

Ancient Origins

Extract Booklet



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Class: _____

Teacher: _____

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Key vocabulary

Muse (n)	One of the nine daughters of Zeus and Mnemosyne, protectors of the arts. Verb – to reflect, ponder, mediate.	Hubris (n)	Excessive pride or self-confidence. Hubristic – excessively proud or arrogant.
Omnipotent (adj)	Having unlimited power. From omni everything and potent power.	Myth (n)	A traditional story involving gods and supernatural events that often explain events and ideas. From the Greek mythos meaning a story or tale. Mythic – to do or from myths. Mythology - A collection of myths, or the study of those myths.
Deity (n)	A god or goddess.	Thesis (n)	A statement, idea or argument.
Catastrophe (n)	A disaster, a sudden event causing great damage or suffering. Catastrophic.	Labyrinth (n)	A complicated, irregular network of passages where it is easy to get lost; a maze.
Cosmogony	A theory regarding the origin of the universe. Adj: Cosmogonic.	Polytheism (n)	A belief in more than one god. Also: polytheistic.
Glory (n)	Fame or honour won by great achievements. Glorious.	Chronology (n)	The order of events as they happened over time. Chronological – to be in time order.
Pantheon (n)	All the gods of a particular religion; in ancient Greece and Rome it can also refer to a temple. Also: pantheism and pantheistic, believing that god is in everything.	Monster (n)	An imaginary creature that is typically ugly or frightening. Monstrous, monstrosity, monstrousness.

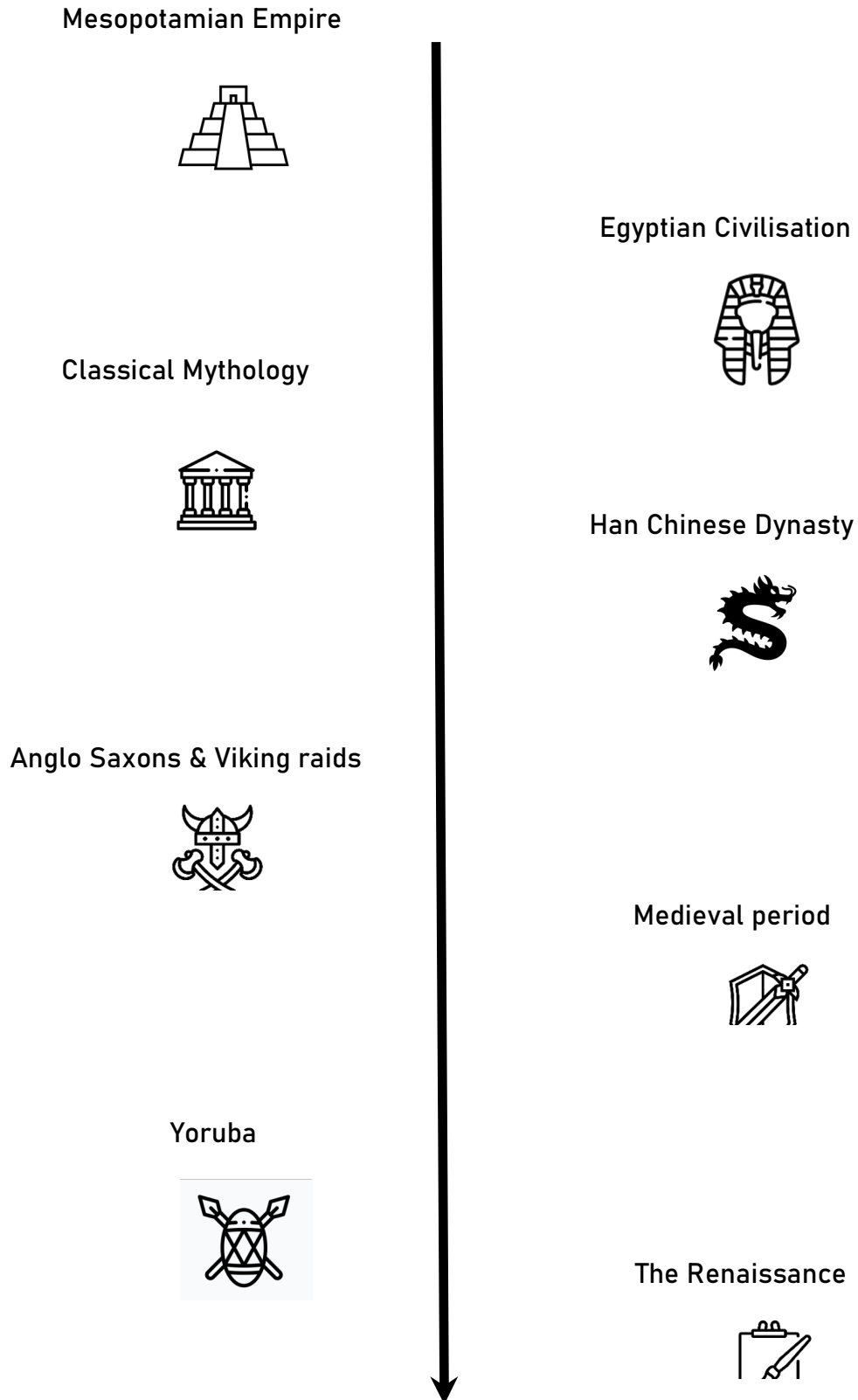
Subject terminology

Epithet	An adjective phrase describing the quality of a person or thing e.g. "the wine-dark sea."	Metaphor	A figure of speech in which a word or phrase is applied to an object or action to which it is not literally applicable. 'time is money.'
Tenor	The person, object or subject referred to in a metaphor. E.g. "Life is a walking shadow." Life is the tenor.	Vehicle	The part of the metaphor that makes the comparison. E.g. "Life is a walking shadow." Walking shadow is the vehicle.
Ground	In a metaphor this is the link between the tenor and the vehicle. E.g. 'Life is a walking shadow.' The link is that life and shadows do not last.	Direct address	The name of the person (normally) who is being directly spoken to.
Structure	The structural framework that underlies the order and manner in which a narrative is presented to a reader, listener, or viewer. The narrative text structures are the plot and the setting.	Dramatic irony	The full significance of a character's words or actions is clear to the audience or reader although unknown to the character.
Dialect	A particular form of a language which is peculiar to a specific region or social group.	Figurative language	Words or expressions to convey a meaning that is different from the literal interpretation.
Denouement	The final part of a play, film, or narrative in which the strands of the plot are drawn together, and matters are explained or resolved.	Form	A text's physical structure. Elements like the poem's type, stanza structure, line lengths, rhyme scheme, and rhythm express its form.
Allusions	Calling something to mind without mentioning it explicitly.	Personification	Giving something inanimate human features.
Exposition	The opening of a story, introducing characters, setting and plot.	Climax	The most intense, exciting, or important point of something; the culmination.

Epic	A long ancient poem, narrating the deeds and adventures of heroes and legendary figures from long ago.	Juxtaposition	The fact of two things being seen or placed close together with contrasting effect. 'the juxtaposition of these two images.'
Context	Circumstances forming a background of an event. Context may be something cultural, historical, social, or political.	Protagonist	The leading character or one of the major characters in a play, film, novel, etc.
In media res	A Latin phrase which means a story that starts 'in the middle' of the action; for example the Odyssey starts almost at the end.	Characterisation	the creation or construction of a fictional character.
Deus ex machina	A Latin phrase that means literally 'god from the machine' and refers to stories that have an unnatural or very unlikely end to the story that solves problems too easily.	Dialogue	A conversation between two or more people
Appositive	A word or phrase that describes the noun or pronoun it sits next to e.g. Achilles, the fastest man in the world, looked over the battlefield.		

Ancient Origins Timeline

We will cover a broad sweep of history during this unit, covering millennia of human development and literature across China, the Near East, Africa, the Mediterranean and Northern Europe.



Creation Myths

The First Order

Stephen Fry,
Mythos



These days the origin of the universe is explained
5 by proposing a Big Bang, a single event that instantly brought into being all the matter from which everything and everyone
10 is made. The ancient Greeks had a different idea. They said that it all started not with a bang, but with CHAOS.

Was Chaos a god – a divine being – or simply a state of nothingness? Or was Chaos, just as we
15 would use the word today, a kind of terrible mess, like a teenager's bedroom only worse?

Think of Chaos perhaps as a kind of grand cosmic yawn. As in yawning chasm or yawning void.

Whether Chaos brought life and substance out
20 of nothing or whether Chaos yawned life up or dreamed it up, or conjured it up in some other way I don't know. I wasn't there. Nor were you. And yet in a way we were, because all the bits that make us were there. It is enough to say that
25 the Greeks thought it was Chaos who, with a massive heave, or a great shrug, or hiccup, vomit or cough, began the long chain of creation that has ended with pelicans and penicillin and toadstools and toads, sea-lions, seals, lions, human
30 beings and daffodils and murder and art and love and confusion and death and madness and biscuits.

Whatever the truth, from formless Chaos sprang two creations: EREBUS and NYX. Erebus, he was
35 darkness, and Nyx, she was night. The coupled at once and the flashing fruits of their union were HEMERA, day, and AETHER, light.

At the same time – because everything must happen simultaneously until Time is there to

40 separate events – Chaos brought forth two more entities: GAIA, the earth, and TARTARUS, the depths and caves beneath the earth.

I can guess what you might be thinking. These creations sound charming enough – Day, Night,

45 Light, Depths and Caves. But these were not gods and goddesses, they were not even personalities. And it may have struck you also that since there was no time there could be no dramatic narrative, no stories, for stories depend
50 on Once Upon a Time and What happened Next.

You would be right to think this. What first emerged from Chaos were primal, elemental principles that were devoid of any real colour, characters or interest. These were the
55 PRIMORDIAL DEITIES, the First Order of divine beings from whom all the gods, heroes and monsters of Greek myth spring. The brooded over and lay beneath everything... waiting.

The silent emptiness of this world was filled
60 when Gaia bore two sons all on her own. The first was PONTUS, the sea, and the second was OURANOS, the sky – better known to us as Uranus, the sound of whose name has ever been the cause of great delight to children from nine
65 to ninety. Hemera and Aether bred too and from their union came THALASSA, the female counterpart of PONTUS the sea.

Ouranos, who preferred to pronounce himself as Ooranos, was the sky and the heavens in the
70 way that – at the very beginning – the primordial deities always were the things they represented and rules over. You could say that Gaia was the earth of hills, valleys, caves and mountains yet capable of gathering herself into a form that
75 could walk and talk. The clouds of Ouranos the sky rolled and seethed above her but they too could coalesce into a shape that we might recognise. It was so early on in the life of everything. Very little was settled.

Yoruban Creation Myth

The Yoruba people are a West African ethnic group that mainly inhabits parts of Nigeria, Benin and Togo that constitute Yorubaland.



In the beginning, there was only the sky above, water and marshland below.

The chief god Olorun ruled the sky, and the goddess Olokun ruled what was below.

- 5 Obatala, another god, reflected upon this situation, then went to Olorun for permission to create dry land for all kinds of living creatures to inhabit.

He was given permission, so he sought advice from Orunmila, oldest son of Olorun and the god of prophecy.

- 10 He was told he would need a gold chain long enough to reach below, a snail's shell filled with sand, a white hen, a black cat, and a palm nut, all of which he was to carry in a bag.

- 15 All the gods contributed what gold they had, and Orunmila supplied the articles for the bag.

- When all was ready, Obatala hung the chain from a corner of the sky, placed the bag over his shoulder, and started the downward climb. When he reached the end of the chain he saw he still had some distance to go.

From above, he heard Orunmila instruct him to pour the sand from the snail's shell, and also immediately release the white hen.

- 25 He did as he was told, whereupon the hen landing on the sand began scratching and scattering it about.

Wherever the sand landed it formed dry land, the bigger piles becoming hills and the smaller piles valleys. Obatala jumped to a hill and named the place Ife.

The dry land now extended as far as he could see.

He dug a hole, planted the palm nut, and saw it grow to maturity in a flash. The mature palm tree dropped more palm nuts on the ground, each of which grew immediately to maturity and repeated the process.

Obatala settled down with the cat for company.

Many months passed, and he grew bored with his routine.

He decided to create beings like himself to keep him company.

He dug into the sand and soon found clay with

which to mould figures like himself and started on his task, but he soon grew tired and decided to take a break.

He made wine from a nearby palm tree, and drank bowl after bowl. Not realizing he was drunk, Obatala returned to his task of fashioning the new beings; because of his condition he fashioned many imperfect figures.

Without realizing this, he called out to Olorun to breathe life into his creatures.

The next day he realized what he had done, and swore never to drink again, and to take care of those who were deformed, thus becoming Protector of the Deformed.

The new people built huts as Obatala had done, and soon Ife prospered and became a city.

- 65 All the other gods were happy with what Obatala had done, and visited the land often, except for Olokun, the ruler of all below the sky.

She had not been consulted by Obatala, and grew angry that he had usurped so much of her kingdom.

- 70 When Obatala returned to his home in the sky for a visit, Olokun summoned the great waves of her vast oceans and sent them surging across the land.

Wave after wave she unleashed, until much of the land was underwater and many of the people were drowned. Those that had fled to the highest land beseeched the god Eshu who had been visiting, to return to the sky and report what was happening to them.

- 80 Eshu demanded sacrifice be made to Obatala and himself before he would deliver the message. The people sacrificed some goats, and Eshu returned to the sky.

When Orunmila heard the news he climbed down the golden chain to the earth and cast many spells which caused the flood waters to retreat and the dry African land reappear. So ended the great flood.



Persephone, Queen of the Underworld

The story of Persephone, the sweet daughter of goddess Demeter who was kidnapped by Hades and later became the Queen of the Underworld, is known all over the world. It is actually the way of the Ancient Greeks to explain the change of the seasons, the eternal cycle of the Nature's death and rebirth. Persephone is understood in people's mind as a naive little girl who flows between the protection of her mother and the love of her husband. The myth of Persephone was very popular in the ancient times and it is said that her story was represented in the Eleusinian Mysteries, the great private and secret celebrations of Ancient Greece.

Persephone and Hades

In those early days the weather was always warm and sunny. The flowers were always in bloom; the crops were always ready for harvest. The goddess Demeter tended the countryside like a garden, planting seeds, watering the green grass, encouraging the trees to put on first blossom, then leaves, then fruit.

While Demeter worked, her beautiful young daughter Persephone used to play in the green woods of Athens, picking violets until her apron was full. When mother and daughter walked home hand in hand at the end of another sunny day, talking and singing and laughing together, the evening primroses opened just to watch them pass by.

Hades was not so lucky. Although he was a god, he did not live on the top of Mount Olympus in halls of cloud and sunlight, or on the earth among trees and fields. Hades ruled over the Kingdom of the Dead, and lived under the earth in darkness and bitter cold. Not one ray of sunshine ever found its way down into those echoing caverns and tunnels.

However, worse than either cold or dark was the loneliness. Hades tried to find a wife, but nobody wanted to give up the sunshine, the flowers or the glittering sea to live in Hades' dismal kingdom below the ground. Sometimes Hades would climb to the brim of the Underworld and peep out at the girls and women playing in the sun. The bright light hurt his eyes, but the sight of all those pretty women hurt even more.

One day he saw Persephone picking violets in her wood. "That's the one," murmured Hades. "How beautiful she is! Oh yes, she's the wife for me."

Nevertheless, Hades did not go to Demeter and ask to marry her daughter; he knew she would say no.

Instead, he harnessed his black chariot and thundered out into the sunlight. Lashing his whip, he drove his horses on at full tilt. All Athens shook at his



Abduction of Persephone, Paolo de Matteis (1662–1728)

coming, and his wheels felled trees to right and left as he raced through the woods. Holding the reins in his teeth, Hades leaned out and snatched Persephone by her long hair. Her apron spilled all its violets.

"Who are you? What do you want with me? Oh let me go! Help me, somebody! Mother, help me!" she cried.

The trees bawled after Hades, "Come back! Leave her alone!" Their green leaves flushed red with shouting, but Hades took no notice as he raced back to his Underworld. He struck out with his whip. The earth split open. A bottom ravine gaped, and his chariot sped downward. Down into the dark, down into the cold, he carried Persephone.

"Don't cry," he told her. "I shall make you my queen. Be happy! I'll give you all the riches of the earth- gold and silver and gems! You have the love of a king! What more do you want?"

"I want to go home! I want my mother!" sobbed Persephone.

When they reached the River Styx, which divides the earth from the Kingdom of the Dead, she cried out, "River, help me! I am Persephone! Save me, please!"

The river heard her and knotted itself around the god's legs, almost tripping him. But Hades kicked it aside like a dog. In despair, Persephone slipped off her belt of flowers and threw it into the tumbling water. "Take that to my mother and tell her," she pleaded. The river took her belt and hurried away. Then darkness closed in on all sides; Hades had reached home with his captive wife.

Meanwhile, up on the earth, Demeter came looking for her daughter at the end of the day.

"Persephone, darling! Time to go home!" There was

no answer. Demeter called out and asked everyone she met, but it was hopeless. Persephone had simply disappeared.

75 All Demeter's work was forgotten as she searched high and low for her child. Nothing mattered but to find Persephone. Consequently, the flowers wilted. The crops stopped growing and as Demeter wept, the trees wept with her, shedding their leaves in brown and yellow tears.

After searching the world over, Demeter returned to Athens and sat down in despair beside a river. As she gazed at the water, what should come spinning by on the current but a little cord of flowers.

85 "Persephone is in the Underworld," whispered the water. "I saw her! Hades has stolen her away to be his queen." As soon as she heard this, Demeter ran all the way to Mount Olympus and rattled at the gates of heaven.

