool with water up to his neck, and just as he bent his head to drink the water, it would disappear. Over his head, apples and oranges grew, but they disappeared just as he reached for them.

15. Based on Tantalus's story, what do you think the word "tantalize" means. Write a sentence using this word. OR Draw your interpretation of Tantalus' facial expression based on his story.

Sisyphus was the cleverest of **mortal** men. He committed many acts against the gods, and his punishment was to roll a heavy stone up a hill; just before he reached the top, the stone rolled back down. Each time the stone rolled back, he had to retrieve it and try again – for eternity. Thus, a Sisyphian labor is a difficult task, one in which the **toiler** never makes any progress and only suffers weariness and frustration.

16. Imagine Sisyphus was allowed to live again and redeem himself. What would you have him do to make up for his devious acts?

#### Self-Reflection Exercise

- 1) Choose a god of Greek Mythology that you relate to and explain why.
- 2) What was the most interesting thing you learned about Greek Mythology?
- 3) How do the lessons of Greek Mythology apply to your own life?

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*Remember: First names only & please let us know if your address changes*