ECHO AND NARCISSUS

retold by Roger Lancelyn Green

IDENTIFY

Pause at line 5. Underline two words that describe Echo. Circle the words that tell who Hera was.

IDENTIFY

Re-read lines 13–15. Underline the details that tell why Hera becomes angry with Echo.

VOCABULARY

detain (dē·tān′) *v.:* hold back; delay.

INFER

Pause at line 19. Underline the punishment that Hera gives Echo. What does this punishment reveal about Hera's character?

Up on the wild, lonely mountains of Greece lived the Oreades,[1] the nymphs or fairies of the hills, and among them one of the most beautiful was called Echo. She was one of the most talkative, too, and once she talked too much and angered Hera, wife of Zeus, king of the gods.

When Zeus grew tired of the golden halls of Mount Olympus, the home of the immortal gods, he would come down to earth and wander with the nymphs on the mountains. Hera, however, was jealous and often came to see what he was doing. It seemed strange at first that she always met Echo, and that Echo kept her listening for hours on end to her stories and her gossip.

But at last Hera realized that Echo was doing this on purpose to **detain** her while Zeus went quietly back to Olympus as if he had never really been away.

"So nothing can stop you talking?" exclaimed Hera. "Well, Echo, I do not intend to spoil your pleasure. But from this day on, you shall be able only to repeat what other people say—and never speak unless someone else speaks first."

Hera returned to Olympus, well pleased with the punishment she had made for Echo, leaving the poor nymph to weep sadly among the rocks on the mountainside and speak only the words which her sisters and their friends shouted happily to one another.

She grew used to her strange fate after a while, but then a new misfortune befell her.

1. **Oreades** (ō′rē·ad′ēz).

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There was a beautiful youth called Narcissus,[2] who was the son of a nymph and the god of a nearby river. He grew up in the plain of Thebes[3] until he was sixteen years old and then began to hunt on the mountains toward the north where Echo and her sister Oreades lived.

As he wandered through the woods and valleys, many a nymph looked upon him and loved him. But Narcissus laughed at them scornfully, for he loved only himself.

Farther up the mountains Echo saw him. And at once her lonely heart was filled with love for the beautiful youth, so that nothing else in the world mattered but to win him.

Now she wished indeed that she could speak to him words of love. But the curse which Hera had placed upon her tied her tongue, and she could only follow wherever he went, hiding behind trees and rocks, and feasting her eyes **vainly** upon him.

One day Narcissus wandered farther up the mountain than usual, and all his friends, the other Theban youths, were left far behind. Only Echo followed him, still hiding among the rocks, her heart heavy with unspoken love.

Presently Narcissus realized that he was lost, and hoping to be heard by his companions, or perhaps by some mountain shepherd, he called out loudly:

"Is there anybody here?"

"Here!" cried Echo.

Narcissus stood still in amazement, looking all around in vain. Then he shouted, even more loudly:

"Whoever you are, come to me!"

"Come to me!" cried Echo eagerly.

Still no one was visible, so Narcissus called again:

"Why are you avoiding me?"

WORD STUDY

Scornfully, in line 34, describes the way Narcissus laughed. Underline the **context clues** nearby that help you understand that *scornfully* means "in a way that shows contempt or disdain."

PREDICT

Pause at line 42. What do you think will happen when Echo and Narcissus meet?

VOCABULARY

vainly (vān′lē) *adv.:* uselessly; without result.

FLUENCY

After you've read lines 50–65, practice reading this boxed passage aloud. Use different voices that fit the two characters and their situation.

2. **Narcissus** (när·sis′əs).
3. **Thebes** (thēbz).

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Echo repeated his words, but with a sob in her breath, and Narcissus called once more:

"Come here, I say, and let us meet!"

"Let us meet!" cried Echo, her heart leaping with joy as she spoke the happiest words that had left her lips since the curse of Hera had fallen on her. And to make good her words, she came running out from behind the rocks and tried to clasp her arms about him.

But Narcissus flung the beautiful nymph away from him in scorn.