90 "Zeus! Lord Zeus! Help me! Hades has stolen away my daughter! Make him give her back!"

Zeus listened to poor Demeter. "You say your daughter was taken by force? Hades should not have done that but there again..."

95 "Oh Zeus!" she interrupted him. "If I don't get my daughter back, how shall I go on decking the earth with flowers and fruit? I only do it out of joy, and without Persephone there is no joy for me. Let the earth wither and die for all I care!"

100 Zeus shivered at the thought. The people of the earth would quickly stop paying tribute to the gods if their crops stopped growing and their trees died.

"It's not up to me," he said gruffly. "There are rules. If Persephone has eaten anything while in the Underworld, she may not come back to the earth. That is the rule."

105 "Then what are you waiting for?" said Demeter. "Send your messenger this instant!"

Even though Zeus sent Hermes, fastest flying of all the gods, Demeter sped ahead of him that day, pulling on his sleeve, begging him to hurry.

110 Meanwhile, below the earth, Hades laid in front of Persephone a delicious feast. He knew (what she did not) that if she ate one mouthful she must stay with him forever.

115 "I'm too miserable to eat," sobbed Persephone. "Let me go. Why don't you let me go? It is so dark and gloomy here!"

120 Hades no longer thought his kingdom was dark or gloomy. Now that Persephone sat on the throne beside him, it seemed bright and cheerful. Hosts of ghosts came streaming through the darkness to gaze at his bride. Hades was very happy indeed. "But you must eat, my dear. Just try a little something." He

125 offered a dish of limes, an almond cake, a cup of wine, tempting her to eat.

"I'd rather die than eat your food," said Persephone, even though she was ravenously hungry.

130 "Just a little taste." Hades held up half a pomegranate- all red and juicy, smiling with seeds. He forced open her fingers and sprinkled twelve seeds into her palm.

Oh and she was so very hungry! For days she had sat and pined, hoping her mother might find her. Her mother did not come and still she did not come. 135 Persephone was too hungry to think. She lifted the seeds to her lips...

"Stop!"

Hermes, messenger of the gods, came skimming through the air in his winged sandals, "Noble Hades, Zeus the almighty commands you to let Persephone go...or am I too late?" He looked at the feast laid out in front of the two thrones.

"Yes, yes! You're too late!" crowed Hades.

145 "No, no! What do you mean?" cried Persephone. Six little pomegranate seeds fell from the palm of her hand.

"Have you eaten any of those?" demanded Hermes. Persephone burst into tears.

150 "She has! She has!" cried Hades triumphantly. "She is mine forever!"

"Only a few!" pleaded Persephone. "What difference does it make?"

155 "Hades, you're a rascal!" said Hermes. "You should have told her. I'm sorry, Persephone. There's a rule. You have accepted Hades' hospitality- eaten his food. Now you must stay here forever."

"And hate you forever Hades," cried Persephone, "because you tricked me!" When she said this, even 160 Hades turned a little pale. He loved Persephone and wanted her to love him in return.

"I only stole you away because I was so lonely," he said regretfully.

Hermes felt sorry for them both. "Let Zeus decide!" 165 he declared.

When Zeus heard what had happened, he thought long and hard before making his decision. Finally, he declared: "Because Persephone ate six of the pomegranate seeds, let her live for six months of every year in the Kingdom of the Dead. For the other 170 six months let her live with her mother, on the earth... and let no one argue with the judgment of Zeus!"

To conclude, that is why in the summertime the flowers bloom, the grass is green and trees wear 175

blossom, then leaves, then fruit. Demeter, you see, is rushing happily here and there, tending the earth like a garden. When she and her daughter walk hand in hand, talking and singing and laughing, the evening primroses open just to see them pass by.

However, in the autumn, Persephone travels down the Underworld, to keep her bargain with Hades. First

she learned to pity him. Then she learned to love him. Now the Underworld is much brighter and warmer during the six winter months. Up on the earth, Demeter is missing her daughter. The trees flush red with calling Persephone's name, then drop their leaves. The flowers wither. The crops stop growing and the people of the earth wait for Persephone to return, with the spring.

Chinese Myth of Zhulong the Candle Dragon

Zhulong also known in English as the Torch Dragon, was a giant red solar dragon and god in Chinese mythology. It supposedly had a human's face and snake's body, created day and night by opening and closing its eyes, and created seasonal winds by breathing.

This is a story of how the Four Seasons and Day and Night. It is because of the Mythical beast known as the Candle Dragon.

It was said to the north of the Chishui River beyond the distant Northwest Sea, there was a strange mountain named Zhangwei Mountain, in which lived a magical mountain god who wore a human face, yet with the body of a snake that stretched for 100's of Miles. The body of the mountain god was red like a fiery dragon. His eyes were also different from ordinary people, like two olives that hung on his face, which turned into two straight slits when he closed them.

The mountain god was so powerful that when he closed his eyes it turned to Night and when he opened them the sun rose. So when he slept the days and night occurred.

The mountain god never slept and he always curled up in the mountain without eating, drinking or breathing. When he yawned there would appear the fierce wind and torrential rain, when he blew, there would be winter in a second with the sky filled with black clouds and heavy snow storm when he sniffed, there would be midsummer in no time with scorching sun that could even melt the stones.



From <http://ancientchina7b.weebly.com/ancient-chinese-blog/chinese-myth-of-the-candle-dragon>

The Story of Prometheus

By James Baldwin

In those old, old times, there lived two brothers who were not like other men, nor yet like those Mighty Ones who lived upon the mountain top. They were the sons of one of those Titans who had fought
5 against Jupiter and been sent in chains to the strong prison-house of the Lower World.

The name of the elder of these brothers was Prometheus, or Forethought; for he was always thinking of the future and making things ready for
10 what might happen to-morrow, or next week, or next year, or it may be in a hundred years to come. The younger was called Epimetheus, or Afterthought; for he was always so busy thinking of yesterday, or last year, or a hundred years ago, that he had no care at
15 all for what might come to pass after a while.

For some cause Jupiter¹ had not sent these brothers to prison with the rest of the Titans.

Prometheus did not care to live amid the clouds on the mountain top. He was too busy for that. While
20 the Mighty Folk were spending their time in idleness, drinking nectar and eating ambrosia, he was intent upon plans for making the world wiser and better than it had ever been before.

He went out amongst men to live with them and help
25 them; for his heart was filled with sadness when he found that they were no longer happy as they had been during the golden days when Saturn was king. Ah, how very poor and wretched they were! He found them living in caves and in holes of the earth,
30 shivering with the cold because there was no fire, dying of starvation, hunted by wild beasts and by one another—the most miserable of all living creatures.

“If they only had fire,” said Prometheus to himself, “they could at least warm themselves and cook their
35 food; and after a while they could learn to make tools and build themselves houses. Without fire, they are worse off than the beasts.”

Then he went boldly to Jupiter and begged him to give fire to men, that so they might have a little
40 comfort through the long, dreary months of winter.

“Not a spark will I give,” said Jupiter. “No, indeed! Why, if men had fire they might become strong and wise like ourselves, and after a while they would drive us out of our kingdom. Let them shiver with cold and
45 let them live like the beasts. It is best for them to be poor and ignorant, that so we Mighty Ones may thrive and be happy.”



Prometheus made no answer; but he had set his heart on helping mankind, and he did not give up. He
50 turned away, and left Jupiter and his mighty company forever.

As he was walking by the shore of the sea he found a reed, or, as some say, a tall stalk of fennel, growing; and when he had broken it off, he saw that its hollow
55 centre was filled with a dry, soft pith which would burn slowly and keep on fire a long time. He took the long stalk in his hands, and started with it towards the dwelling of the sun in the far east.

“Mankind shall have fire in spite of the tyrant who sits
60 on the mountain top,” he said.

He reached the place of the sun in the early morning just as the glowing, golden orb was rising from the earth and beginning his daily journey through the sky. He touched the end of the long reed to the flames,
65 and the dry pith caught on fire and burned slowly. Then he turned and hastened back to his own land, carrying with him the precious spark hidden in the hollow centre of the plant.

He called some of the shivering men from their caves
70 and built a fire for them and showed them how to warm themselves by it and how to build other fires

¹ Jupiter is the Roman name for Zeus

from the coals. Soon there was a cheerful blaze in every rude home in the land, and men and women gathered round it and were warm and happy, and thankful to Prometheus for the wonderful gift which he had brought to them from the sun.

It was not long until they learned to cook their food and so to eat like men instead of like beasts. They began at once to leave off their wild and savage habits; and instead of lurking in the dark places of the world, they came out into the open air and the bright sunlight and were glad because life had been given to them.

After that, Prometheus taught them, little by little, a thousand things. He showed them how to build houses of wood and stone, and how to tame sheep and cattle and make them useful, and how to plough and sow and reap, and how to protect themselves from the storms of winter and the beasts of the woods. Then he showed them how to dig in the earth for copper and iron, and how to melt the ore, and how to hammer it into shape and fashion from it the tools and weapons which they needed in peace and war; and when he saw how happy the world was becoming, he cried out, "A new Golden Age shall come, brighter and better by far than the old!"

Things might have gone on very happily indeed, and the Golden Age might really have come again, had it not been for Jupiter. But one day, when he chanced to look down upon the earth, he saw the fires burning, and the people living in houses, and the flocks feeding on the hills, and the grain ripening in the fields, and this made him very angry.

"Who has done all this?" he asked.

And some one answered, "Prometheus!"

"What! that young Titan!" he cried. "Well, I will punish him in a way that will make him wish I had shut him up in the prison-house with his kinsfolk. But as for those puny men, let them keep their fire. I will make them ten times more miserable than they were before they had it."

Jupiter bade two of his servants, whose names were Strength and Force, to seize the bold Titan and carry him to the topmost peak of the Caucasus Mountains. Then he sent the blacksmith Vulcan¹ to bind him with iron chains and fetter him to the rocks so that he could not move hand or foot.

Vulcan did not like to do this, for he was a friend of Prometheus, and yet he did not dare to disobey. And so the great friend of men, who had given them fire and lifted them out of their wretchedness and shown them how to live, was chained to the mountain peak;

¹ The Roman name for Hephaestus



Prometheus Bound - Jacobs Jordaens (1593-1678)

and there he hung, with the storm-winds whistling always around him, and the pitiless hail beating in his face, and fierce eagles shrieking in his ears and tearing his body with their cruel claws. Yet he bore all his sufferings without a groan, and never would he beg for mercy or say that he was sorry for what he had done.

Year after year, and age after age, Prometheus hung there. Now and then old Helios, the driver of the sun car, would look down upon him and smile; now and then flocks of birds would bring him messages from far-off lands; once the ocean nymphs came and sang wonderful songs in his hearing; and oftentimes men looked up to him with pitying eyes, and cried out against the tyrant who had placed him there.

The Epic of Gilgamesh

The Epic of Gilgamesh is a long poem from Ancient Mesopotamia, regarded as the oldest surviving literary text. It was written down from various sources sometime between 2100 – 1200 BCE in Ancient Summarian on clay tablets.

The Epic tells the story of the great King, Gilgamesh, part god, part man and his wild friend Enkidu. The story is filled with adventures, mythical creatures and trials for Gilgamesh. It has been translated into many languages, including English, and continues to influence modern readers.

Written three and a half millennia ago, The Epic of Gilgamesh was forgotten for nearly two thousand years, until Austin Henry Layard and Hormuzd Rassam excavated the ancient Assyrian capital of Nineveh. There, the library of Ashurbanipal yielded the long-forgotten text, inscribed on clay tablets, the first great masterpiece of world literature and itself a text about exploring the world.

Tablet One: The Creation of Gilgamesh and Enkidu

This is the story of a man who knew all that could be known. He saw the hidden things from the time before the Flood. He built the walls of Uruk. Climb
5 those walls. Examine their foundations; marvel at their brickwork. No other city can rival strong-walled Uruk. Within the city is a temple, and within the temple is a cedar box. Open the box. Take out the tablets and read the story of Gilgamesh. Gilgamesh,
10 the wild bull, perfect in strength, surpassing all others.

Gilgamesh, the hero – immense and terrible. Who other than Gilgamesh can say: “I am king without equal”? Gilgamesh was his name before birth. The
15 great goddess Aruru designed his body. Two thirds god she made him, and one third man. Shamash the Sun gave him beauty. Adad the Storm gave him courage. Gilgamesh, strongest of all! Long was his journey, and arduous his labours. Weary, he returned
20 to city of Uruk and inscribed this story.

Gilgamesh was unmatched in strength and power. Arrogant, he believed everything belonged to him. He ripped sons from their fathers and demanded their daughters be made to serve him. His tyranny and
25 savagery grew. The women and the old ones complained to the gods, “Shouldn’t Gilgamesh be our shepherd, the protector of our people?” They called to Aruru: “You made this king of ours. Now make us another who is strong enough to withstand him.” The
30 goddess Aruru heard the cries of the people of Uruk, and out of clay she fashioned a wild man named Enkidu.



Enkidu’s hair was long and matted; he grazed on the grasslands with the gazelles and joined the animals at
35 the watering hole. A trapper and his son saw Enkidu among the animals and saw how he scared the creatures away from their traps. They thought of Gilgamesh and how he and this wild man might oppose each other. “Set both of them against each
40 other,” the trapper reasoned, “and my son and I can live in peace.”

So the father sent his son to consult with Gilgamesh in Uruk. Gilgamesh summoned Shamhat, a servant of the temple, so that she could return with the
45 trapper’s son and ensnare Enkidu. When Shamhat saw Enkidu at the watering hole, she approached him gently and kissed him softly. For seven nights, Shamhat and Enkidu passed time in each other’s company. After seven nights, Enkidu sought the
50 company of the animals once again, but now they fled from him. Shamhat counselled Enkidu: “Come with me to strong-walled Uruk, where Gilgamesh rules, like a wild bull. None can withstand him.”

Enkidu, longing for an equal and a companion, said,
55 “Take me to strong-walled Uruk, where Gilgamesh rules like a wild bull. I will challenge him and say, ‘I am the strongest of all.’”

“Come with me to Uruk,” said Shamhat. “Gilgamesh has already dreamed about you. Gilgamesh awoke
60 one morning and told his mother, Ninsun, ‘I dreamed that a star from heaven fell on the plain outside Uruk. And I dreamed that I could not lift it, but I was drawn to it as a moth to a flame.’ And Ninsun said, ‘the star that fell from heaven, the star you could not lift, the
65 star you were drawn to like a woman, is your companion, a brother who will never forsake you.’ ‘Let it be so,’ said Gilgamesh.”

Tablet Two: Enkidu and Gilgamesh meet, fight, and become friends; Gilgamesh invites Enkidu on a journey

Vocabulary in action

Choose the word that is *not* related in meaning to the other words in each set.

1. a) diminutive, b) immense, c) huge, d) enormous
2. a) dirty, b) cleanse, c) defile, d) corrupt
3. a) easy, b) tranquil, c) leisurely, d) arduous
4. a) ferocity, b) gentleness, c) savagery, d) viciousness
5. a) consult, b) ask, c) ignore, d) confer
6. a) bade, b) summoned, c) beckoned, d) dismissed
7. a) survive, b) resist, c) crumble, d) withstand

On their way to Uruk, Shamhat and Enkidu came to a shepherd's camp. There Shamhat clothed Enkidu and taught him how to eat bread and drink ale. The shepherds remarked how like he was to Gilgamesh in strength and stature, how like a star fallen from the heavens. A traveller stopped at the camp, on his way to a wedding feast in Uruk, and complained bitterly that Gilgamesh would arrive and ruin the wedding. Angered, Enkidu proclaimed, "I will go to Uruk. I will challenge Gilgamesh."

When Enkidu arrived in Uruk, the people whispered, "This is the wild man. He is the only one who can stop Gilgamesh." The traveller's wedding feast was prepared. When Gilgamesh arrived to take the bride, Enkidu stood in his way. Like two bulls they fought. The door post splintered. The walls shook. The floor trembled. Gilgamesh wrestled Enkidu to the ground. "You are the strongest," Enkidu gasped. Then the two embraced. "This is the star that fell from the heavens," said Ninsun, "the companion who will never forsake you."

Then an idea came to Gilgamesh. "I need to increase my fame. I will obtain wood from the distant cedar forest. Come with me. The god Enlil has made the monster Humbaba the guardian of the cedar forest. It is written that I must slay this demon."

"The cedar forest is sacred to Enlil," replied Enkidu. "Humbaba's voice is like the roar of the Flood; his breath is like deathly fire. Who would risk his wrath?"

"Has your strength left you, Enkidu? Even lions were once afraid of you. No man can live forever. If I die in this battle, at least my children will be able to say that I fought Humbaba."

Gilgamesh sought the blessings of the elders of Uruk, who echoed, "Humbaba's voice is like the roar of the

Flood, and his breath is like deathly fire. Who would risk his wrath?"

Tablet Three: Preparations for the journey to the Cedar Forest



Gilgamesh scorned the fearful elders and ordered armour to be made for himself and Enkidu.

Gilgamesh sought the blessings of his mother Ninsun. "I do not know the road I am about to travel or the kind of battle I am about to fight," he admitted.

Ninsun implored Shamash, the sun god, "Why did you give my son a restless heart? Do not desert him during the dark of night." She embraced Enkidu: "You are my son now too. Bring my son back to me."

"Gilgamesh, Enkidu knows the wild places," the elders added. "Let Enkidu be your guide."

Enkidu agreed. "Since your mind is set, I know the way. I will go with you and be your guide."

"We cannot sit at home for the rest of our days," Gilgamesh concluded. "This is my destiny. Standing together, we two can prevail."

