

College Guild
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Mythology

Unit 5 of 6

The Underworld

The ancient Greeks were very concerned about death and the welfare of those who died. They thought that the spirit of the dead person might come back and bring bad luck if they were not properly buried. Hades is often incorrectly used as another name for the Underworld when, in reality, Hades (Pluto to the Romans) was the King of the Underworld and Persephone was the Queen.

When someone died, s/he was escorted to the Underworld by Hermes (Mercury), the very busy Messenger of the Gods, to the river Styx. Here Charon, an old boatman, was waiting to ferry people across, but the people had to have a penny in their mouths. Otherwise, they were left to wander in lonely desolation forever on the wrong side of the river. Once across the Styx, they were met by Cerberus, a fierce three-headed guard dog with a hissing snake for a tail, who watched over the dark, gloomy palace of Hades. He was definitely not your idea of a fancy, groomed poodle. He never bothered anyone upon entry, but was ferocious to anyone who tried to depart.



“The old boatman took
a man on an old man’s way, with old
eyes: “Woe to you, wretched spirit!”
— Virgil, Aeneid, Book VI

1. Write a ten-line dialogue between someone being escorted to the Underworld and Charon.
2. Describe what this passage down the river must be like. Use imagery and detail.

The dog had one weakness -- he loved to eat a piece of cake, or a sop, as it was called, soaked in honey. The Greeks firmly believed that with a piece of cake and the necessary penny, a safe passage would be granted to their loved ones. There is

a commonly used expression, "give a sop to Cerberus," which means to appease someone or give a bribe to get out of a difficult situation.

3. Rituals are described as habits or traditions habitually and invariably followed by someone. Give several examples of rituals that you encounter, either in or out of prison.

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." Obviously, many of us mortals believe there is a place that embodies the worst-case scenario.

4. Draw a picture of the Greek's Underworld.

The Underworld was divided into different regions. First, the spirits of the dead appeared for trial before judges. Here, their deeds in the world above were examined and sentence 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 region called Tartarus, where all manner of torture awaited them. This is where the Titan Uranus sent his horrible monster children. The following are some of those who suffered untold misery because they had offended the gods.

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 the 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 just as he reached for them, they disappeared.

5. We get the word "tantalize" from this myth. Write a sentence using this word.

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, only suffers weariness and frustration.

6. Imagine *Sisyphus* was given the opportunity to live again and redeem himself. What would you have him do to make up for all the devious acts he committed?

Hades also gave hard labor punishment to cruel women. Three sisters who had been wicked and mean had to carry water from a well, using a sieve.

7. What would you imagine a "tartarean" situation would be for someone who works at sea, someone who flies a plane, and someone who is a doctor?

Aeneas

One of the great, but sad, love stories in Greek mythology was the story of the Trojan hero, Aeneas (pronounced oh-nee-us). The city of Troy was sacked and burned by the Greeks. The remaining survivors left the city by boat in search of a new homeland. The Fates had destined Aeneas to be the founder of a new city in Italy: Rome. The long, perilous journey by sea is described in Virgil's literary classic, the *Aeneid*. The gods and goddesses who had sided with the Greeks in the Trojan War used everything in their power to prevent Aeneas from reaching his final destination.

8. If you could only bring five items with you to a new homeland, what would you bring and why?

The weary, defeated band of survivors, led by Aeneas, were blown off course by Poseidon, but managed to find safe harbor in the ancient town of Carthage, ruled by Queen Dido. Dido and Aeneas had a long love affair with the promise of marriage. Jupiter sent Hermes to Carthage in order to remind Aeneas of his Destiny. So Aeneas had to tell a heart-broken Dido that he must continue his voyage to Italy and obey his divine command. Shaken to the depths by the strength of his love for Dido, he set sail with his comrades.



Aeneas leaving Dido.

9. Write an ending to the myth as if Aeneas had decided to disobey Jupiter and stay with Dido.

At a much later date, Aeneas got permission from the gods to visit his father in Tartarus. Rarely was any mortal allowed to enter the Kingdom of the dead. While searching for his father there, he saw Dido. As written in the *Aeneid*,

"As he recognized her dimly through the shadows, his tears fell and he spoke to her in the sweet accents of love: 'O Dido, unhappy Dido, was the news true that you had perished, had taken the sword?... Could I have been the cause of your death?' But in her the anger blazed and grimly she glared, holding her gaze averted and fixed on the ground. At length she flung herself away, and, in hatred still, fled back into the shadows of the woods... Aeneas was shocked by her unjust fate; and as she went, long gazed after her with tearful eyes and pity for her in his heart."