"Away with these embraces!" he cried angrily, his voice full of cruel contempt. "I would die before I would have you touch me!"

"I would have you touch me!" repeated poor Echo.

"Never will I let you kiss me!"

"Kiss me! Kiss me!" murmured Echo, sinking down among the rocks, as Narcissus cast her violently from him and sped down the hillside.

"One touch of those lips would kill me!" he called back furiously over his shoulder.

"Kill me!" begged Echo.

And Aphrodite,[4] the goddess of love, heard her and was kind to her, for she had been a true lover. Quietly and painlessly, Echo pined away and died. But her voice lived on, lingering among the rocks and answering faintly whenever Narcissus or another called.

"He shall not go unpunished for this cruelty," said Aphrodite. "By scorning poor Echo like this, he scorns love itself. And scorning love, he insults me. He is altogether eaten up with self-love . . . Well, he shall love himself and no one else, and yet shall die of **unrequited** love!"

INTERPRET

Pause at line 77. In your opinion, if Echo could speak normally, would Narcissus's opinion of her change? Explain why or why not.

IDENTIFY

Re-read lines 79–83. Underline the words that tell who Aphrodite is.

IDENTIFY

Re-read lines 84–88. Underline the details that tell why Aphrodite decides to punish Narcissus. Circle the details that tell how she's going to punish him.

VOCABULARY

unrequited (un′ri·kwīt′id) *v.* used as *adj.:* not returned in kind.

4. **Aphrodite** (af′rə·dīt′ē).

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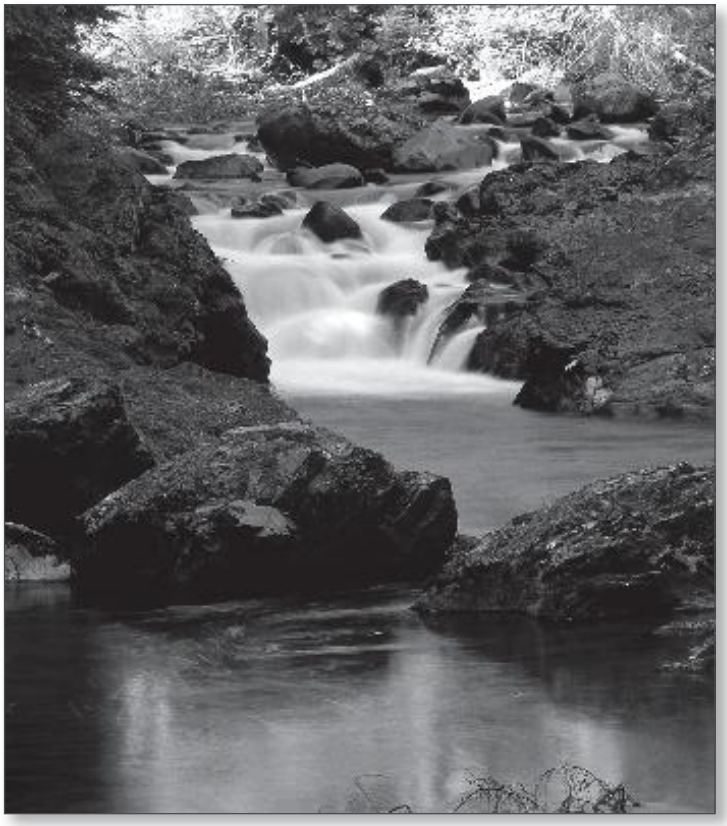
It was not long before Aphrodite made good her threat, and in a very strange way. One day, tired after hunting, Narcissus came to a still, clear pool of water away up the mountainside, not far from where he had scorned Echo and left her to die of a broken heart.

With a cry of satisfaction, for the day was hot and cloudless, and he was **parched** with thirst, Narcissus flung himself down beside the pool and leaned forward to dip his face in the cool water.

What was his surprise to see a beautiful face looking up at him through the still waters of the pool. The moment he saw, he loved—and love was a madness upon him so that he could think of nothing else.

"Beautiful water nymph!" he cried. "I love you! Be mine!"