Tablet Four: The Journey to the Cedar Forest

Gilgamesh and Enkidu set out for the cedar forest atop Mount Lebanon. They travelled fifty leagues a day, resting only at nightfall as the dark and wooded mountain loomed ahead. Each night they dug a well and prepared a shelter against the wind. They sacrificed grain to the Dream god, and Enkidu kept watch while Gilgamesh slept.

Each night, Gilgamesh dreamt: He dreamt of a huge mountain falling, of a fearsome bull bellowing, of a wild storm crashing, of a fierce eagle soaring. Each night, Enkidu interpreted the dream: "Shamash the sun will shine upon you, and you will slay Humbaba. Standing together, we two will prevail."

When they arrived at the dark forest, Gilgamesh fell asleep once more. "Awake," urged Shamash. "Hurry."

"Take my hand, friend," said Gilgamesh. "Shamash, protect us. Our names will be remembered for

generations.” The two companions gazed silently at the path before them.

Vocabulary in action

Choose the word that is *not* related in meaning to the other words in each set.

1. a) stature, b) height, c) size, d) immense
2. a) disdained, b) derided, c) chosen, d) scorned
3. a) begged, b) implored, c) appealed, d) seized
4. a) prevail, b) fail, c), collapse, d) flop
5. a) spiralling, b) increasing, c) soaring, d) plummeting
6. a) caress, b) buffet, c) stroke, d) embrace

Tablet Five: The Battle with Humbaba

The cedar forest stood ahead, cool, green, and fragrant. Gilgamesh and Enkidu entered; they felled a cedar tree with their axes.

145 “Who has entered my forest?” roared Humbaba. In a swirl of confusion, the demon surrounded them, changing faces, changing places, now here, now there.

The heroes were frightened. “The forest is dark,” trembled Enkidu. “Shamash the sun has abandoned us.”

“Standing together, we two can prevail,” countered Gilgamesh. “All men must die, but I am not ready to die yet. Shamash, protect us.”

155 Rallying, Enkidu responded, “Attack, son of Uruk.”

Shamash heard the prayers of the two heroes and sent seven winds to buffet Humbaba, winds from the North, South, East and West, frost-winds, fire-winds, whirlwinds.

160 Humbaba could not move. “Enkidu, I knew you in the wild. Tell Gilgamesh to spare my life. I will serve you, Son of Uruk. The cedar forest will be yours.”

“Do not listen to this demon, Gilgamesh,” said Enkidu. “He will block your way back to Uruk. He will rob you of your fame.”

165 Humbaba cursed Enkidu. “Neither of you will grow old; Gilgamesh will bury you.” But Gilgamesh struck the monster, cutting off his head.

Tablet Six: Gilgamesh, Ishtar, and the Bull of Heaven

170 Gilgamesh and Enkidu returned, triumphant, to the city of Uruk. Gilgamesh washed and perfumed his hair, put on his purple cloak and his crown. And the goddess Ishtar was stunned by his beauty. “Be my bridegroom, Gilgamesh.” she begged, on fire with

175 longing. “Marry me, and I will give you riches in abundance, chariots of lapis lazuli with wheels of gold. Princes will kneel to you; kings will send you tribute from far and wide.”

“You are the Queen of Love. What can I give you?” 180 Gilgamesh replied. “My mother did not raise a broken-winged bird; you will use and discard me as you have all of your lovers.”

Furious, Ishtar went to heaven, to complain to her father Anu that Gilgamesh had insulted her. Anu 185 shrugged. “Maybe you gave him reason, daughter.”

“Give me the Bull of Heaven, father,” she insisted. “I want to trample Gilgamesh, the arrogant one.”

“The Bull of Heaven will not only trample Gilgamesh,” warned Anu. “The city of Uruk will suffer seven years 190 of drought.” Ishtar assured her father that she would prepare the city for the coming drought, so Anu released the Bull of Heaven to his angry daughter.

With each stamp of the huge bull’s hoof, the ground in Uruk opened up, swallowing its people.

195 “I’ll grab him by the tail,” called Enkidu to Gilgamesh. “You slit his throat. Standing together, we two can prevail.” And so the two heroes slew the Bull of Heaven.

Ishtar stood on the walls of Uruk, wailing, “Gilgamesh 200 has killed the Bull of Heaven.” Enkidu cut off one of the bull’s haunches and threw it with contempt toward Ishtar. “I would do the same to you.”

“I am the strongest here,” Gilgamesh exulted, and the people of Uruk rejoiced with their king. 205 But that night, Enkidu had a foreboding dream.

Vocabulary in action

Choose the word that is *not* related in meaning to the other words in each set.

1. a) sorrowful, b) jubilant, c) triumphant, d) exultant
2. a) scarcity, b) abundance, c) paucity, d) dearth
3. a) praise, b) esteem, c) tribute, d) contempt
4. a) contempt, b) appreciation, c) regard, d) approval
5. a) threatening, b) dread, c) encouraging, d) foreboding
6. a) emaciated, b) wilted, c) strengthened, d) withered
7. a) lament, b) rejoice, c) mourn, d) grieve

Tablet Seven: The Death of Enkidu

This was Enkidu’s dream: The gods of the heavens held a council. Anu and Enlil blamed Shamash the

Sun. "You helped Gilgamesh, and he killed Humbaba, guardian of my cedar forest," claimed Enlil, the ruler of the earth. "And now he has killed my Bull of Heaven," added Anu, father of the gods. "One of these two must die."

"Let it be Enkidu," Enlil decreed.

Enkidu began to waste away. Neither brother wanted to lose the other. Enkidu cursed the trapper who found him, and Shamhat who tamed him. But Shamash reminded him. "Did Shamhat not bring you to Uruk? Did she not lead you to Gilgamesh? To Gilgamesh, a king without rival and your beloved companion." Enkidu grew calm, but his sleep was troubled. In his dreams, he journeyed to the dark Underworld, to the House of Dust. Day after day, he withered.

On the twelfth day, he begged Gilgamesh: "Do not forget how we stood together. Alas, I do not die in battle. I am cursed. Who will remember my name?"

Tablet Eight: The Lament of Gilgamesh

Gilgamesh pulled the veil of a bride over the face of his beloved. The King of Uruk raised this lament: "Enkidu, may the gazelles of the grassland mourn you, and the animals at the watering hole. May the path that winds through the cedar forest mourn you, by day and by night. May the elders of strong-walled Uruk mourn you. May Shamhat mourn you in the Temple of Ishtar. Hear me: The young men who cheered for us weep for you now. The rivers weep for you, and the mountains too." Gilgamesh tore at his hair and his clothing. Grave goods he gathered—sheathed in precious ivory, gold, and lapis lazuli—to accompany his friend to the Underworld.



Tablet Nine: Gilgamesh Journeys through the Mountains

Gilgamesh wandered the wild plains outside the walls of Uruk. Howling his grief, he chased the wind and

would not be comforted. "Where are you going?" asked Shamash.

Gilgamesh replied, "How can I rest? I am stalked by death. Alone, I can never prevail. I must find Uta-napishti, he who survived the Flood. Only Uta-napishti can tell me how to escape death."

Gilgamesh resolved to find Uta-napishti. After a long and wearisome journey, he finally arrived at the great mountains where the sun rises and sets. Two scorpions guarded the mountain pass. With a terrible gaze, they doled out death. And yet, Gilgamesh mustered his courage and walked toward them. "Only a god would dare approach us," said one of the scorpions.

"Two thirds god," corrected the other. "One third man."

"Why have you travelled so far," demanded the first scorpion.

"I need to question Uta-napishti about the secret of life and death," answered Gilgamesh.

"No mortal has ever crossed these mountains," warned the scorpions. "No light shines within them, and the darkness is dense."

"I must cross these mountains. Let me pass," the king replied.

The scorpions stepped aside. "You may go, Gilgamesh. May the mountains allow you to pass safely."

Gilgamesh entered the mountain pass alone. Utter darkness pressed him from all sides. He travelled many long and weary leagues alone in profound darkness. "If I had a companion," he muttered. "We two . . ." But darkness swallowed his words, and still he pressed on blindly. At ten leagues, the blessed wind played over his face. At eleven leagues, welcome dawn streaked the horizon. At twelve leagues, the sun finally rose on a glistening garden. Beyond the garden stretched the sea.

Vocabulary in action

Choose the word that is *not* related in meaning to the other words in each set.

1. a) took, b) doled, c) grabbed, d) stole
2. a) dispersed, b) collected, c) mustered, d) gathered
3. a) shallow, b) weighty, c) overwhelming, d) profound
4. a) etched, b) scratched, c) cut, d) stroked
5. a) chains, b) structure, c) controls, d) rigging
6. a) climb, b) ascend, c) disembarking, d) rise
7. a) surrendered, b) routed, c) vanquished, d) overcame

Tablet Ten: Gilgamesh Travels to Find Uta-napishti



Siduri the tavern keeper lived by the sea. She had seen Gilgamesh from a distance, his face etched in sorrow, despair in his heart. Fearful, she barred her gate against him. But Gilgamesh begged entry, insisting, "I am Gilgamesh, King of Uruk. He who killed Humbaba and the Bull of Heaven."

"If you are Gilgamesh, slayer of Humbaba and the Bull of Heaven, why are your cheeks so hollow and your clothing so wild?" Siduri retorted.

"Why shouldn't I have hollow cheeks? I grieve for Enkidu, my companion. Death has stalked every step of my long journey."

Siduri spoke softly: "Gilgamesh, did you not know that all men must die? The gods keep immortality for themselves. Wash yourself, put on new clothes. Fill your stomach with good food and fine wine. Hold your wife and your child. Cherish the life you have."

Silencing the tavern keeper, Gilgamesh insisted, "I must cross the ocean to find Uta-napishti."

"Only Shamash the Sun can cross the ocean," said Siduri. "The waters of death are treacherous. And once you have crossed the ocean, what will you do then? Ah, Gilgamesh. Uta-napishti has a boatman named Urshanabi. Seek him down by the water. Let him see your sorrow-etched face. Maybe he will ferry you across the waters. If he won't, then you must go back."

Enraged, Gilgamesh crept down to the water and took an axe to the boat rigging.

"Who are you," shouted Urshanabi?

"I am Gilgamesh, the King of Uruk."

"Why are your cheeks so hollow?" asked Urshanabi, "and your heart so heavy?"

"My cheeks are hollow and my heart is heavy because my brother is dead. Enkidu, my beloved companion, is dead. And I am tormented by one question: Must I die too? I have journeyed this long way to find Uta-napishti and to learn the secret of life and death."

Pointing to the broken rigging, Urshanabi explained that Gilgamesh had destroyed the only way across the ocean. But together, they fashioned poles to ferry across the waters of death.

The old man Uta-napishti saw them from a distance and wondered who could be traveling with Urshanabi, his face etched in sorrow, despair in his heart. Disembarking, Gilgamesh told Uta-napishti his story, how he and Enkidu became companions and vanquished many a foe together, how Enkidu had angered Ishtar and died, how he, Gilgamesh, King of Uruk, had journeyed through the dark mountains to Siduri's tavern, how Urshanabi had taken pity on him and ferried him across the waters of death.

"Ah Gilgamesh," sighed Uta-napishti. "Stop chasing sorrow. Death takes all - the handsome young man and the old one as well. But no one sees the face of Death or hears his voice. Life and death the gods have established."

Tablet Eleven: Uta-napishti Tells Gilgamesh the Story of the Flood



"How are you different?" challenged Gilgamesh.

"Why did the gods grant you immortality?"

So Uta-napishti told this story: "A long time ago, the gods lived in the city of Shuruppak, on the banks of the Euphrates river. But they left the city because it grew too crowded and too noisy. The gods decided to send a Flood to destroy the city. But Ea, the ocean god, whispered their plans to me. Ea told me to build a boat and gave me the dimensions. I followed his directions. When the time came, I sealed myself inside my boat, along with everything that I owned and all my household people. Adad the Storm God came riding on a black cloud, stirring up a terrible storm. For six days and six nights, the storm raged, and the flood waters swept my boat away."

355 On the seventh day, the storm calmed, and my boat grounded on the top of a mountain. The waters stretched endlessly all around us. I set loose a bird and it returned, for there was no place to land. I kept sending out birds until one did not return, for it had found dry land. I sacrificed to the gods, but Enlil, ruler of the earth, was angry. 'How is it that this man survived?' Ea defended me, but Enlil condemned me and my wife to live forever in this faraway place.

360 "If you think you deserve immortality," said Uta-napishti to Gilgamesh, "let's see if you can stay awake for a week." But as soon as Gilgamesh sat down, sleep crept over him like a fog. The wife of Uta-napishti baked a loaf of bread for every day that Gilgamesh slept, seven in all.

370 Discouraged, Gilgamesh prepared to return to Uruk. As the King and the ferryman were leaving, the wife of Uta-napishti said, "Gilgamesh journeyed a long and weary distance to find you. Can't you give him something to take back with him." Uta-napishti told Gilgamesh how to dive under the water to find a plant that would restore his youth, and Gilgamesh was able to find the plant. However, on the way back to Uruk, Gilgamesh rested, soaking his feet in a cool pond. A snake slithered out and stole the plant. Gilgamesh wept. "Oh, Urshanabi, for all my labours I have achieved nothing."

When Gilgamesh and Urshanabi arrived back in Uruk, Gilgamesh showed Urshanabi the city he had built. He and Urshanabi climbed the city walls, examined their foundations, and marvelled at their brickwork. Weary

Vocabulary in action

Choose the word that is *not* related in meaning to the other words in each set.

1. a) dimensions, b) proportions, c) measurements, d) weight
2. a) restored, b) weary, c) rejuvenated, d) energized
3. a) sung, b) carved, c) chiselled, d) inscribed
4. a) clasp, b) hold, c) release, d) hug

385 from journeying, Gilgamesh the King surveyed his city and inscribed his story.

Tablet Twelve: Gilgamesh Speaks to the Shade of Enkidu

Enkidu asked Gilgamesh, "Why do you weep? What have you lost? I will go down to the Underworld for you."

390 "Don't wear new clothes," warned Gilgamesh, "for they will know you are a stranger there."

Enkidu ignored Gilgamesh's instructions, and the gods of the Underworld knew Enkidu was a stranger and kept him there. Enlil would not help bring him back, but Shamash the Sun opened a hole in the roof of the Underworld and the spirit of Enkidu floated up. Enkidu and Gilgamesh tried to clasp each other.

395 "Tell me what the Underworld is like," pressed Gilgamesh.

400 "I cannot tell you," Enkidu replied, "for you will weep. The body that you loved to hold is rotting there now." Horrified, Gilgamesh asked about this person or that. "Have you seen the man who died suddenly? The famous warrior? The unburied corpse?"

405 Enkidu had seen them all.

"How about the man who had no one to mourn for him?"

"No dog would eat the scraps that the unmourned man must eat."

Structured discussion

- Why is Gilgamesh's appearance described so often?
- Explain Gilgamesh's reaction to Enkidu's death.
- What does Uta-napishti try to teach Gilgamesh about mortality and immortality?
- How does Gilgamesh change?
- What do you think of the ending to the story?
- How is the Epic of Gilgamesh similar or different to other myths?

Mythos

The Sickle

Now, Kronos (or Cronus as he sometimes styled himself) was not quite the pained and vulnerable emo-like youth that Rhea's and Tartarus's descriptions may have led us to picture, for he was the strongest of an unimaginably strong race. He was darkly handsome, certainly; and yes, he was moody. Had Kronos the examples to go by, he would perhaps have identified with Hamlet at his most introspective, or Jaques at his most self-indulgently morbid. Konstantin from *The Seagull* with a suggestion of Morrissey. Yet there was something of a Macbeth in him too and more than a little Hannibal Lecter – as we shall see.

Kronos had been the first to discover that brooding silence is often taken to indicate strength, wisdom and command. The youngest of the twelve, he had always hated his father. The deep and piercing venom of envy and resentment was beginning to unravel his sanity, but he had managed to hide the intensity of his hatred from all but his adoring sister Rhea, who was the only member of his family with whom he felt comfortable enough to reveal his true self.

As they made their way up from Tartarus, Gaia poured more poison into his receptive ear. 'Ouranos is cruel. He is insane. I fear for myself and for all of you, my beloved children. Come boy, come.'

She was leading him to Mount Othrys. You recall the strange and terrible artefact that I told you she had wrought and hidden in the cleft of the mountain before she went visiting each of her children? Gaia now took Kronos to that place and showed him what she had made. 'Pick it up. Go on.'

Kronos's black eyes glittered as they took in the shape and meaning of this most strange object.

It was a sickle. An enormous scythe whose great curved blade had been forged from adamantite, which means 'untameable'. A massive aggregate of grey flint, granite, diamond and ophiolite, its half-moon blade had been refined to the sharpest edge. An edge that could cut through anything.

Kronos plucked it from its hiding place just as easily as you or I would pick up a pencil. After feeling the balance and heft of it in his hand, he swung it once, twice. The powerful swish as it whipped through the air made Gaia smile.

'Kronos, my son,' she said, 'we must bide our time until Hemera and Aether dive into the waters of the west and Erebus and Nyx prepare to cast the dark —'

'You mean we must wait until evening.' Kronos was impatient and quite lacking in poetry or finer feeling.

'Yes. Eventide. That is when your father will come to me, as he always does. He likes to —' Kronos nodded curtly. He did not wish to know the details of his parents' love-making.

'Hide there, in that very cleft where I hid the sickle. When you hear him covering me, and he grows loud in his roars of passion and groans of lust — strike.'

Ouranos Gelded

At last, Gaia and Kronos heard from the west the sound of a great stamping and shaking. The leaves on the trees shivered. Kronos, standing silently in his hiding place, did not tremble. He was ready.

‘Gaia!’ roared Ouranos as he approached. ‘Prepare yourself. Tonight we shall breed something better than hundred-handed mutants and one-eyed freaks ...’