10. What famous person would you want to visit in the Kingdom of the dead and why?

Helios and Phaeton

Helios was the Sun god in Greek mythology. To explain the rising and setting of the sun, the ancient Greeks believed that Helios (pronounced hee-lee-ohs) rose each morning at dawn from the ocean and drove his golden chariot, drawn by four horses, through the sky and descended at night in the west.

Helios had a son, Phaeton (pronounced fay-ton), who often boasted about his parentage to his companions. They in turn, scoffed at the idea. There is an old saying, "Don't be too curious about your origins, and don't get too big for your breeches." But Phaeton went to his mother and asked if it was true that Helios was his father. She sent her son to the Sun god's shining palace in the heavens, where Helios embraced his son and acknowledged that he was the father. To prove the fact, he gave Phaeton one wish. Phaeton asked to drive his father's chariot on the daily round of the rising and setting sun. Reluctantly, Helios instructed him about the many hazards he would encounter.

11. Do you agree with the saying, "Don't be too curious about your origins"? Why or why not?

Phaeton rejected the warnings. The horses immediately realized someone else was driving the chariot and rushed headlong into the journey. They left the road and went wherever they chose, with the chariot swinging wildly. Phaeton was terrified when he looked down at earth, and suddenly dropped the reins. The horses charged wildly up to the very top of the sky, and as they sped downward towards earth, the chariot caught fire, causing the earth to be set afire.



12. What do you imagine Phaeton's journey looked like from earth?

13. Write a poem in the voice of Phaeton looking down over earth.

Jupiter had no other choice but to intervene. He shot Phaeton with one of his thunderbolts, and he plunged into the sea.

14. Think of another solution to solve the out-of-control situation.

15. Whom do you think was more responsible for Phaeton's fate: Phaeton, Helios, or Jupiter? Explain.

16. Remember Icarus? (He escaped the labyrinth with wings, and then flew too close to the sun and died.) How are the personalities of Icarus and Phaeton alike, and how are they different?

Hercules

Hercules is often considered the greatest of all the Greek heroes. One well-known myth is the "Twelve Labors of Hercules".

Hercules was the son of Zeus (Jupiter) and a mortal woman. Hero (Juno), Zeus' Queen, was so angered by another one of her husband's extra-marital affairs that she "waged war" with Hercules from the moment he was born. When he became an adult, she struck him with temporary insanity, and he killed his own children. When he recovered, he was ordered to serve his relative, Eurystheus, by performing twelve labors. Below are five of them, each intended to kill Hercules, but not the beasts.

1) His first labor was to kill the Nemean lion, a monstrous beast that has a skin so thick, arrows and spears could not pierce it. Hercules had to fight the beast with his bare hands and his famous club. Because of his incredible strength, he wrestled it to the ground and strangled it.



2) His second labor was to kill the Hydra, a great serpent that had nine heads. Each time he cut off one head, two more grew back in its place. He had to get a friend to help him by burning the growth of the new heads.



3) The third labor was to capture unharmed a sacred deer with golden antlers. It took a year of hunting before he was able to capture it with a net while it slept.

17. What is another way to capture a deer, a lion, and a snake without harming them?

4) The fourth labor was to capture a vicious boar that had been plaguing the countryside for years by destroying the farmers' fields. Hercules stood outside his den and shouted loudly. The boar charged out of his den and ran straight into a snowbank where Hercules captured him and brought him back to the king.

5) The fifth labor was to clean the Augean stables, in which Augean had kept thousands of cattle for thirty years. The King ordered it to be cleaned in one day. Hercules did this by diverting the course of a river, which then flowed through the stables and washed away all the dung. This myth gives us the expression, "to clean the Augean stables." Used today it means to accomplish an extremely formidable task or to clear away massive corruption.

18. Describe a present-day "cleaning the Augean stables" situation.

The word "herculean" is borrowed from this myth, and means "requiring or having great strength or effort."

19. Write a fictional story where the word "Herculean" comes into play.

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

Appendix

Greek Mythology: Unit 5 of 6

Citations

[https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/3/32/Gustave_Dor%C3%A9_-_Dante_Alighieri_-_Inferno_-_Plate_9_\(Canto_III_-_Charon\).jpg/436px-Gustave_Dor%C3%A9_-_Dante_Alighieri_-_Inferno_-_Plate_9_\(Canto_III_-_Charon\).jpg](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/3/32/Gustave_Dor%C3%A9_-_Dante_Alighieri_-_Inferno_-_Plate_9_(Canto_III_-_Charon).jpg/436px-Gustave_Dor%C3%A9_-_Dante_Alighieri_-_Inferno_-_Plate_9_(Canto_III_-_Charon).jpg)
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