Desperately he plunged his arms into the water—but the face vanished and he touched only the pebbles at the



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VOCABULARY

parched (pärcht) *v.* used as *adj.:* very hot and dry.

CLARIFY

Pause at line 103. What has happened to Narcissus?

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bottom of the pool. Drawing out his arms, he gazed **intently** down and, as the water grew still again, saw once more the face of his beloved.

Poor Narcissus did not know that he was seeing his own reflection, for Aphrodite hid this knowledge from him—and perhaps this was the first time that a pool of water had reflected the face of anyone gazing into it.

Narcissus seemed enchanted by what he saw. He could not leave the pool, but lay by its side day after day looking at the only face in the world which he loved—and could not win—and pining just as Echo had pined.

Slowly Narcissus faded away, and at last his heart broke.

"Woe is me for I loved in vain!" he cried.

"I loved in vain!" sobbed the voice of Echo among the rocks.

"Farewell, my love, farewell," were his last words, and Echo's voice broke and its whisper shivered into silence: "My love . . . farewell!"

So Narcissus died, and the earth covered his bones. But with the spring, a plant pushed its green leaves through the earth where he lay. As the sun shone on it, a bud opened and a new flower blossomed for the first time—a white circle of petals round a yellow center. The flowers grew and spread, waving in the gentle breeze which whispered among them like Echo herself come to kiss the blossoms of the first Narcissus flowers.

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VOCABULARY

intently (in·tent'lē) *adv.:* with great concentration.

INFER

To whom is Narcissus speaking in lines 121–123?

IDENTIFY

"Echo and Narcissus" is an **origin myth,** a story that explains how something came to be. What two things in nature does this myth explain?

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Greek statue of Hermes, messenger of the gods.

Scientists today can explain many aspects of nature that people once explained through myths. The mythological explanations, however, still have a powerful imaginative appeal.

As you read the myth of Demeter [di mē'tər] and Persephone [pər sef'ə nē], notice how in mythology personal emotions such as love and sadness may affect the course of the whole world.

Retold by
Anne Terry White

Demeter and Persephone

Deep under Mt. Etna, the gods had buried alive a number of fearful, fire-breathing giants. The monsters heaved and struggled to get free. And so mightily did they shake the earth that Hades, the king of the underworld, was alarmed.

"They may tear the rocks asunder and leave the realm of the dead open to the light of day," he thought. And mounting his golden chariot, he went up to see what damage had been done.

Now the goddess of love and beauty, fair Aphrodite, was sitting on a mountainside playing with her son, Eros.[1] She saw Hades as he drove around with his coal-black horses and she said:

"My son, there is one who defies your power and mine. Quick! Take up your darts! Send an arrow into the breast of that dark monarch. Let him, too, feel the pangs of love. Why should he alone escape them?"

At his mother's words, Eros leaped lightly to his feet. He chose from his quiver[2] his sharpest and truest arrow, fitted it to his bow, drew the string, and shot straight into Hades' heart.

The grim King had seen fair maids enough in the gloomy underworld over which he ruled. But never had his heart been touched. Now an unaccustomed warmth stole through his veins. His stern eyes softened. Before him was a blossoming valley, and along its edge a charming girl was gathering flowers. She was Persephone, daughter of Demeter, goddess of the harvest. She had strayed from her companions, and now that her basket overflowed with blossoms, she was filling her apron with

1. **Eros** [ēr'os]: god of love.

2. **quiver:** case for holding and carrying arrows, usually slung over one shoulder.

lilies and violets. The god looked at Persephone and loved her at once. With one sweep of his arm he caught her up and drove swiftly away.

"Mother!" she screamed, while the flowers fell from her apron and strewed the ground. "Mother!"

And she called on her companions by name. But already they were out of sight, so fast did Hades urge the horses on. In a few moments they were at the River Cyane.[3] Persephone struggled, her loosened girdle[4] fell to the ground, but the god held her tight. He struck the bank with his trident.[5] The earth opened, and darkness swallowed them all—horses, chariot, Hades, and weeping Persephone.