‘Come to me, glorious son, divine husband!’ called Gaia, with what Kronos thought adistastefully convincing show of eagerness.

The horrible sounds of a lustful deity slobbering, slapping and grunting suggested to him that his father was attempting some kind of foreplay.

In his alcove Kronos breathed in and out five times. Never for a second did he weigh the moral good of what he was about to do, his thoughts were only for tactics and timing. With a deep inhalation he raised the great sickle and stepped swiftly sideways from his hiding place.

Ouranos, who had been preparing to lie on top of Gaia, sprang to his feet with an angry snarl of surprise. Walking calmly forward, Kronos swung the scythe back and swept it down in a great arc. The blade, hissing through the air, sliced Ouranos’s genitals clean from his body.

All Cosmos could hear Ouranos’s maddened scream of pain, anguish and rage. Never in creation’s short history had there been a sound so loud or so dreadful. All living things heard it and were afraid.

Kronos leapt forward with an obscene cry of triumph, catching the dripping trophy in his hands before it could reach the ground.

Ouranos fell writhing in immortal agony and howled out these words:

‘Kronos, vilest of my brood and vilest in all creation. Worst of all beings, fouler than the ugly Cyclopes and the loathsome Hecatonchires, with these words I curse you. May your children destroy you as you destroyed me.’

Kronos looked down at Ouranos. His black eyes showed nothing, but his mouth curved into a dark smile.

‘You have no power to curse, daddy. Your power is in my hands.’

He juggled before his father’s eyes his grisly spoils of victory, burst and slimy with blood, oozing and slippery with seed. Laughing, he pulled back his arm and hurled the package of genitals far, far from sight. Across the plains of Greece they flew and out over the darkening sea.

All three watched as Ouranos’s organs of generation vanished from sight across the waters. Kronos was surprised, when he turned to look at her, that his mother had covered her mouth in what appeared to be horror. Tears were leaking from Gaia’s eyes.

He shrugged. As if she cared.

Erinyes, Gigantes and Meliae

Creation at this time, peopled as it was by **primal** deities whose whole energy and purpose seems to have been directed towards reproduction, was **endowed** with an astonishing fertility. The soil was blessed with such a **fecund** richness that one could almost believe that if you planted a pencil it would burst into flower. Where **divine** blood fell, life could not help but spring from the earth.

So no matter how murderous, cruel, **rapacious** and destructive the character of Ouranos, he had been the ruler of creation after all. For his son to have **mutilated** and **emasculated** him constituted a most terrible crime against Cosmos.

Perhaps what happened next is not so surprising.

Great pools of blood formed around the scene of Ouranos's **castration**. From that blood, the blood which fell from the ruined groin of Ouranos, living beings emerged.

The first to push themselves out of the sodden ground were the ERINYES, whom we call the Furies, ALECTO (**remorseless**), MEGAERA (jealous rage) and TISIPHONE (**vengeance**). Perhaps it was an unconscious instinct of Ouranos that caused such vengeful beings to rise up. Their eternal duty, from the moment of their chthonic – or out-of-the-ground – birth, would be to punish the worst and most violent of crimes: relentlessly to chase the **perpetrators** and to rest only when the guilty had paid the full and dreadful price. Armed with cruel metallic **scourges**, the Furies flayed the very flesh from the bones of the guilty. The Greeks with characteristic irony nicknamed these female avengers the EUMENIDES or 'kindly ones'.

Next to rise from the soil were the GIGANTES. We have inherited 'giant', 'giga' and 'gigantic' from them, but while they were certainly possessed of **prodigious** strength, they were no greater in stature than their half-brothers and sisters.

Finally, in that instant of pain and destruction were created also the MELIAE, graceful **nymphs** who were to become guardians of an ash tree whose bark exuded a sweet and healthful **manna**.

As all these unexpected new beings emerged alive from the blood-soaked ground, Kronos stared at them in disgust and scattered them with a sweep of his **scythe**. Next he turned to Gaia.

'I promised you, Earth Mother,' he said, 'that I would release you from your gnawing agony – hold still.' With another sweep of the scythe he sliced open Gaia's side. Out tumbled the Cyclopes and Hecatonchires. Kronos looked down at his parents, both of them now bloody, panting and snarling like angry wounded animals.

'No more shall you cover Gaia,' he said to his father. 'I banish you to live out eternity beneath the ground, buried deeper even than Tartarus. May you sulk there in your fury, gelded and powerless.'

'You have overreached yourself,' hissed Ouranos. 'There will be revenge. I curse your life, that it be ground out in slow remorseless **perpetuity**, its immortal eternity an insufferable burden without end. Your own children will destroy you as –'

'As I destroyed you. Yes, I know. You said. We'll see about that.'

'You and your brothers and sisters, I curse you all, your straining ambition will destroy you.'

The 'striving, straining one', or TITAN, is the title we reserve for Kronos, his eleven siblings and (much of) their progeny. Ouranos meant it as an insult, but somehow the name has resounded through the ages with a ring of grandeur. No one, to this very day, would be insulted to be called a Titan.

Kronos met these curses with a sneer and, corralling his mutilated father and newly freed mutant brothers at the point of his sickle, he led them down to Tartarus. The Hecatonchires and Cyclopes he imprisoned in the caves, but his father he buried even deeper, as far from his natural domain of the heavens as he could contrive.

Brooding, simmering and raging in the ground, deep beneath the earth that once loved him, Ouranos compressed all his fury and divine energy into the very rock itself, hoping that one day some excavating creature somewhere would mine it and try to harness the immortal power that radiated from within. That could never happen, of course. It would be too dangerous. Surely the race has yet to be born that could be so foolish as to attempt to unleash the power of uranium?

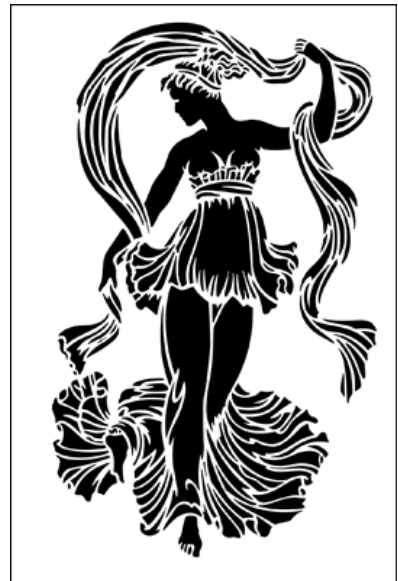
From the Foam

We return now to the great arc in the heavens traced by Ouranos's severed gonads. Kronos had flung the Sky Father's junk, if you recall, far across the sea. We can watch it now. Near the Ionian island of Cythera it drops, splashes, bounces, rises up again and finally falls and half sinks beneath the waves. Great ropes of semen trail in its wake like ribbons from a kite. Where they strike the surface of the sea a furious frothing is set up.

Soon all the waters bubble and boil. Something arises. From the horrors of **patricidal** castration and unnatural ambition it must be – surely – something unimaginably ugly, something terrible, something violent, something appalling, that promises only war, blood and anguish?

The whirlpool of blood and seminal fluid foment, fizzes and foams. Out of the spindrift of surf and seed emerges the crown of a head, then a brow and then a face. But what kind of face?

A face far more beautiful than creation has yet seen or will ever see again. Not just someone beautiful but Beauty itself rises fully formed from the foam. In Greek 'from the foam' can be rendered as something like APHRODITE, and this is the name of the one who now lifts herself from the spume and spray. She stands on a large scallop shell, a demure and gentle smile playing on her lips. Slowly she alights onto a beach on Cyprus. Where she steps flowers bloom and clouds of butterflies arise.



Around her head birds fly in circles, singing in ecstasies of joy. Perfect Love and Beauty has made her landfall and the world will never be the same.

The Romans called her VENUS, and her birth and arrival on the sands of Cyprus on the scallop shell were never better portrayed than in Botticelli's exquisite painting, which once seen is never forgotten. We leave Aphrodite making her home on Cyprus and return to Kronos, who is on his way back from the dark caves of Tartarus.

The Children of Rhea

Kronos was now lord of earth, sea and sky, with the scythe the symbol of his authority. His sceptre. The earth he took from Gaia, the sky from Ouranos. With threats of violence he wrested dominion over the sea from Pontus and Thalassa and from his siblings Oceanus and Tethys. He trusted no one and ruled alone.

Still Kronos continued to take his pleasure with Rhea and still she consented, loving him hopelessly and trusting that the monstrous eating of their firstborn had been some sort of aberration.

It was not. Their next child, a boy she called HADES, was devoured in just the same manner.

And then another baby girl, DEMETER. Next was POSEIDON, a second boy, and finally a third girl, HERA. All of them swallowed whole with as much ease as you and I might gulp down an oyster or a spoonful of jelly.

By the time Kronos consumed Hera, Rhea's fifth pregnancy, her love for Kronos had turned to hate. That same night he seized her and made love to her again. She swore to herself that if she became pregnant he would never take her sixth child. But how could she prevent him? He was all powerful.

One morning she arose and felt the familiar nausea. She was pregnant. Her divine instincts told her that her sixth was to be a boy.

She left Othrys and took herself off in search of her mother and father. For all that she had contributed to their downfall she retained a daughter's trust in their wisdom and good will. She knew too that their fury at her part in their ruin was as nothing to their undying hatred of Kronos. For three days her calls to Gaia and Ouranos rang round the hills and caves of the world.

'Earth Mother, Sky Father, hear your daughter and come to her aid! The son who cut you and cast you out has become the foulest of ogres, the most depraved and unnatural creature in all the world. Five of your grandchildren has he eaten. I have one more baby inside me, ready to come into the world. Teach me how to save him. Teach me, I beg, and I will raise him to revere you always.'

A deep and terrible rumbling was heard far below. The ground shook beneath Rhea's feet. The voice of Ouranos came roaring into her ears, but within it she heard too the calmer tones of her mother.

Together the three of them hatched a marvellous plan.

The Switch

In order to set this marvellous plan in motion Rhea went to Crete to confer with a she-goat named AMALTHEA. Also living on the island were the Meliae, nymphs of the manna-bearing ash tree. If you remember, they had sprung from the soil soaked by Ouranos's blood, along with the Furies and the Giants. After an encouraging conversation with Amalthea, Rhea conferred with these mild and sweet-natured nymphs. Satisfied that the things she needed to achieve on Crete could be achieved, she returned to Mount Othrys to prepare for her time.

Kronos had seen by now that his wife was expecting and he readied himself for the happy day when he could consume the sixth of his children. He was taking no chances. The prophecy of Ouranos still rang in his ears and the superstitious pangs of paranoia that ravage all despotic usurpers grew fiercer in this ur-Stalin each day. Gaia had told Rhea about a certain stone – an object of perfect magnetite just the right size for their purposes, smooth and shaped like a bean – which could be found in the hills not far from Mount Othrys itself.

In the mornings Kronos liked to stride from one end of Greece to the other visiting each of his Titan brothers and sisters, outwardly to consult with them, in truth to make sure that they were not plotting against him. At the time she knew he would be on the seashore, visiting Oceanus and Tethys, Rhea went to the place that Gaia had described, found the stone and took it home to Mount Othrys, where she swaddled it in linen. The plan was coming together.

One afternoon not long afterwards, with Kronos near enough to hear her but far enough away to take some time to arrive, Rhea began to scream the screams of childbirth. Louder and louder came her agonized howls, tearing the fabric of the air until, after a sudden silence, they were replaced by the best impression she could give of a baby's first gasping cries.

Sure enough, Kronos approached. His shadow fell over Rhea. 'Give me the child,' he said.

'Dread lord and husband –' Rhea cast him an imploring look. 'Will you not let me keep this one? Look at him, so sweet, so innocent. So harmless.' With a rough laugh Kronos snatched the tightly wrapped baby from Rhea's cradling arms and bolted it down in one great gulp, swaddling linen and all. Down it went like the others, never touching the sides. Punching his breastbone once, then twice, Kronos gave a loud belch and left his tormented wife to her grief-stricken sobs.

The moment he had gone, the sobs turned to hysterical, barely suppressed chokes and screams. Chokes and screams of laughter.

Catching her breath and rising from her bed Rhea slipped down the mountainside and made her way to Crete, travelling as fast as anyone could in so heavily pregnant a state.

The Cretan Child

Rhea's accouchement on Crete was easy enough. Tenderly assisted by the she-goat and the Meliae she prepared to give birth in the safety and comfort of a cave on Mount Ida. Soon she was delivered of a quite transcendently beautiful baby boy. She named him ZEUS.

Clash of the Titans

At the summit of Mount Othrys, Kronos lay stretched out on the ground. The other Titans had not yet learned of Zeus's rescue of his brothers and sisters, but it seemed likely that when they did they would react with furious violence. Under cover of the night Rhea and her six children slipped away, putting as great a distance between themselves and Titan country as they could. War, Zeus understood clearly, was inevitable. Kronos would not rest as long as his children lived and Zeus was just as determined to dethrone his father. He heard louder than ever the sound he had heard within him since infancy: a softly insistent whisper from Moros telling him that it was his destiny to rule.

The bloody, violent and destructive conflict that followed is known to historians as the TITANOMACHY.

While most of the details of this ten-year war may be lost to us, we do know that the heat and fury, the explosive power and colossal energy released by the battling Titans, gods and monsters caused mountains to bellow fire and the ground itself to quake and crack.

Many islands and landmasses were formed by these battles. Whole continents shifted and reshaped themselves and much of the world as we know it now owes its geography to these seismic disturbances, to this literally earth-shaking conflict.

In a straight fight it is almost certain that the combined strength of the Titans would have been too much for their young adversaries. They were stronger and more remorselessly savage. All but Clymene's sons Prometheus and Epimetheus sided with Kronos, far outnumbering the small group of self-styled gods ranged against them under Zeus's generalship. But just as Ouranos had paid dearly for his crime of imprisoning the Cyclopes and Hecatonchires inside Gaia, so Kronos was about to pay for the blunder of imprisoning them in the caverns of Tartarus.

It was the wise and clever Metis who advised Zeus to go down and release his three one-eyed and three hundred-handed brothers. He offered them freedom in perpetuity if they would help him defeat Kronos and the Titans. They needed no further encouragement. The Gigantes too chose to side with Zeus and proved themselves brave and tireless fighters.

In the final decisive battle the pitiless ferocity of the Hecatonchires – not to mention their surplus of heads and hands – combined quite marvellously with the wild electric power of the Cyclopes whose names were, if you recall, Brightness, Lightning and Thunder: Arges, Steropes and Brontes. These gifted craftsmen hammered their mastery of storms into thunderbolts for Zeus to use as weapons, which he learned to fling with pinpoint accuracy at his enemies, blasting them to atoms. Under his direction the Hecatonchires picked up and hurled rocks at furious speed, while the Cyclopes harried and dazzled the enemy with lightning shows and terrifying peals of thunder. The hundred hands of the Hecatonchires scooped and launched, scooped and launched innumerable rocks at the enemy like so many demented windmilling catapults until, bludgeoned and battered, the Titans called for a ceasefire. We will leave them, their great bloodied heads bowed in full and final surrender, and take a moment to look at what else had been going on in the world while battle raged for those ten terrible years.

Disposer Supreme and Judge of the Earth

Zeus now moved to make sure the defeated Titans could never rise again to threaten his order.

His strongest and most violent opponent in the war had not been Kronos but ATLAS, the brutally powerful eldest son of Iapetus and Clymene. Atlas had been at the centre of every battle, rousing his fellow Titans into combat, shouting for one last supreme effort even as the Hecatonchires were battering them into submission. As punishment for his enmity, Zeus sentenced him to hold up the sky for eternity. This killed two birds with one stone. Zeus's predecessors, Kronos and Ouranos, had been forced to waste much of their energy in separating heaven from earth. At a stroke Zeus relieved himself of that draining burden and placed it, quite literally, on the shoulders of his most dangerous enemy. At the junction of what we would call Africa and Europe the Titan strained, the whole weight of the sky bearing down upon him. Legs braced, muscles bunched, his mighty body contorted itself with this supreme and agonizing effort. For aeons he groaned there like a Bulgarian weightlifter. In time he solidified into the Atlas Mountains that shoulder the skies of North Africa to this day. His straining, squatting image is to be found on copies of the very first maps of the world, which in his honour we still call 'atlases'.

To one side of him lies the Mediterranean and to the other the ocean still named 'the Atlantic' after him, where the mysterious island kingdom of Atlantis is said to have flourished.

As for Kronos – the dark unhappy soul who had once been Lord of All, the brooding and unnatural tyrant who ate his own children out of fear of prophecy – his punishment, just as his gelded father Ouranos had foretold, was ceaselessly to travel the world, measuring out eternity in inexorable, perpetual and lonely exile. Every day and hour and minute was his to be marked out, for Zeus doomed Kronos to count infinity itself. We can see him everywhere even today, the gaunt sinister figure with his sickle. Now given the cheap and humiliating nickname 'Old Father Time', his sallowness, drawn features tell us of the inevitable and merciless ticking of Cosmos's clock, driving all to their end days. The scythe swings and cuts like a remorseless pendulum. All mortal flesh is as grass beneath the cruel sweep of its mowing blade. We find Kronos in all things 'chronic' or 'synchronized', in 'chronometers', 'chronographs' and 'chronicles'.

The Romans gave this saturnine, sallowness of a defeated Titan the name SATURN. He hangs in the sky between his father Uranus and his son Jupiter. Not all the Titans were banished or punished. To many Zeus showed magnanimity and mercy, while on those few who had sided with him in the war he showered favours.

Atlas's brother Prometheus was chief amongst those who had had the prescience to fight for the gods against their own kind.

Zeus rewarded him with his companionship, taking ever more delight in the young Titan's presence until one day which was to have massive consequences for humankind, consequences we feel even now. The story of that friendship and its tragic end will be told soon.

During the war, the Cyclopes had, as mentioned, given Zeus in respectful homage the weapon with which he is always associated: the thunderbolt. Their brothers the Hecatonchires, whose tremendous strength had secured victory, were rewarded by being sent back to Tartarus – not as prisoners this time, but as guardians of the gates to those imponderable depths. The Cyclopes' reward was to be appointed by Zeus his personal artificers, armourers and smiths.

Third Order

The shattered world was still smoking from the savagery of war. Zeus saw that it needed to heal and he knew that his own generation, the Third Order of divine beings, must manage better than the first two had done. It was time for a new order, an order purged of the wasteful bloodlust and elemental brutality that had marked earlier times.

To the victors, the spoils. Like a chief executive who has just completed a hostile takeover, Zeus wanted the old management out and his people in. He allotted each of his siblings their own domain, their areas of divine responsibility. The President of the Immortals chose his cabinet. For himself, he assumed overall command as supreme leader and emperor, lord of the firmament, master of weather and storms: King of the Gods, Sky Father, Cloud-Gatherer. Thunder and lightning were his to command. The eagle and the oak were his emblems, symbols then as now of fierce grace and unopposable might. His word was law, his power formidably great. But he was not perfect. He was very, very far from being perfect.

Narcissus

There was once a naiad called LIRIOPE, who coupled with the river god CEPHISSUS and gave birth to a son, NARCISSUS, whose beauty was so remarkable that she worried for his future. Liriope had seen enough of life to know that extreme beauty was an awful privilege, a dangerous attribute that could lead to dire and even fatal consequences. When Narcissus reached the age of fifteen and started to attract unwanted attentions, she decided to act.

‘We are going to Thebes,’ she told him, ‘to see Tiresias and have your fortune told.’ And so mother and son walked for two weeks all the way to Thebes and joined the queue to see the prophet that formed every morning outside the temple of Hera.

‘Although you are blind and cannot see my son,’ she explained to Tiresias when their turn came at last, ‘you may take my word for it that all who do see him are dazzled by his looks. No more beautiful mortal ever trod the earth.’

Narcissus blushed to his golden roots at this and shuffled his feet in an agony of embarrassment.

‘I know enough of the gods,’ continued Liriope, ‘to fear that such beauty might be more curse than blessing. The world knows what happened to Ganymede, to Adonis, Tithonus, Hyacinth and all those other boys far less beautiful than my son. So I would have you tell me, great seer, if Narcissus will live a long and happy life. Is it his moira to reach a contented old age? You who are blind see all that is invisible to the rest of us. Tell me, I beg, my beloved son’s destiny.’

Tiresias put out his hands and traced the outlines of Narcissus’s face. ‘Fear not,’ he said. ‘So long as he fails to recognize himself, Narcissus will live a long and happy life.’

Liriope laughed aloud. ‘So long as he fails to recognize himself!’ Such a strange pronouncement could have no serious application. How can anyone recognize themselves?



NARCISSUS CHANGE EN FLEUR.
*Un autre vice encor nous trouble à l'extrême De soy mesme conçoit si bonne opinion
 C'est que l'homme oublie toute autre affection Qu'il se prise chascun pour n'aimer que soy mesme.*

Echo

We leave Liriope joyfully thanking Tiresias at the temple of Hera in Thebes and travel a short distance over to the foothills of Mount Helicon, where the streams and meadows outside the township of

Thespieae were filled with the comeliest nymphs in all Greece. So comely that they often received visitations from Zeus himself, whose weakness for a comely nymph we have already noted.

The oread ECHO was not the least comely of these, but she did have one personality trait which caused Zeus and other potential suitors to be wary of her – she was the most tremendous talker. A compound of village gossip, nosy neighbour and over-solicitous best friend, Echo found it impossible to hold her tongue. There was nothing malicious about her prattling, indeed she often went out of her way to speak up for her friends, to cover for them, praise them and paint them in the best light. There was an element of vanity here, for she had a lovely voice, pretty in both speech and song. Like many people gifted with a mellifluous tongue, she loved to exercise it.

She was protected to some extent by the goddess Aphrodite who admired her singing, which was always in praise of love. In short, Echo was a romantic. Her detractors might call her sentimental and even slushy, mushy and gushy, but they could not deny her good intentions and fullness of heart.

Zeus enjoyed visiting Echo's sister oreads and cousin naiads in secret and Echo enjoyed being a confidante and best friend to them all. It rather thrilled her to think that her relations and companions were having liaisons with Zeus, the Cloud-Gatherer and King of the Gods himself. It was a secret she loved to hug to herself.

Hera had always been suspicious of Zeus's absences, but recently they had become prolonged. She heard from a chaffinch loyal to her that it was the lower slopes of Helicon that her husband had been visiting, so she decided one golden afternoon to make her way there and see if she could catch him in the act of betrayal. She had barely dismounted from her chariot when a mountain nymph skipped up to her, bubbling with inconsequential chatter. It was Echo in full voluble flow.

'Queen Hera!'

Hera drew up her eyebrows. 'Do I know you?'

'Oh, majesty!' cried Echo, falling to her knees. 'How lucky we are to see you here! What honour you do us! And in your chariot, too! Is it permitted to feed the peacocks? To have a god of Olympus here! I cannot remember the last time an Olympian deigned to take notice of us. It is such –'

'Surely my husband Zeus is a regular visitor to these woods and waters?'

Echo knew full well that Zeus was not far away on a riverbank doing improper things with a pretty river nymph. Her love of intrigue, drama and romance now drove her to protect the pair. With tumbling torrents of inconsequential babble gushing from her like water from a fountain, she guided the goddess's footsteps in the direction away from the river.

'There is a very fine ilex tree just in this clearing, majesty, which I was thinking of consecrating to you, with your permission ... Excuse me – Zeus? Oh no, I've never seen him here.'

'Really?' Hera fixed Echo with a hard stare. 'I heard a rumour that he was here now. This very day.'

'No, no, my queen! No, no, no! In fact... a servant of the Muses came down from Helicon just half an hour ago to draw water from our stream and he mentioned specifically that today mighty Zeus is in Thespieae today, honouring his temple there.'

'Oh. I see. Well, I thank you.' Hera nodded curtly and uncomfortably, returned to her chariot and flew off into the clouds. It is mortifying to be witnessed trying to catch your husband out. Echo skipped away, pleased to have been useful to her fellow nymph and to Zeus. In all fairness she would have been just as happy to have been protecting a mortal pair of lovers. It delighted her to ease the path of all lovers everywhere. She had never really felt love herself, except the love of helping others to love, which she felt was the highest love of all. So selfless was she that she never even bothered to tell Zeus or her sister of her useful act, which someone hoping for a reward would most certainly have done. She sang as she gathered flowers and felt that the life of a nymph was a good life.

Echo and Narcissus

Into the painful solitude of Echo's private hell there crashed one day all the laughter, shouting and boisterous clamour of a hunt. The youths of Thespieae had chased a boar all the way into the wood, and one of the huntsmen had become separated. He was a youth of such transcendent beauty that Echo, whom the tender passion had passed over all her life, was instantly lovestruck.

The youth was Narcissus, now older and more dazzling than ever. He had never fallen victim to the tender passion either. He had become so used to girls and boys, men and women, fauns and satyrs, nymphs and dryads, oreads and centaurs, and all manner of beings, sentient and non-sentient, shrieking and sighing and fainting away in his presence that he thought the whole business of love absurd. It turned sensible people stupid. Narcissus hated being mooned and swooned over. It maddened him to see the unmistakable look of love leaping into the eyes of others. There was something so angry and ugly about that look. Something so hungry, lost and despairing, so brooding, haunted and unhappy.

To Narcissus love and desire were sicknesses. He had been taught that lesson in the worst way possible a year before, when a boy called AMEINIAS had declared his love to him. Narcissus had replied, as kindly as he could, that he did not return his love. But Ameinias would not accept 'no' for an answer and took to haunting Narcissus's every step. He joined him on his morning walk to school, tagging along and gazing at him like a lost and adoring puppy until Narcissus could stand it no longer and yelled at him to go away and never come near him again.

That night Narcissus had been awoken by a strange sound outside his bedroom. He looked out of his window and saw in the moonlight Ameinias hanging from a pear tree, a rope around his neck. He choked out a curse before he died.

'May you be as unlucky in love as I have been, beautiful Narcissus!'

Since then Narcissus had got into the habit of keeping his head down, covering his body as much as possible and being short and gruff to strangers, never meeting them in the eye.

But now, as he looked about him, he saw that the rest of the hunting party had gone and that he was splendidly alone. He decided to take advantage of the cool waters of the stream and its inviting mossy banks. He slipped out of his clothes and plunged into the water.

As soon as she caught sight of that lissom and golden form, half sunlit, half dappled by the shade and all streaming with water, Echo caught her breath. And when, peeping through the leaves she saw the face, the beautiful, beautiful face of Narcissus, she could no longer control her senses. Were it not for Hera's curse she would have cried out there and then. Instead she gazed in silent wonder as the naked youth laid his clothes and bow and arrows on the grass and stretched himself out to sleep. When love comes late it comes like a tornado. Poor Echo's whole being was swept up by her feelings for this impossibly beautiful youth. Nothing, not even the horror of Hera's curse, had ever caused her heart to hammer so violently inside her. The blood pounded and surged in her ears. It was as if she was swirling in the centre of a great cyclone. She simply had to take a closer look at this lovely youth. If she felt such tumultuous passions swirling inside her at the sight of him, then perhaps it was in the nature of things that he would feel the same at the sight of her?

Surely that must be so? She crept forward, hardly daring to breathe. With each step she found herself more and more thrilled until she was quivering and trembling all over with excitement. The stories of love at first sight that she had heard sung all her life were true after all! This beautiful boy would be bound to return her love. Cosmos and creation would not make sense otherwise.

Of course, you and I know that Cosmos and creation make no sense at all and never have. Poor Echo was about to discover the truth of this. Whether it was her pounding heart or the cry of a bird, something made the sleeping Narcissus open his eyes just as Echo drew near.

His eyes met hers.

Echo was a pretty nymph, lovely in fact. But it was only her eyes that Narcissus saw. That look again! That haggard, hungry, haunted look. Those needing, pleading eyes. Ugh!

'Who are you?' he said, turning away.

'Who are you?'

'Never you mind. That's my business.'

'That's my business!'

'No it isn't. You woke me.'

'You woke me!'

'I suppose like all the others you've fallen in love with me.'

'Love with me!'

'Love! I'm fed up with love.'

'Up with love!'

'It'll never happen. Never. Go away!'

'Never go away!'

'I don't care how much you wail at me. I hate the sight of you.'

'The sight of you!'

'Stop it, will you? Just don't!' cried Narcissus. 'Go away!'

'Don't go away!'

'You're driving me crazy.'

'Driving me crazy!'

'Go away before I do something so desperate ...'

'So desperate!'

'Don't tempt me, now.'

'Tempt me now!'

Narcissus picked up his hunting sling and loaded it with a stone. 'Go. Just go. I'll hurt you if you don't. Understand?'

'You don't understand.'

The first stone missed her, but Echo turned and fled before Narcissus could reload and try again. As she ran he called out after her.

'And never come back!'

'Never come back,' she cried.

She ran from him and kept running until she fell weeping to the ground, her heart bursting with grief and shame.

The Gods Take Pity

Echo ran and ran up the hillside, sobbing with grief and desolation. She hid in a cave high above the river by whose banks the lovely Narcissus lay.

Inside her head Echo framed the words of a prayer to her favourite goddess, Aphrodite. In mute despair she begged to be relieved of the pain of love and the intolerable burden of her cursed existence.

Aphrodite answered the nymph's prayers as best she could. She freed the nymph of her body and most of her physical self. She did not have the power to lift Hera's curse, so the voice remained. The voice that had got Echo into all that trouble in the first place, the voice that was doomed to repeat and repeat. Nothing more was left of the once beautiful nymph, just the answering voice. You can hear Echo still, returning your last few words when you call out near caves, canyons, cliffs, hills, streets, squares, temples, monuments, ruins and empty rooms.

And Narcissus? Day after day he lay by the river, passionately and hopelessly in love with his own reflection, gazing at himself, filled with love for himself and longing for himself, with eyes only for himself, and consideration for no one and nothing but himself. He drooped down over the water, pining and pining until at last the gods turned him into the delicate and beautiful daffodil that bears his name and whose lovely head always bows down to look at itself in puddles, pools and streams.

You can choose to think of the characteristics these doomed young people have bequeathed us and our language as common human traits or as problematic afflictions. Narcissistic personality disorder and echolalia (the apparently mindless repetition of what is said) are both classified in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, which medically and legally defines mental illnesses. Narcissistic personality disorder, much talked about these days, is marked by vanity, self-importance, a grandiose hunger for admiration, acclaim and applause, and above all an obsession with self-image. The feelings of others are railroaded and stampeded, while such considerations as honesty, truthfulness or integrity are blithely disregarded. Bragging, boasting and delusional exaggeration are common signs. Criticism or belittlement is intolerable and can provoke aggressive and explosively strange behaviours.

Hero Myths

Theseus and the Minotaur

There used to be a great many kings in the world, because every city and islands called itself a kingdom. One king and one island struck fear into all the rest. King Minos of Crete so terrified his

5 neighbours that they paid him tributes every year to be left in peace. It was King Minos who built a palace with a cellar like a maze. It was King Minos who kept a monster called the Minotaur in this famous Labyrinth and fed it on human flesh.

10 "Why do we send tribute to Crete every year?" Prince Theseus asked his father, the king of Athens.

"To keep King Minos from sinking our ships or making war on us," replied King Aegeus (though

15 he did not like to talk about it).

"And what do we send?"

"Seven men and seven women," said the king.

"As slaves?"

20 "Not as slaves," said the king reluctantly. "They are to feed the Minotaur."

"How revolting! Never again!" Theseus vowed.

"This year I'll go as one of the fourteen and kill this Minotaur!"

25 Nothing the king could say would change his mind. As the tribute-ship set sail, the old man called from the dockside, "Good luck son! I shall keep watch on the cliff top every day. If you succeed, raise a new white sail. If you fail, raise this black one."

30 "I shall succeed!" called Theseus.

King Minos laughed to see the prisoners arrive from Athens. "Who shall be the first into the Minotaur's den?" he asked.

35 "I shall," said Theseus, stepping forward. "I, Prince Theseus of Athens, claim that honour!"

"You boasting young puppy," snarled Minos. "My Minotaur will make short work of you. Guards! Put the prince into the Labyrinth!"

40 Behind the throne, the king's plain little daughter, Ariadne, sat listening. She was ashamed of her father's cruelty, and hated to see how he fed the savage beast in the basement. She was still more unhappy when she saw brave and handsome Theseus dragged away to feed the monster.

45 Down went Theseus, into the dark, but he paused, not knowing which way to go. The guards marched away.

"Prince Theseus!" It was Ariadne. "Here. Take this." She dropped down to him a ball of string.

50 "Even if you can kill the Minotaur, you won't ever find your way back to the entrance unless you use this."

"Excellent!" exclaimed Theseus. "I could marry a girl as clever as you!" Then he tied one end to the



55 entrance and set off, unwinding the string as he went, forgetting everything but the Minotaur. However, Ariadne did not forget.

Theseus felt his way in the dark. It was true; without the string he would soon have been hopelessly lost in the maze of winding corridors. Suddenly, his fingers brushed warm, wiry hair, then the sharp point of a tusk. The Minotaur bellowed in his ear and flung him through the darkness. It stamped on him savagely with heavy

60 hoofs. The string was knocked out of his hand. They fought in utter darkness. The monster, half-man, half-bull, crushed him between hairy arms and lashed him viciously with its tail. Clever Theseus took hold of its horns and twisted them

70 first one way, then the other. He kicked and butted and struggled, and at last the beast gave a gurgling gasp and fell dead, its neck broken. Filled with panic, the prince scrabbled around for the ball of string. There! No, that was the

75 Minotaur's ear. There! Yes! Now he had only to wind it in and so retrace his steps. At the door of the Labyrinth, Ariadne stood waiting. "You're alive! You escaped!" she cried, and she took him by the hand and hurried him

80 away. They freed the other thirteen prisoners, then ran to the harbour. "You must take me with you, or my father will kill me too!" said the princess.

85 "Of course! Come aboard!" said Theseus, raising the old black sail with two pulls of his strong arms. The sail filled, and they were at sea before anyone knew they had escaped.

Theseus sat on deck in the sunshine and thought about what he had done. He was proud. His father would be proud too. "I must change this

90 sail for a white one," he was thinking. Just then, Ariadne came and sat at his feet, gazing up at him. "How wonderful!" she sighed. "To be free of my wicked father and to be married to a

95 brave prince!"

“Married?” said Theseus, turning rather pale. He suddenly realized that just because Ariadne had saved his life, she expected to marry him! He studied her face. That nose was very big. Those eyebrows were very thick. “Mmmm,” he said. “How wonderful.”

On the way home, the ship put in at an island for supplies. Theseus sent Ariadne ashore to buy wine and bread. While she was busy, he set sail and hurried away, breathing a sigh of relief. “When I marry,” he thought, “It will be to a beautiful queen or to a goddess.” He was in such a hurry to get away that he quite forgot to swap the black sail for a white one.

King Aegeus, watching day after day from the cliff below Athens, saw the ship as it hove into view. He saw the black sail full of wind. Instantly, he believed that his son Theseus had been killed and

eaten by the Minotaur. He threw himself off the high white cliff into the water below.

Ever afterwards, the sea was called the Aegean Sea, after the father of that ungrateful hero, Theseus.