From end to end of the earth Demeter sought her daughter. But none could tell her where Persephone was. At last, worn out and despairing, the goddess returned to Sicily. She stood by the River Cyane, where Hades had cleft[6] the earth and gone down into his own dominions.

Now a river nymph had seen him carry off his prize. She wanted to tell Demeter where her daughter was, but fear of Hades kept her dumb. Yet she had picked up the girdle Persephone had dropped, and this the nymph wafted[7] on the waves to the feet of Demeter.

The goddess knew then that her daughter was gone indeed, but she did not suspect Hades of carrying her off. She laid the blame on the innocent land.

"Ungrateful soil!" she said. "I made you fertile. I clothed you in grass and nourishing grain, and this is how you reward me. No more shall you enjoy my favors!"

That year was the most cruel mankind had ever known. Nothing prospered, nothing grew. The cattle died, the seed would not come up, men and oxen toiled in vain. There was too much sun. There was too much rain. Thistles and weeds were the only things that grew. It seemed that all mankind would die of hunger.

"This cannot go on," said mighty Zeus. "I see that I must intervene." And one by one he sent the gods and goddesses to plead with Demeter.

But she had the same answer for all: "Not till I see my daughter shall the earth bear fruit again."

Zeus, of course, knew well where Persephone was. He did not like to take from his brother the one joyful thing in his life, but he saw that he must if the race of man was to be preserved. So he called Hermes to him and said:

"Descend to the underworld, my son. Bid Hades release his bride. Provided she has not tasted food in the realm of the dead, she may return to her mother forever."

Down sped Hermes on his winged feet, and there in the dim palace of the king, he found Persephone by Hades' side. She was pale and joyless. Not all the glittering treasures of the underworld could bring a smile to her lips.

"You have no flowers here," she would say to her husband when he pressed gems upon her. "Jewels have no fragrance. I do not want them."

When she saw Hermes and heard his message, her heart leaped within her. Her cheeks grew rosy and her eyes sparkled, for she knew that Hades would not dare to disobey his brother's command. She sprang up, ready to go at once. Only one thing troubled her—that

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3. **River Cyane** [sī'an]: river in Sicily, an island off the southwestern tip of Italy.
4. **girdle:** belt.
5. **trident:** spear with three sharp points.
6. **cleft:** opened.
7. **wafted:** carried along.

she could not leave the underworld forever. For she had accepted a pomegranate[8] from Hades and sucked the sweet pulp from four of the seeds.

With a heavy heart Hades made ready his golden car. He helped Persephone in while Hermes took up the reins.

"Dear wife," said the King, and his voice trembled as he spoke, "think kindly of me, I pray you. For indeed I love you truly. It will be lonely here these eight months you are away. And if you think mine is a gloomy palace to return to, at least remember that your husband is great among the immortals. So fare you well—and get your fill of flowers!"

Straight to the temple of Demeter at Eleusis,[9] Hermes drove the black horses. The goddess heard the chariot wheels and, as a deer bounds over the hills, she ran out swiftly to meet her daughter. Persephone flew to her mother's arms. And the sad tale of each turned into joy in the telling.

So it is to this day. One third of the year Persephone spends in the gloomy abode of Hades—one month for each seed that she tasted. Then Nature dies, the leaves fall, the earth stops bringing forth. In spring Persephone returns, and with her come the flowers, followed by summer's fruitfulness and the rich harvest of fall.

8. **pomegranate** [pom'gran'it]: round, golden-red fruit with many small seeds.

9. **Eleusis** [ē lo͞o'sis]: town in Greece northwest of Athens.

STUDY QUESTIONS

Recalling

1. Who is Hades? What causes him to fall in love with Persephone?
2. Where does Demeter place the blame for her daughter's disappearance? What does Demeter do to gain revenge?
3. Why does Zeus intervene?
4. What does Persephone do in the underworld that keeps her from leaving it forever?
5. How does this myth explain the changing of the seasons?

Interpreting

6. Give at least three examples from the selection of human emotions displayed by gods and goddesses.
7. Do you think the final decision of the gods is a fair compromise for all the characters? Tell why or why not.

Extending

8. Name at least one other aspect of nature that might be explained by the strong emotions of a god or goddess.

READING AND LITERARY FOCUS

Myth

A **myth** is an ancient anonymous story, usually about gods and heroes. Myths originally explained some aspect of nature or accounted for some human action. In other words, most myths grew out of particular historical events. They show us the imagination at work, creating literature out of the events of the real world.

Almost every culture created myths. There are myths about the beginning of the world, the first human beings, great wars, and movements of people from place to place. There are myths about why flowers grow, why birds fly, and why different languages exist. In fact, collections of myths—

Mythology is filled with stories of mortals who dare to challenge the gods. Sometimes the gods are amused by these challenges, sometimes they are understanding; sometimes they are _': Arachne [;) rak'ne] is a young girl who dares to challenge Athena. What is Athena's response?

Retold by Olivia Coolidge

Arachne

Arachne was a maiden who became famous throughout Greece, though she was neither wellborn nor beautiful and came from no great city. She lived in an obscure little village, and her father was a humble dyer of wool. In this he was very skillful, producing many varied shades, while above all he was famous for the clear, bright scarlet which is made from shellfish, and which was the most glorious of all the colors used in ancient Greece. Even more skillful than her father was Arachne. It was her task to spin the fleecy wool into a fine, soft thread and to weave it into cloth on the high-standing **loom**[1] within the cottage. Arachne was small and pale from much working. Her eyes were light and her hair was a dusty brown, yet she was quick and graceful, and her fingers roughened as they were, went so fast that it was hard to follow their flickering movements. So soft and even was her thread, so fine her cloth, so gorgeous her embroidery, that soon her products were known all over Greece. No one had ever seen the like of them before.

At last Arachne's fame became so great that people used to come from far and wide to watch her working. Even the graceful nymphs would steal in from stream or forest and peep shyly through the dark doorway, watching in wonder the white arms of Arachne as she stood at the loom and threw the **shuttle**[2] from hand to hand between the hanging threads, or drew out the long wool, fine as a hair, from the **distaff**[3] as she sat spinning. "Surely Athena herself must have taught her," people would murmur to one another. "Who else could know the secret of such marvelous skill?"

Arachne was used to being wondered at, and she was immensely proud of the skill that had brought so many to look on her. Praise was all she lived for, and it displeased her greatly that people should think anyone, even a goddess, could teach her anything. Therefore when she heard them murmur, she would stop her work and turn round **indignantly**[4] to say, "With my own ten fingers 1 gained this skill, and by hard practice from early morning till night. I never had time to stand looking as you people do while another maiden worked. Nor if I had, would I give Athena credit because the girl was more skillful than I. As for Athena's weaving, how could there be finer cloth or more beautiful embroidery than mine? If Athena herself were to come down and compete with me, she could do no better than I."

One day when Arachne turned around with such words, an old woman answered her, a gray old woman, bent and very poor, who stood leaning on a staff and peering at

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[1] high standing loom: large, free-standing machine for weaving thread into cloth

[2] shuttle: device on the loom that moves the thread back and forth through the thread that runs up and down.

[3] distaff: stick that holds the cotton or wool before it is pulled thin into thread.

[4] indignantly: with restrained anger.

Arachne amid the crowd of onlookers. "Reckless girl," she said, "how dare you claim to be equal to the immortal gods themselves? I am an old woman and have seen much.

Take my advice and ask pardon of Athena for your words. Rest content with your fame of being the best spinner and weaver that mortal eyes have ever beheld."

"Stupid old woman," said Arachne indignantly, "who gave you a right to speak in this way to me? It is easy to see that you were never good for anything in your day, or you would not come here in poverty and rags to gaze at my skill. If Athena resents my words, yet her answer them herself. I have challenged her to a contest, but she, of course, will not come. It is easy for the gods to avoid matching their skill with that of men."