The Labyrinth of Crete in Cyprus by Hercules Milas

Daedalus and Icarus

The island of Crete was ruled by King Minos, whose reputation for wickedness had spread to every shore. One day he summoned to his country a famous inventor named Daedalus.

- 5 “Come Daedalus, and bring your son Icarus too. I have a job for you and I pay well.”

King Minos wanted Daedalus to build him a palace, with soaring towers and a high, curving roof. In the cellars there was to be a maze, of many corridors- so twisting and dark that any man who once ventured in there, would never find his way out again.

- 10 “What is it for?” asked Daedalus. “Is it a treasure vault? Is it a prison to hold criminals?”
- 15 Minos only replied, “Build my labyrinth as I told you. I pay you to build, not to ask questions.” So Daedalus held his tongue, and set to work. When the palace was finished, he looked at it with pride, for there was nowhere in the world so fine.
- 20 However, when he found out the purpose of the maze in the cellar, he shuddered with horror.

For at the heart of the maze, King Minos put a beast- a thing too horrible to describe. He called it the Minotaur, and he fed it on men and women!

- 25 Daedalus wanted to leave Crete at once, and forget both maze and Minotaur. He went to King Minos to ask for his money.
- “I regret,” said King Minos, “I cannot let you leave Crete, Daedalus. You are the only man who knows the secret of the maze and how to escape from it. The secret must never leave this island. So I am afraid I must keep you and Icarus here a while longer.”

“How much longer?” gasped Daedalus.

- 35 “Oh- just until you die,” replied Minos cheerfully. “But never-you-mind. I have plenty of work for a man as clever as you.”

Daedalus and Icarus lived in great comfort in King Minos’ palace. Nevertheless, they were prisoners.

- 40 Their rooms were in the tallest palace tower, with beautiful views across the island. They ate delectable food and wore luxurious garments. But at night the door of their fine apartment was locked and a guard stood outside. It was a comfortable prison, but it was a prison even so.
- 45 Daedalus was deeply unhappy.

Every day he put seed out on the windowsill for the birds. He liked to study their brilliant colours, the clever overlapping of their feathers, the way they soared on the sea wind. It comforted him to think that they at least were free to come and go.

- 50



The Fall of Icarus, Jacob Peeter Gowy (1635-7)

The birds had only to spread their wings and they could leave Crete behind them, whereas Daedalus and Icarus were imprisoned forever in their luxurious cage.

55

Young Icarus could not understand his father’s despair. “I like it here,” he said. “The king gives us much gold and this beautiful tower to live in.” Daedalus groaned, “But to work for such a wicked man, Icarus! And to be prisoners all our days... We shall not stay. We shall not!”

60

“How can anyone escape from this island?” said Icarus. “Fly?” he snorted with laughter.

Daedalus did not answer. He scratched his head and stared out of the window at the birds pecking seed on the sill.

65

From that day onwards, he got up early each morning and stood at the open window. When a bird came for seed, Daedalus begged it to spare him one feather. Then each night, when everyone had gone to bed, Daedalus worked by candlelight on his greatest invention of all.

70

Early mornings. Late nights. A whole year went by. Then one morning Icarus was woken by his father shaking his shoulder. “Get up, Icarus, and don’t make a sound. We are leaving Crete.” “But how? It’s impossible!”

75

Daedalus pulled out a bundle from under his bed. “I’ve been making something, Icarus.” Inside were four great folded fans of feathers. He stretched them out on the bed. They were wings! “I sewed the feathers together with strands of wool from my blanket. Now hold still.”

80

Daedalus melted down a candle and daubed his son’s shoulders with sticky wax. While the wax

85

was still soft, he stuck two of the wings to Icarus' shoulder blades.

"Now you must help me put on my wings, son. When the wax sets hard, you and I will fly away from here, as free as birds!"

"I'm scared!" whispered Icarus as he stood on the narrow window ledge, his knees knocking and his huge wings drooping down behind. The royal guards looked as small as ants. "This won't work!"

"Courage, son!" said Daedalus. "Keep your arms out wide and fly close to me. Above all- are you listening, Icarus?"

"Y-y-yes father"

"Above all, don't fly too high. Don't fly too close to the sun."

"Don't fly too close to the sun," Icarus repeated with his eyes tight shut. Suddenly he gave a cry as his father nudged him off the window sill.

He plunged downwards. With a crack, the feathers behind him filled with wind, and Icarus found himself flying. Flying!

"I'm flying!" he crowed.

The little guards looked up in astonishment, and wagged their swords, and pointed and shouted, "Tell the king! Daedalus and Icarus... are...flying away!"

By dipping first one wing, then the other, Icarus found that he could turn to the left and the right. The wind tugged at his hair. His legs trailed out behind him. He saw the fields and streams as he had never seen them before!

Soon they were out over the sea. The seagulls pecked at him angrily, so Icarus flew higher, where they could not reach him.

He copied their shrill cry and taunted them: "You can't catch me!"

"Now remember, don't fly too high!" called Daedalus, but his words were drowned by the screaming of the gulls.

"I'm the first boy ever to fly! I'm making history! I shall be famous!" shouted Icarus as he flew up and up, higher and higher.

At last Icarus was looking the sun itself in the face, "Think you're the highest thing in the sky, do

you?" he jeered. "I can fly just as high as you.



Landscape with the Fall of Icarus, attributed to Bruegel the Elder

Higher, even!" He did not notice the drops of sweat on his forehead; he was so determined to out-fly the sun.

Soon its vast heat beat on his face, on his back, and on the great wings stuck on with wax. The wax softened. The wax trickled. The wax dripped. One feather came unstuck. Then a plume of feathers fluttered slowly down.

Icarus stopped flapping his wings. His father's words came back to him clearly now. Don't fly too close to the sun!

With a great sucking noise, the wax on his shoulders came unstuck. Icarus tried to catch hold of the wings, but they just folded up in his hands.

He plunged down, his two fists full of feathers- down and down and down.

The clouds did not stop his fall. The seagulls did not catch him in their beaks. His own father could only watch as Icarus hurtled head first into the glittering sea and sank deep down among the sharks and eels and squid. All that was left of proud Icarus was a litter of waxy feathers floating on the sea.

Perseus the Gorgon Slayer

From *Tales of the Greek Heroes* by Roger Lancelyn Green

In Tiryns lived King Acrisius, who had one child only, a lovely girl, called Danae. Being very anxious to have a son to succeed him, Acrisius sent to ask the oracle of Apollo what he had done that this was denied him. His question was not answered; instead the oracle warned him that his daughter would have a son who would kill him.

'We'll see about that!' cried Acrisius, and, vowing that Danae should never marry, he shut her up in a tower at Tiryns which was plated all over with brass so that it shone in the sun like gold. The brass plates have gone from it today, but you can still see the brass nails embedded in the stone which once held them in place. But Zeus visited Danae in a shower of golden rain, and spoke with her out of the shining mist, and they had a son called Perseus who was born there in the prison-tower at Tiryns.

When Acrisius heard that, in spite of all his precautions, he had a grandson, he was filled with anger and fear, and these passions made him cruel. He would not believe that Zeus was the child's father, but said that it was Proteus, his brother, whom he hated, who had stolen the key of the brazen tower and married Danae in secret.

He had a great wooden chest made, and he set Danae in it with the baby in her arms, and pushed it out on to the rippling waters in the Bay of Nauplia.

'It would be a terrible crime to kill my daughter and my grandson,' he said, 'and the Immortals would send a curse upon me. No, I am merely dispatching them across the sea — and if the waves chance to fill the chest and make it sink, I am not to blame!'

Away floated the chest over the blue sea and out of sight of land; and presently the waves began to rise and the wind to blow, and Danae wept with fear and clasped the baby Perseus close in her arms: 'Oh what a fate is yours,' she sobbed, 'and yet you do not cry but sleep as peacefully as ever, feeling no terror of the dreadful place in which we are. You do not fear the heaving sea, nor the salt spray on your hair... Oh, perhaps it is because you know that Father Zeus will protect us... Then sleep on, sweet babe, for the waves swell only to rock your cradle, and I will pray to Zeus that we may come safely to land.'

All night the chest floated over the sea, and in the morning it was washed up on the shores of the

island of Seriphos where Polydectes was king. And there Dictys, the king's brother, who was a fisherman, found Danae and her child, and took them to his home and looked after them.

There Perseus grew up, a strong and noble youth skilled in all manner of things, from the craft of the fisherman to the use of the sword. In time King Polydectes heard of them, and fell in love with Danae; but she would not marry him, for he was a cruel and wicked tyrant. At length he decided to take her by force; but this he dared not do because Perseus was always there to guard her.

So he devised a scheme to remove Perseus without incurring any blame for killing him. He held a great feast to which he invited the young men of Seriphos, including Perseus, and they all came bringing rich gifts to the King.

But Perseus had nothing to give, and he alone came empty-handed, so that all the young men mocked him, until his cheeks burnt with shame. 'I'll bring a finer present than any of you!' he cried fiercely.

"That cannot be," said cunning Polydectes, "unless you bring me the Gorgon's Head!"

"That I will!" shouted Perseus, "I'll bring it, or die in the attempt!"

And with that he rushed out of the palace amid the loud laughter and jeers of Polydectes and his friends, and went down beside the quiet sea to think what he should do.

While he sat there, deep in thought, two Immortals came to him: Athena, tall and stately in her shining helmet, with her polished shield upon her arm; and Hermes with kindly laughter in his eyes, slim and quick of limb, with the winged sandals on his feet.

"Do not grieve, Perseus," said Hermes, "for, by the will of Zeus, we are come to help you. See, here I lend you the sharpest weapon in the world, that very sickle of adamant with which Cronos wounded the Sky, and which Zeus used in his battle with Typhon. No lesser blade will smite the head from Medusa the Gorgon."

"And I," said Athena in her calm, sweet voice, "will lend you my shield with which I dazzle the eyes of erring mortals who do battle against my wisdom. Any mortal who looks upon the face of Medusa is turned to stone immediately by the tenor of it: but if you look only on her reflection in the shield, all will be well."

"Rise now," said Hermes, "your mother will be safe until your return, for the good fisherman,

105 Dictys, will protect her — and you have far to travel. First you must visit the Grey Sisters and learn from them how to find the Nymphs who dwell at the back of the North Wind: they will lend you all else that you may need, and will tell you how to find the Gorgons, and how to escape from the two who are immortal, when you have slain Medusa.”

110 So Perseus hastened away, his heart beating with excitement at the thought of the high adventure which was his, and the great honour which the Immortals had done him.

115 He came, as Hermes had instructed him, to the lonely cave in the dark north where the three daughters of the Titan Phorcus lived, the Grey Sisters who had been born old women with grey hair, and who had only one eye and one tooth between them.

120 Perseus stepped quietly up behind them as they sat near the mouth of their cave; and as they passed the single eye from one to another, he took it from an outstretched hand, and then cried aloud: “Daughters of Phorcus, I have your eye! And I will keep it and leave you for ever in darkness if you do not tell me what I wish to know.”

130 The Grey Sisters cried aloud in alarm: “Give us back our eye, and we will swear by Styx to tell you truthfully all you ask. But do not leave us for ever in this terrible darkness!”

135 So Perseus learnt the way to the magic land at the back of the North Wind and, returning the eye, hastened on his journey.

140 When he reached the lovely garden of the Northern Nymphs, he was welcomed kindly by them, and he rested for a long time in the paradise where they dwelt for ever young and happy.

145 But at length he said, “Fair Nymphs, I must hasten away to kill the Gorgon Medusa and carry her head to wicked King Polydectes. Tell me, I beg of you, where the Gorgons live, and how I may kill Medusa.”

150 “We will lend you the Shoes of Swiftiness,” answered the Nymphs, “so that you may escape from Medusa’s terrible sisters. And we lend you this magic wallet in which to carry away the head. There is but one thing wanting, and that is the Cap of Hades, the dog-skin cap which can make its wearer invisible.

155 Then one of the Nymphs went swiftly down to the Realm of Hades, for she had been Persephone’s favourite companion on earth, and could visit the

Queen of the Dead whenever she wished, and returned at will.

160 She brough back the Cap of Darkness, so that Perseus now had all the things he needed, and was ready for his dreadful task.

165 He bade farewell to the kind Nymphs, and set out on the way which the Grey Sisters had told him, and he came at last to the stony land of the Gorgons. As he drew near to where they lived, he saw all about in the fields and on the roads, the statues of men and beasts which had been living creatures until turned to stone by the deadly glance of the Gorgons.

170 Wearing the Cap of Darkness, and stepping cautiously, Perseus drew near, looking only at the reflection in Athena’s polished shield. Then he trembled indeed as he saw the terrible face of Medusa pictured on the bright surface; but he did not draw back. Still looking only at the reflection, he drew the adamantine sickle and cut off the terrible head at a single blow. Then, quick as could be, he picked it up and dropped it into the wallet which the Nymphs had given him.

180 But the hissing of the snakes on Medusa’s head woke the other two Gorgons, who could not be killed, and they sprang up, eager to avenge their sister.



Perseus and the head of Medusa, Benvenuto Cellini (1545–1554)

185 Perseus leapt into the air and sped away on the
Shoes of Swiftmess as fast as he could go. After
him came the Gorgons, screaming with rage, but
Perseus fled away and away out over the dark
ocean, south, ever south until his terrible
pursuers were lost in the distance behind him.

190 Then Perseus turned east and flew over Africa,
across the great empty desert where there was
no green thing, and no drop of water. As he went
the blood soaked through the magic wallet and
dripped behind him, and whenever a drop
195 touched the thirsty sand, it became a green oasis.

Night came, and in the morning as he flew over
the sea-shore he beheld what at first he thought
was a wonderful statue of a fair girl hewn from
the rock just above sea-level.

200 Swooping down, Perseus found that it was no
statue but a living maiden chained naked to the
face of the rock, with the little waves creeping up
to her feet.



Perseus and Andromeda Giacomo Bolognini (1644–
1734/1737)

205 “Chained maiden!” said Perseus gently. “My heart
bleeds for you.”

“Who speaks? Who is it pities poor doomed
Andromeda?” she cried wildly.

Perseus had forgotten that he still wore the Cap
of Invisibility. Now he removed it swiftly, and
210 hovering above the waves he said, “Lovely
Andromeda, why are you chained her?”

Then, weeping bitterly, she told him how her
foolish mother, Cassiopeia, had offended the sea-
nymphs by her ridiculous boastings, and they had
sent a monster to ravage all the sea coast, until
215 King Cepheus, her father, chained her there as a
sacrifice, hoping thus to satisfy the creature's
fury.

220 “If I can save you, will you at least remember
me?” asked Perseus, who had fallen in love with
Andromeda at first sight.

“Do not make me weep, dreaming of deeds that
can never be done!” she sobbed.

225 “Deeds that men deemed impossible have been
accomplished, none the less,” he answered. Then
he turned quickly away, for he had noticed a
ripple in the sea drawing nearer, ever nearer.
Perseus, still hovering just above the waves, got
ready; and in a few moments the monster raised
230 its head above the water and opened wide its
fierce jaws. Then, while Andromeda screamed,
and her parents on the cliffs above wept and
prayed, Perseus drew the Gorgon's head from his
wallet and held it in front of the savage eyes. And
235 the monster sank back, still and cold and silent, a
long ridge of jagged stone.

Then Perseus returned the head to the magic
wallet, cut Andromeda's chains with the
adamantine sickle, and carried her in safety to the
240 cliff top.

There was great rejoicing at the rescue of
Andromeda, and King Cepheus readily agreed
that Perseus should marry her. So there Perseus
stayed for many days, and there was a noble feast
245 at his wedding. But as they sat at the great table,
the door was flung suddenly open, and a great
man strode in followed by a band of desperadoes
all armed with drawn swords:

250 “Yield up Andromeda to me!” shouted the leader
of this band, who was a prince named Phineus.
“She was promised to me, and unless I get her, I'll
slaughter every man here, burn the city and carry
off the women to be my slaves!”

255 Then Perseus strode down the hall until he stood
in front of Phineus, and taking out the Gorgon's
head he turned him and all his followers to stone
on the instant.

Not long after this, Perseus and Andromeda set
sail for Greece and came at length to the island of
260 Seriphos. Here he found that his mother Danae
had been made a slave by Polydectes, while
Dictys his kind friend languished in prison.

Leaving Andromeda on the ship, Perseus went
alone up to the palace and found Polydectes
265 sitting at meat with the same band of followers
who had jeered at him once before.

“Well, if it isn't that landless boaster, Perseus!”
cried the king scornfully, while the others laughed
and jested at him. “Have you, by any chance,
270 brought me the present you promised?”

“Yes,” answered Perseus quietly. “I come,
according to my promise, bringing the Gorgon's
head.”

275 “Boaster and liar!” jeered Polydectes. “Do you
think to frighten us with empty words? Show us
this wonder — if you can.”

Perseus answered nothing, but pulled the
Gorgon's head out of the wallet and held it up for
all to see. And afterwards the stone lumps which
280 had once been men were dragged out and
dumped on the hillside.

That evening Hermes came to Perseus and
received back from him the Sickle and the Shield
and with them the Cap, the Shoes, and the
285 Wallet. He also took the head of Medusa, which
Athena set in the centre of her shield to strike
terror into the hearts of the Giants when the
long-expected invasion should take place.

After this Dictys became King of Seriphos, and
290 married Danae, while Perseus and Andromeda set
sail for Argolis. But on the way he stopped at

Larissa and took part in the great games which
the king of that land was holding.

Perseus distinguished himself greatly in these; but
295 when it came to throwing the round iron disc, he
hurled it so hard that it struck an old man who sat
watching, and killed him instantly. This, it turned
out, was Acrisius, who had left Tiryns in fear that
Perseus, on his return, would kill him and so fulfil
300 the oracle.