At these words the old woman threw down her staff and stood erect. The wondering onlookers saw her grow tall and fair and stand clad in long robes of dazzling white. They were terribly afraid as they realized that they stood in the presence of Athena. Arachne herself flushed red for a moment, for she had never really believed that the goddess would hear her. Before the group that was gathered there she would not give in; so pressing her pale lips together in **obstinacy**[5] and pride, she led the goddess to one of the great looms and set herself before the other. Without a word both began to thread the long woolen strands that hang from the rollers, and between which the shuttle moves back and forth. Many **skeins**[6] lay heaped beside them to use, bleached white, and gold, and scarlet, and other shades, varied as the rainbow. Arachne had never thought of giving credit for her success to her father's skill in dyeing, though in actual truth the colors were as remarkable as the cloth itself. Soon there was no sound in the room but the breathing of the onlookers, the whirring of the shuttles, and the creaking of the wooden frames as each pressed the thread up into place or tightened the pegs by which the whole was held straight. The excited crowd in the doorway began to see that the skill of both in truth was very nearly equal, but that, however the cloth might turn out, the goddess was the quicker of the two. A pattern of many pictures was growing on her loom. There was a border of twined branches of the olive, Athena's favorite tree, while in the middle, figures began to appear. As they looked at the glowing colors, the spectators realized that Athena was weaving into her pattern a last warning to Arachne. The central figure was the goddess herself competing with Poseidon for possession of the city of Athens; but in the four corners were mortals who had tried to strive with gods and pictures of the awful fate that had overtaken them. The goddess ended a little before Arachne and stood back from her marvelous work to see what the maiden was doing.

Never before had Arachne been matched against anyone whose skill was equal, or even nearly equal to her own. As she stole glances from time to time at Athena and saw the goddess working swiftly, calmly, and always a little faster than herself, she became angry instead of frightened, and an evil thought came into her head. Thus as Athena stepped back a pace to watch Arachne finishing her work, she saw that the maiden had taken for her design a pattern of scenes which showed evil or unworthy actions of the gods, how they had deceived fair maidens, resorted to trickery, and appeared on earth from time to time in the form of poor and humble people. When the

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[5] obstinacy: stubbornness

[6] skeins: strands of yarn coiled into bundles, ready for weaving

goddess saw this insult glowing in bright colors on Arachne's loom, she did not wai1 while the cloth was judged, but stepped forward her gray eyes blazing with anger, and tore Arachne's work across. Then she struck Arachne across the face. Arachne stood there a moment, struggling with anger, fear, and pride. "I will not live under this insult," she cried, and seizing a rope from the wall, she made a noose and would have hanged herself.

The goddess touched the rope and touched the maiden. "Live on, wicked girl," she said.

"Live on and spin both you and your descendants. When men look at you they may remember that it is not wise to strive with Athena.

At that the body of Arachne shriveled up; and her legs grew tiny, spindly and distorted. There before the eyes of the spectators hung a little dusty brown spider on a slender thread.

All spiders descend from Arachne, and as the Greeks watched them spinning their thread wonderfully fine, they remembered the contest with Athena and thought that it was not right for even the best of men to claim equality with the gods.

STUDY QUESTIONS

Recalling

1. What was Arachne's great skill? Who did the people think had taught her?
2. What did Arachne "live for"? What did she dare the goddess to do?
3. What was the subject of Athena's weaving? What was the subject of Arachne's weaving?
4. Into what shape did the goddess transform Arachne?

Interpreting

5. Describe Arachne's personality in your own words. What do you think was the greatest fault in her character?
6. Why was the form of Arachne's metamorphosis (change) appropriate to her life and personality?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR
Geraldine McCaughrean was born in England, where she studied theater and began writing her versions of traditional texts such as *The Canterbury Tales* and Shakespeare's plays. Her goal was to retell these challenging texts in language that young readers could enjoy and understand. She has received numerous awards for her books, and her writing is noted for its strong use of imagery and narrative structure that bring her stories alive for young readers.

Myth

"Daedalus and Icarus"

from *Greek Myths* by Geraldine McCaughrean

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. "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.