Sorrowing deeply, Perseus went on his way; and
he and Andromeda ruled over Argolis for many
years and had numerous children. Among these
were Electryon and Alcaeus. The first of these
305 became the father of Alcmena and the second
was the father of Amphitryon; and these two
cousins married, and went to live in Thebes. And
there was a third son called Sthenelus, who late in
life had a son called Eurystheus, who ruled over
310 Tiryns and all Argos.

The Iliad

While the Greeks are laying siege to Troy, a quarrel breaks out between Agamemnon, the Greek leader and Achilles, his greatest warrior. As a result, the angry Achilles refuses to leave his tent and let the Greeks fight without him. He even pays a visit to his mother Thetis, a sea goddess, to make the Greeks lose. With Achilles off the battlefield, the Trojans, under the leadership of Hector, are able to drive the Greeks back to the sea. During the battle, Hector kills Achilles' best friend, Patroclus. While grieving for his dead friend, Achilles is visited by his mother, the goddess Thetis.

Vocabulary in action

Choose the word that is *not* related in meaning to the other words in each set.

1. a) face, b) meet, c) evade, d) confront
2. a) ponderous, b) swift, c) weighty, d) hefty
3. a) clamour, b) peacefulness, c) silence, d) calm
4. a) dirty, b) cleanse, c) defile, d) corrupt
5. a) strong, b) vulnerable, c) weak, d) defenceless
6. a) dodge, b) capture, c) elude, d) escape
7. a) destruction, b) disaster, c) havoc, d) protection
8. a) whetted, b) dull, c) blunt, d) rounded
9. a) disobey, b) flout, c) punish, d) disregard
10. a) promise, b) exult, c) rejoice, d) celebrate
11. a) defender, b) guardian, c) protector, d) scourge
12. a) act, b) abstain, c) proceed, d) perform

The immortal shield, from Book 18

(Translated by Robert Fitzgerald)

Bending near her groaning son, the gentle goddess wailed and took his head between her hands in pity, saying softly: "Child, why are you weeping? What great sorrow came to you? Speak

5 out, do not conceal it. Zeus did all you asked:

Achaean troops, for want of you, were all forced back again upon the ship sterns, taking heavy losses none of them could wish."

Fleet-footed Achilles groaned and answered:

10 "Mother, yes, the master of high **Olympus**

brought it all about, but how have I benefitted? My greatest friend is gone: Patroclus, comrade in arms, whom I held

- 15 – dear as myself –
now gone, lost;
Hector cut him
down, despoiled him
of my own arms,
20 massive and fine, a
wonder in all men's
eyes. The gods gave
them to **Peleus** that
day they put you in a
25 mortal's bed – how I
wish the immortals

- of the sea had been your only consorts! How I wish Peleus had taken a mortal queen! Sorrow immeasurable is in store for you as well, when
30 your own child is lost; never again on his
homecoming day will you embrace him! I must reject this life, my heart tells me, reject the world of men, if Hector does not feel my battering spear
tear the life out of him, making him pay in his own
35 blood for the slaughter of Patroclus!"
Letting a tear fall, Thetis said: "You'll be swift to meet your end, child, as you say: your doom comes close on the heels of Hector's own."
Achilles the great runner ground his teeth and
40 said: "May it come quickly. As things were, I could not help my friend in his extremity. Far from home he died; he needed me to shield him or to
parry the death stroke. For me there's no return to my own country. Not the slightest gleam of
45 hope did I afford Patroclus or the other men
whom Hector overpowered. Here I sat, my weight a useless burden to the earth, and I am one who has no peer in war among Achaean captains –
though in council there are wiser. Ai! Let strife

- 50 and **rancor** perish from the
lives of gods and men, with
anger that **envenoms** even
the wise and is sweeter than
slow-dripping honey,
55 clouding the hearts of men
like smoke: just so the
marshal of the army,

- Agamemnon, moved me to anger. But we'll let that go, though I'm still sore at heart; it is all past,
60 and I have **quelled** my passions as I must.
Now I must go to look for the destroyer of my great friend. I shall confront the dark drear spirit of death at any hour Zeus and the other gods may wish to make an end. Not even Heracles escaped that terror through cherished by the lord Zeus.
65 Destiny and Hera's bitter tongue mastered him. Likewise with me, if destiny like his awaits me, I

Achaean = Greek
Olympus – the highest mountain in Greece where the Greek gods were supposed to live. Patroclus wore Achilles' armour to convince the Trojans the hero had rejoined the battle.
Peleus = Achilles' mortal father
parry: to turn aside the thrust of a sword

rancor: bitter, long lasting ill will
envenom: fill with poison
quell: to quiet; suppress

shall rest when I have fallen! Now, though, may I win my perfect glory and make some wife of Troy break down, or some deep-breasted **Dardan** women sob and wipe tears from

Dardan = Trojan
abstain: to deliberately hold yourself back

her soft cheeks. They'll know then how long they had been spared the deaths of men, while I **abstained** from war! Do not attempt to keep me from the fight, though you love me; you cannot make me listen."

Achilles seeks to avenge Patroclus by slaughtering Trojans. Apollo, a god who protects Troy, opens the gates of the city so that the Trojans can rush to safety inside the city's walls. Only Hector is left outside. Achilles chases him around the walls of Troy three times. Finally, the goddess Athena, disguised as Hector's brother Deiphobus, appears to Hector and persuades him to fight Achilles.

Desolation before Troy, from Book 22 (Translated by Robert Fitzgerald)

And when at last the two men faced each other, Hector was the first to speak. He said: "I will no longer fear you as before, son of Peleus, though I ran from you round **Priam's** town three times and could not face you. Now my soul would have me stand and fight,

whether I kill you or am killed. So come, we'll summon gods

Priam: the king of Troy
arbiter: judge, referee

here as our witnesses, none higher, **arbiters** of a pact: I swear that, terrible as you are, I'll not insult your corpse should Zeus allow me victory in the end, your life as a prize. Once I have your gear, I'll give your body back to Achaeans. Grant me too this grace."

But swift Achilles frowned at him and said:

"Hector, I'll have no talk of pacts with you, forever unforgiven as you are. As between men and lions there are none, no **concord** between wolves and sheep, but all hold one another hateful

concord: peace or harmony
elude: to avoid or escape

through and through, so there can be no courtesy between us, no sworn truce, till

one of us is down and glutting with his blood the war god Ares. Summon up what skills you have. By god, you'd better be a spearman and a fighter! Now there is no way out. Pallas Athena will have the upper hand of you. The weapon belongs to me. You'll pay the reckoning in full for all the pain my men have borne, who met death by your spear."

He twirled and cast his shaft with its long shadow. Splendid Hector, keeping his eye upon the point, **eluded** it by ducking at the instant of the cast, so shaft and bronze shank passed him overhead and punched into the earth. But unperceived by Hector, Pallas Athena plucked it out and gave it back to Achilles. Hector said: "A clean miss.

Godlike as you are, you have not yet known doom for me from Zeus. You thought you had, by heaven. Then you turned into a word-thrower, hoping to make me lose my fighting heart and head in fear of you. You cannot plant your spear between my shoulders while I am running. If you have the gift, just put it through my chest as I come forward. Now it's for you to dodge my own. Would god you'd give the whole shaft lodging in your body! War for the Trojans would be eased if you were blotted out, **bane** that you are."

With this he twirled his long spearshaft and cast it, hitting his enemy mid-shield, but off and away the spear rebounded.

bane: a cause of distress
bemused: dazed, confused

Furious that he had lost it, made the throw for nothing, Hector stood **bemused**. He had no other. Then he gave a great shout to Deiphobus to ask for a long spear. But there was no one near him, not a soul. Now in his heart the Trojan realised the truth and said: "This is the end. The gods are calling deathward. I had thought a good soldier, Deiphobus, was with me. He is inside the walls. Athena tricked me. Death is near, and black, not at a distance, not to be evaded. Long ago this hour must have been to Zeus's liking and to the liking of his **archer son**. They have been well disposed before, but now the appointed

Zeus's "archer son" is Apollo, god of the sun, whose arrows represent the sun's rays.

time's upon me. Still, I would not die without delivering a stroke, or die ignominiously, but in some action memorable to me in days to come."

With this he drew the **whetted** blade that hung upon his left flank, **ponderous** and long,

whetted: sharp
ponderous: very heavy, slow

collecting all his might the way an eagle narrows himself to dive through shady cloud and strike a lamb or cowering hare: so Hector lanced ahead and swung his whetted blade. Achilles with wild fury in his heart pulled in upon his chest his beautiful shield – his

helmet with four burnished metal ridges nodding above it, and the golden

Hephaestus: the god of fire and blacksmith of the gods who made Achilles' armour.

crest **Hephaestus** locked there tossing in the wind. Conspicuous as the evening star that
 170 comes, amid the first in heaven, at fall of night, and stands most lovely in the west, so shone in sunlight the fine-pointed spear Achilles poised in his right hand, with deadly aim at Hector, at the skin where most it lay exposed. But nearly all was
 175 covered by the bronze gear he took from slain Patroclus, showing only, where his collarbones divided neck and shoulders, the bare throat where the destruction of a life is quickest. Here, then, as the Trojan charged, Achilles drove his point straight through the tender neck, but did
 180 not cut the windpipe, leaving Hector able to speak and to respond. He fell aside now into the dust. And Prince Achilles now exulted:

“Hector, had you thought that you could kill
 185 Patroclus and be safe? Nothing to dread from me; I was not there. All childishness. Though distant then, Patroclus’ comrade in arms was greater far than he – and it is I who had been left behind that day besides the deepsea ships who now have
 190 made your knees give way. The dogs and **kites** will rip your body. His will lie in honour when Achaeans give him funeral.”

Hector, barely
 whispering, replied: “I
 195 beg you by your soul and by your parents do not let the dogs feed on me. Accept the bronze and gold my father will provide as gifts, my father and her ladyship my mother, let them
 200 have my body back, so that our men and women may accord me decency of fire when I am dead.”

kites: birds of prey

Burning the bodies of the dead was customary – truces were often arranged for this purpose.

Achilles, the great runner, scowled and said: “Beg
 205 me no beggary by soul or parents, whining dog! Would god my passion drove me to slaughter you and eat you raw, you’ve caused such agony to me! No man exists who could defend you from
 210 the **carrion** pack – not if they spread for me ten times your ransom, twenty times, and promise me more as well; aye not if Priam,
 215 son of Dardanus, tells them to buy you for your weight in gold! You’ll have no bed of death, nor will you be laid out and mourned by her who gave you birth. Dogs and birds will have you, every scrap.”

carrion: wild animals that feed on dead bodies.

220 Then at the point of death Lord Hector said: “I see you now for what you are. No chance to win you over. Iron in your heart. Think a bit, though: this

may be a thing the gods in anger hold against you on that day when Paris and Apollo destroy you at the gates, great as you are.”

225 Even as he spoke, the end came, and death hid him; spirit from body fluttered to undergloom, bewailing fate that made him leave his youth and manhood in the

230 world. And as he died Achilles spoke again: “Die, make an end. I shall accept my own whenever
 235 Zeus desires.”

Although Achilles is still alive at the end of the Iliad, he is later killed by Hector’s brother, Paris with the help of Apollo.

At this he pulled his spearhead from the body, laying aside, and stripped the bloodstained shield and **cuirass** from his shoulders. Other Achaeans hastened round to see Hector’s fine body and his
 240 handsome face, and no one came who did not stab the body. Glancing at one another they would say: “Now Hector has turned vulnerable,
 245 softer than when he put the torches to the ships!”

cuirass: armored breastplate

And he who said this would inflict a wound. When the
 250 great master of pursuit, Achilles, had the body stripped, he stood among them saying softly: “Friends, my lords and captains of **Argives**, now that the gods at last have let me bring to earth this man who wrought
 255 havoc among us – more than all the rest – come, we’ll offer battle around the city, to learn the intentions of the Trojans now. Will they give up their strongpoint at this
 260 loss? Can they fight on, though Hector’s dead?”

Hector torched the Greek ships while Achilles was refusing to fight.

Argives: Greeks

But wait: why do I ponder, why take up these questions? Down by the ships Patroclus’ body lies unwept, unburied. I shall not forget him while I can keep my feet among the living. If in the dead
 265 world they forget the dead, I say there, too, I shall remember him, my friend. Men of Achaea, lift a song! Down to the ships we go, and take this body, our glory. We have beaten Hector down, to whom as to a god the Trojans prayed.”

270 Indeed, he had in mind for Hector’s body outrage and shame. Behind both feet he pierced the tendons, heel to ankle. Rawhide cords he drew through both and lashed them to his chariot, letting the man’s head trail. Stepping aboard, bearing the great trophy of arms, he shook the
 275 reins, and whipped the team ahead into a willing run. A dustcloud rose above the furrowing body;

the dark tresses flowed behind, and the head so princely once lay back in the dust. Zeus gave him to his enemies to be defiled in his own fatherland. So his whole head was blackened.

Looking down, his mother tore her braids, threw off her veil, and wailed, heartbroken to behold her son. Piteously his father groaned, and round him lamentation spread throughout the town, most like the clamour to be heard if **Ilion's** towers, top to bottom, seethed in flames. They barely stayed the old man, mad with grief, from passing through the gates.

Ilion: Troy

Structured discussion

- What is your impression of Achilles?
- Does Achilles loyalty to his friend Patroclus justify the way he treats Hector?
- To what extent do Achilles and Hector conform to your idea of a hero?
- How is Achilles similar to Gilgamesh?
- What is your opinion of the gods' involvement with events?

Unscramble the sentences:

1. with long its shadow and cast his twirled shaft he.
2. dust he fell now the aside into.
3. gave it back to Pallas Athena Hector Achilles and plucked it out, but unperceived by.
4. talk I'll of have no pacts unforgiven with, forever Hector, as you you are.

Appositives

The epitaphs given to the heroes and gods in Homer's epics are often appositives – noun phrases that give extra description and can substitute for the character's name. In the extracts above Achilles is referred to as 'the great runner'. He also sometimes called 'Best of the Greeks' and 'Prince of Phthia'.

Achilles and his warriors return to their camp and carry out the burial rites for Patroclus. Three times, Achilles drags Hector's body behind his chariot around Patroclus' grave. Afterwards, the gods cleanse and restore the body, and Zeus asks Thetis to tell Achilles to return the body to the Trojans. Priam sets out for the Greek camp, accompanied only by an old servant, to ask Achilles to return the body. He is not aware that the god Hermes helps him by putting sentries to sleep and opening the gates. Eventually Achilles agrees to return Hector's body to his father.

Add an appositive to the sentences below:

1. Patroclus, _____, was killed by Hector.
2. Thetis, _____, comforted her grieving son.
3. Achilles, _____, killed Hector.
4. Hector, _____, was dragged around the walls of Troy.
5. Priam, _____, mourned for his son.



Achilles by Elizabeth Cook

After the killing of Patroclus and Hector, Achilles is killed by Paris whose arrow, guided by the vengeful god Apollo, strikes Achilles in the one place where he can be injured: his heel. Here the author Elizabeth Cook describes the aftermath of Achilles' death.



They fell on your carcass like jackals. Those who would not have dared to come near you in life, suddenly very brave. Everyone wanted to get a look, a feel. They plan to boast about this for the rest of their lives, which for most of them is not long.

"You should have seen the look in his eyes. Not fear. Surprise"

"I touched one of his hands – twice the size of mine. Little reddy-gold hairs on the back of it."

"So young, his face."

Moments after you were felled – slamming into the ground like a huge tree – there was chaos. They did not want to let you go, these Trojans who had got you so suddenly. So undeservedly. But Odysseus and Ajax arrived, wielding their broad swords.

Ajax hooked his arms under your shoulders as Odysseus, fierce as a dog, drove back the Trojan scavengers. He snarled, menacing on all sides, laying about him with the butt of his spear then twirling it round to stab. He plied it nimbly, as if it were part of him.

Then Ajax, his own great body filled with sorrow, lifted you. He kneeled to insert his left shoulder under the place where your body folds and then, with a stamp and a loud exhalation, staggered to his feet.

Yes. Great Ajax staggered under the weight of you.

Now your body has been washed. Briseis has done this, her exile's heart breaking, tears mixing with the clean water. She has dried you with her long hair and with linen. She has crushed herbs into the oil she anoints you with: hyssop, myrtle, juniper, rosemary. Maquis herbs that smell of Pelion's shrubby mountainside in the sun.

Your glistening body, healed of its single wound, is laid out on the bier.

40 You saw how it would be when you buried Patroclus.

One by one your Myrmidons approach you. Each man saws at his hair with his sword's edge and lays this tribute on you. Each man is weeping.

45 After the Myrmidons, the generals. Even Agamemnon weeps as he bows his head beside you, ashamed now of his greed. Your body under this soft plied blanket of black and brown, russet and gold. The wind detaches and lifts some of the locks. Bright hairs separate themselves, and float in the air like strange insects. Sea horses of the air. A terrible sound. A great wailing. A keening that never seems to exhaust itself but which moves in waves, each fuller than the one before.

50 The sea has altered. Where before it was one bright blue, broken only by the myriad jagged flashes of sunlight, it is darker now. Purple waves, green ones, waves of a deeper blue roll in, one on top of the other, lipping it, chasing it, waves pouring in as if to flood the beach.

The sudden darkening of the waves makes the men look up at the sky, expecting to see signs of a storm. They find unbroken blue. The mild wind continues to lift the locks of hair – they hang in the air like leaves on an autumn day. Yet still the sound grows and the small waves race in. Some meteorological catastrophe must be at hand: a whirlwind, a twister, or else a tidal wave once these flat little waves have gathered force. The keening must be the sound of the wind whipping in the distance. They have heard of such phenomena.