"What is it for?" asked Daedalus. "Is it a treasure vault? Is it a prison to hold criminals?"

But 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. But when he found out the purpose of the maze in the cellar, he shuddered with horror.

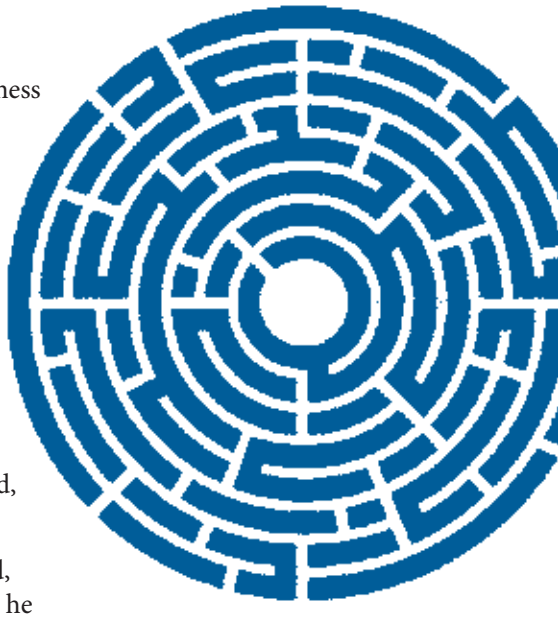
For at the heart of that maze, King Minos put a creature that was half man, half beast—a thing almost too horrible to describe. He called it the Minotaur, and he fed it on men and women!

Then Daedalus wanted to leave Crete at once, and forget both maze and Minotaur. So 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'm afraid I must keep you and Icarus here a while longer."

"How much longer?" gasped Daedalus.

My Notes



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Flight to Freedom

My Notes

KEY IDEAS AND DETAILS
Wings and flying are often a metaphor for what?

"Oh—just until you die," replied Minos cheerfully. "But never mind. I have plenty of work for a man as clever as you."

Daedalus and Icarus lived in great comfort in King Minos's palace. But they lived the life of prisoners. Their rooms were in the tallest palace tower, with beautiful views across the island. They ate delectable food and wore expensive clothes. 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. Daedalus was deeply unhappy.

Every day he put seed out on the windowsill, for the birds. He liked to study their brilliant colors, 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. The birds had only to spread their wings and they could leave Crete behind them, whereas Daedalus and Icarus must stay forever in their luxurious cage.

Young Icarus could not understand his father's unhappiness. "But I like it here," he said. "The king gives us gold and this tall tower to live in."

Daedalus groaned. "But to work for such a wicked man, Icarus! And to be prisoners all our days! . . . We shan't stay. We shan't!"

"But we can't get away, can we?" said Icarus. "How can anybody escape from an island? 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.

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

Early mornings. Late nights. A whole year went by. Then one morning Icarus was awakened by his father shaking his shoulder. "Get up, Icarus, and don't make a sound. We are leaving Crete."

"But how? It's impossible!"

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."

Daedalus melted down a candle and daubed his son's shoulders with sticky wax. "Yes, I know it's hot, but it will soon cool." While the wax was still soft, he stuck two of the wings to Icarus's shoulder blades.

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"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 lawns and courtyards of the palace lay far below. 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. Then he gave a cry as his father nudged him off the windowsill. He plunged downward. With a crack, the feathers behind him filled with wind, and Icarus found himself flying. Flying!

"I'm flying!" he crowed.

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

Then they were out over the sea. The sea gulls 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.