In spite of the strangeness of the sea, some men make for the ships. The instinct of sailors who want home.

70 Chaos on the beach: as before a storm when dry leaves swirl on the forest floor in separate conflicting eddies. The generals attempt to impose some kind of order but it is hard for them to be heard.

Only the Myrmidons to a man keep close to you. Not one of them will desert his beloved commander.

85 Nestor sees what is happening and has a word with Odysseus. There is no storm coming. Achilles' mother and her sisters are arriving from the sea to be present at the funeral. He speaks quietly – his old voice cannot carry as Menelaus' does – but once he has spoken calm settles again.

90 With calm a sense of wonder spreads. Now the fear has gone the warriors stand in silence,

listening to the subtle harmonies that make up this keening.

95 The sound is the sound that would happen if every fish in a silver shoal had its own fine note. An intricacy of sound, a close-stitched cloth. Each fish a needle darting over and under, over and under, till the cloth is tight. Each needle a note, taking its place in the vast canopy of sound that spreads itself out over their heads. This pliant, seam-free cloth of shot skill which encloses them unfurls, interposing itself between them and the sky.

105 Many who are there have never knowingly met gods before. Their hearts, open already with grief, salute the marvellous happening.

The air too seems to stand to attention and within it, each mote of light moves. Each mote twirls and

110 dances, like the bright lifted sections of hair. Each mote sings.

Then something happens which all can discern. The sea is suddenly crowded with slivery creatures. Not like fish. Bigger. More like a colony of seals making its way up onto the shore; 115 heaving, sliding, pulling, arcing. A flickering mass of gleaming bodies, dark as ore or mottled and luminous. Some are pale as honey. Each one in an ecstasy of movement.

As they arrive on the beach the song thickens. 120 Soon they are all here: Thetis, her sisters and those nine daughters of Zeus and Mnemosyne, the Muses. They stand together on the shore and sing and their song burns in the veins of all who hear it. It is stronger than unmixed wine.



Thetis, Nereids, and the Muses Mourning Achilles' Death, 560–550 BCE

Introduction to Odysseus

The Belly of the Beast – Stephen Fry (from *Troy*)



Procession of the Trojan Horse into Troy, Giovanni Domenico Tiepolo (1760)

Odysseus had heard some, but not all, of what had taken place. When the noise of the world outside did reach him, all the separate sounds were fused into a muffled boom that made picking out individual words all but impossible.

It was hot, dark and painfully cramped inside the horse. There were thirty of them in there, crammed in as tight as olives in a jar. Epeius's vents and ducts were working, but that air that came through was stale and tasted of wood and tar.

The sudden shocking moment when Laocoön had slammed the flat of a sword blade against the wood next to Odysseus's head had taken him completely by surprise. He had nearly slipped off the narrow wooden bench he shared with nine others. Two more such benches held the other twenty volunteers; all, like him, doing their best not to sneeze, cough, fart, fidget or shift.

So far as Odysseus could tell, Sinon seems to be playing his part wonderfully. He made out scraps of the Palamedes story being forced out of Sinon just as they had rehearsed it. He heard the whining tone, the highly convincing shrill edge of contempt and disgust in Sinon's voice. Convincing because Sinon truly did hate Odysseus. No play-acting required. He had hoarded insults and harboured resentment for years. Now he could let all the poison out.

Then came a strange and inexplicable moment. An unearthly screeching, as from some terrible demonic creature, followed by choking human screams and a fraught silence. Had they suddenly turned on Sinon? Where they torturing him?

But no, there was laughter next. Laughter and the sound of music. Suddenly the whole inner frame in which Odysseus and the others sat suspended

gave a violent lurch. Only the swift, outstretched arm of young Anticlus next to him stopped Odysseus from being thrown forward off his bench. He breathed a silent 'Thank you' to Anticlus. If he had tumbled down onto the secret trapdoor below, he might have burst through, out of the belly, and landed, back broken, in front of a crowd of Trojans. At the very least, the noise of his fall would surely have been loud enough to ruin everything.

The wrenching jerk was prelude to more shaking and shifting. They were on the move. The Trojans were singing and clashing cymbals, and tugging the horse along the ground, there could be no doubt about it.

Epeius had drilled tiny holes, no bigger than the holes made by woodworm, in the horses' side at irregular intervals, just enough to allow thin white needles of light to pierce the pitch-black interior. As the horse was dragged over the uneven terrain, the beams darted about revealing eye-whites, teeth and the gleam of swords. Odysseus caught sight of Neoptolemus on the bench opposite, grinning across at him.

'You've done it!'

Odysseus pressed his hands down in the air as if to smother the triumphant excitement. 'We shall see,' he mouthed.

The jogging, grating journey across the plain seemed to last for ever. In their time they had all sat on the rowing benches of **penteconters**, but this was somehow worse. The darkness, confusion, the terrible possibility that they were being led not to victory but to cruel defeat. At any moment the crunch of axes might come or the furious crackle of fire.

penteconters:
ancient Greek galleys

On and on. The scrape and scrabble over rough terrain, the vibrations so violent that Odysseus found himself praying to Hephaestus to keep watch over the horse's tenons, joints and interior bolts lest they be shifted loose by the incessant jolting and juddering. And all the while the dreadful music: horns, drums, pipes and screeching, tuneless yells. Odysseus told himself these were sounds of genuine victorious joy. If the Trojans doubted the horse and planned to

destroy it, surely the songs and shouts would have a different tone?

Then the swaying, lurching and grinding stopped altogether and a relative silence fell. Voices
90 barked inaudible commands. Then came loud banging. Odysseus thought he recognised the sounds of demolition and dared hope that the Trojans had begun work on knocking out a space in the wall big enough for the horse to pass
95 through. Hot globes of sweat were dropping from his chin. The tap-tap sounds they made as they slapped onto the skin of his bare knees was unbearably loud.

He heard hissing curses of relief and triumph from the men around him as they thanked the gods. They knew what those noises must mean. Odysseus was sure he could identify the smashing of hammers on walls and the splintering cracks followed by deep thumps than could be made
105 only by blocks of stone breaking up and falling to the ground. And then, after so much more than Odysseus felt he could account for, they jerked into movement once more, this time on smoother ground. The wood wheels of the horse's hoofs
110 trundled freely over the flags and paving stones. The cries and calls boomed louder than before. A scream of joy sounded so close to Odysseus's ear that he almost leapt from his bench again. At first he couldn't understand it. Then he realized that they must be rolling along through a city street. The belly of the horse would be level with the upper storey or balcony of some shop or dwelling house. Citizens must be crowded everywhere to watch the passage of this huge and extraordinary
120 artefact, the like of which no one had seen before. Where would they take it? To the square outside the temple of Athena, he supposed, the one where he and Diomedes had abstracted the Palladium.

125 Odysseus laughed silently. This was all so entirely odd. Perhaps it really had been Athena who had

planted this idea. It had revealed itself so completely to him. Just as Athena herself had sprung fully formed from the head of her father Zeus, so the idea of the horse had emerged
130 complete to the last detail in his head. Right down to the use of Sinon and the need for the Trojans to think that the last thing the Greeks wanted was for the horse to be taken into Troy. How had such a complex notion come to him? Odysseus allowed his head to drop as thoughts flooded him mind.
135

'Sinon and I are both descended from the trickster god Hermes, so perhaps it was more his work than grey, grey-eyed Athena's? I have to hand it to my cousin: he not only understood and consented to the plan, he saw the need to be bloody and roughed up when the Trojans found him. "No, you must beat me," he had said. "Break my nose. I wouldn't have submitted meekly to being sacrificed, to having my throat cut. I'd have fought like a lion. It has to look real." Now, there was a sacrifice to the cause. Or perhaps Sinon is one of those warped souls who derives pleasure from pain? Agamemnon promised him a giant share of treasure, of course. When this is all over, Sinon will be one of the richest men in the world. Richest commoners, at least. And his name will be remembered for ever. How strange is our mortal zest for fame. Perhaps it is the only way humans
155 can be gods. We achieve immortality not through ambrosia and ichor but through history and reputation. Through statues and epic song. Achilles knew he could live a long and happy life, but chose blood, pain and glory over serene obscurity. I don't give a fig for fame. If that smug rat Palamedes hadn't exposed me, I'd be at home with Penelope at this very moment. I'd be teaching young Telemachus how to use a bow and arrow. He is ten years old. *Ten*. How is that possible? He won't know who I am. Does Penelope tell him stories about me?
165

Odysseus slept.

The Muses

From Hesiod's *Theogony*

So said the ready-voiced daughters of great Zeus, and they plucked and gave me a rod, a shoot of sturdy laurel, a marvellous thing, and breathed into me a divine voice to
5 celebrate things that shall be and things that were aforetime; and they bade me sing of the race of the blessed gods that are eternally, but ever to sing of themselves both first and last. But why all this about oak or
10 stone? Come you, let us begin with the Muses who gladden the great spirit of their father Zeus in Olympus with their songs, telling of things that are and that shall be and that were aforetime with consenting voice.
15 Unwearying flows the sweet sound from their lips, and the house of their father Zeus the loud-thunderer is glad at the lily-like voice of the goddesses as it spreads abroad, and the peaks of snowy Olympus resound,
20 and the homes of the immortals. And they, uttering their immortal voice, celebrate in song first of all the revered race of the gods from the beginning, those whom Earth and wide Heaven begot, and the gods sprung of these, givers of good things. Then next, the
25 goddesses sing of Zeus, the father of gods and men, as they begin and end their strain, how much he is the most excellent among the gods and supreme in power. And again,
30 they chant the race of men and strong giants, and gladden the heart of Zeus within Olympus, the Olympian Muses, daughters of Zeus the **aegis**-holder.

Them in Pieria did

35 Mnemosyne

aegis: magical shield

(Memory, who reigns over the hills of Eleuther), bear of union with the father, the son of Cronos, a forgetting of ills and a rest from sorrow. For nine nights did wise Zeus lie
40 with her, entering her holy bed remote from the immortals. And when a year was passed and the seasons came round as the months



Apollo and the Muses, Nicolas Poussin (1630s)

waned, and many days were accomplished, she bore nine daughters, all of one mind, whose hearts are set upon song, and whose spirit is free from care, a little way from the top-most peak of snowy Olympus.

There are their bright dancing places and beautiful homes, and beside them the Graces and Himerus (Desire) live in delight. And they, uttering through their lips a lovely voice, sing the laws of all and the goodly ways of the immortals, uttering their lovely voice. Then went they to Olympus, delighting
50 in their sweet voice, with heavenly song, and the dark earth resounded about them as they chanted and a lovely sound rose up beneath their feet as they went to their father. And he was reigning in heaven, himself holding the lightning and glowing thunderbolt, when he had overcome by might his father Cronos; and he distributed fairly to the immortals their portions and declared their privileges. These things, then, the Muses sang who
65 dwell on Olympus, nine daughters begotten by great Zeus, Cleio and Euterpe, Thaleia, Melpomene and Terpsichore, and Erato and Polyhymnia and Urania and Calliope, who is the chiefest of them all, for she attends on worshipful princes: whomever of heaven-nourished princes the daughters of great Zeus honour and behold at his birth, they pour sweet dew upon his tongue, and from his lips flow gracious words.

Translations of Homer

Simon Armitage, like Homer before him, starts his dramatized version of the play with an invocation to the Muse.

Remind us, Muse, of that man of many means,
Sent spinning the length and breadth of the map
After bringing the towers of Troy to their knees;
Of the lessons he learned in the cities of great minds,
And the heartbreak he suffered, roaming the seas
To land his shipmates and salvage his life.
But for all the torture and grief he sustained
His comrades were lost; heedless fools,
They gorged on the flesh of the Cattle of the Sun.
In turn, the God of the Sun made death their domain.
Muse, daughter of Memory and Zeus,
Where to start this story is yours to choose



Emily Wilson's translation of the Odyssey starts like this:

Tell me about a complicated man.
Muse, tell me how he wandered and was lost
when he had wrecked the holy town of Troy
Where he went and who he met
The pain he suffered and the storms at sea
And how he worked to save his life and
Bring his men back home.
He failed to keep them safe, poor fools,
They ate the sun god's cattle and the god
kept them from home. Now goddess, child of Zeus,
tell the old story for our modern times,
Find the beginning.



Modern Interpretations

Siren Song by Margaret Atwood



Odysseus and the Sirens (1909), Herbert James Draper

This is the one song everyone
would like to learn: the song
that is irresistible:

the song that forces men
to leap overboard in squadrons
even though they see the beached skulls

the song nobody knows
because anyone who has heard it
is dead, and the others can't remember.

Shall I tell you the secret
and if I do, will you get me
out of this bird suit?

I don't enjoy it here
squatting on this island
looking picturesque and mythical

with these two feathery maniacs,
I don't enjoy singing
this trio, fatal and valuable.

I will tell the secret to you,
to you, only to you.
Come closer. This song

is a cry for help: Help me!
Only you, only you can,
you are unique

at last. Alas
it is a boring song
but it works every time.

Margaret Atwood, "Siren Song" from Selected Poems 1965-1975.

squadrons = a large group of people or things, often military

picturesque = attractive in a quaint or charming way

Structured discussion

- What role do the Sirens play in the story of Odysseus?
- Why do you think Odysseus wanted to hear the song of the Sirens?
- What does Odysseus offer his men if they untie him?
- In Simon Armitage's *Homer*, what do the lines of the Sirens' song suggest?
- What does Margaret Atwood's poem suggest about the Sirens' song?

Medusa by Carol Ann Duffy

A suspicion, a doubt, a jealousy
grew in my mind,
which turned the hairs on my head to
filthy snakes
as though my thoughts
hissed and spat on my scalp.

My bride's breath soured, stank
in the grey bags of my lungs.
I'm foul mouthed now, foul tongued,
yellow fanged.
There are bullet tears in my eyes.
Are you terrified?

Be terrified.
It's you I love,
perfect man, Greek God, my own;
but I know you'll go, betray me, stray
from home.
So better be for me if you were stone.

I glanced at a buzzing bee,
a dull grey pebble fell
to the ground.
I glanced at a singing bird,
a handful of dusty gravel
spattered down.

I looked at a ginger cat,
a housebrick
shattered a bowl of milk.

I looked at a snuffling pig,
a boulder rolled
in a heap of shit.

I stared in the mirror.
Love gone bad
showed me a Gorgon.
I stared at a dragon.
Fire spewed
from the mouth of a mountain.

And here you come
with a shield for a heart
and a sword for a tongue
and your girls, your girls.
Wasn't I beautiful
Wasn't I fragrant and young?

Look at me now.



Medusa, Caravaggio (1597)

Excerpt from *The Penelopiad* by Margaret Atwood

A Low Art

Now that I'm dead I know everything. This is what I wished would happen, but like so many of my wishes it failed to come true. I know only a few factoids that I didn't know before. It's much too high a price to pay for the satisfaction of curiosity, needless to say.

Since being dead — since achieving this state of bonelessness, liplessness, breastlessness — I've learned some things I would rather not know, as one does when listening at windows or opening other people's letters. You think you'd like to read minds? Think again.

Down here everyone arrives with a sack, like the sacks used to keep the winds in, but each of these sacks is full of words — words you've spoken, words you've heard, words that have been said about you. Some sacks are very small, others large; my own is of a reasonable size, though a lot of the words in it concern my eminent husband. What a fool he made of me, some say. It was a specialty of his: making fools. He got away with everything, which was another of his specialties: getting away.

He was always so plausible. Many people have believed that his version of events was the true one, give or take a few murders, a few beautiful seductresses, a few one-eyed monsters. Even I believed him, from time to time. I knew he was tricky and a liar, I just didn't think he would play his tricks and try out his lies on me. Hadn't I been faithful? Hadn't I waited, and waited, and waited, despite the temptation — almost the compulsion — to do otherwise? And what did I amount to, once the official version gained ground? An edifying legend. A stick used to beat other women with. Why couldn't they be as considerate, as trustworthy, as all-suffering as I had been? That was the line they took, the singers, the yarn-spinners. Don't follow my example, I want to scream in your ears — yes, yours! But when I try to scream, I sound like an owl.

Of course I had inklings, about his slipperiness, his wiliness, his foxiness, his — how can I put this? —

his unscrupulousness, but I turned a blind eye. I kept my mouth shut; or, if I opened it, I sang his praises. I didn't contradict, I didn't ask awkward questions, I didn't dig deep. I wanted happy endings in those days, and happy endings are best achieved by keeping the right doors locked and going to sleep during the rampages.

But after the main events were over and things had become less legendary, I realized how many people were laughing at me behind my back — how they were jeering, making jokes about me, jokes both clean and dirty; how they were turning me into a story, or into several stories, though not the kind of stories I'd prefer to hear about myself. What can a woman do when scandalous gossip travels the world? If she defends herself she sounds guilty. So I waited some more.

Now that all the others have run out of air, it's my turn to do a little story-making. I owe it to myself. I've had to work myself up to it: it's a low art, tale-telling. Old women go in for it, strolling beggars, blind singers, maidservants, children — folks with time on their hands. Once, people would have laughed if I'd tried to play the minstrel — there's nothing more preposterous than an aristocrat fumbling around with the arts — but who cares about public opinion now? The opinion of the people down here: the opinion of shadows, of echoes. So I'll spin a thread of my own.

The difficulty is that I have no mouth through which I can speak. I can't make myself understood, not in your world, the world of bodies, of tongues and fingers; and most of the time I have no listeners, not on your side of the river. Those of you who may catch the odd whisper, the odd squeak, so easily mistake my words for breezes rustling the dry reeds, for bats at twilight, for bad dreams.

But I've always been of a determined nature. Patient, they used to call me. I like to see a thing through to the end