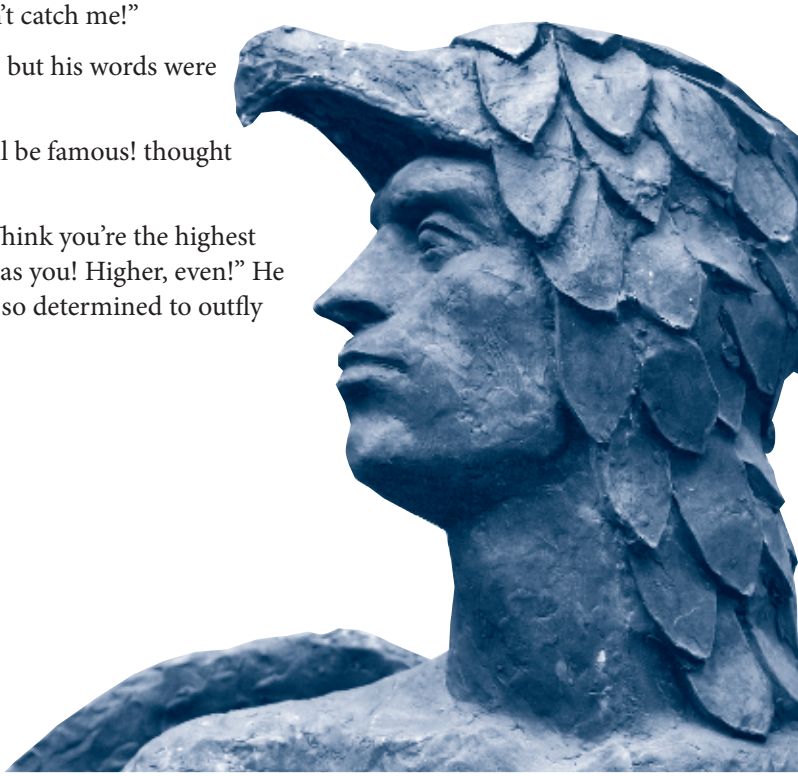
I'm the first boy ever to fly! I'm making history! I shall be famous! thought Icarus, as he flew up and up, higher and higher.

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! Higher, even!" He did not notice the drops of sweat on his forehead: He was so determined to outfly the sun.

KEY IDEAS AND DETAILS
Can you find the similes used in this selection? What is their effect? Remember that similes are comparisons using "like" or "as."

KEY IDEAS AND DETAILS
From what point of view is this myth written? How do you know?

My Notes



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Flight to Freedom

KEY IDEAS AND DETAILS
Using the context of this passage, what do you think a "plume" is?

My Notes

Soon its vast heat beat on his face and 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 sea gulls 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. And all that was left of proud Icarus was a litter of waxy feathers floating on the sea.

After Reading

"Daedalus and Icarus," like most myths, teaches us a lesson. Daedalus tells his son, "Don't fly too close to the sun." Since it is not likely that any of us will wear wings made of feathers and wax, the main idea, or **theme**, of this story is not a literal lesson about how high to fly. The story of Icarus can be read as a **metaphor** for other, more realistic situations we might face.

1. Discuss the following ideas in a collaborative group:
   - In the story, Icarus thinks to himself, "I'm the first boy ever to fly! I'm making history!" Icarus also says to the sun, "I can fly just as high as you! Higher, even!" What does this dialogue illustrate about the character of Icarus? How could this relate to the story's theme?
   - Daedalus repeatedly warns Icarus not too fly too high, advice that Icarus thoughtlessly ignores. What might this story be saying about relationships between parents and children? What might it be saying about how we learn?
   - The expression "flying too close to the sun" has taken on other meanings, namely about the consequences of risk taking. What is this story saying about the benefits and dangers of taking risks?
   - Sometimes critics of scientific development and rapid technological change bring up the story of Daedalus and Icarus as a warning about the dangers of reckless science taking humans into areas where they might not belong. Explain how this story might illustrate the idea of the dangers of technology and scientific progress.

ACADEMIC VOCABULARY
A **theme** is the central idea, message, or purpose of a literary work.
A **metaphor** is a comparison between two unlike things in which one thing is spoken of as if it were another.

WORD CONNECTIONS

Analogies

Think about the relationship (analogy) between feather and wing. Then write a word that has the same relationship with the word *alphabet*.

Feather : wing ::————————: alphabet.

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The tale of Midas [mi'd;}s) is one of the most popular myths. It was probably designed to teach a lesson, for it shows us a king learning a very hard lesson indeed. As you read, notice how the power of the gods is balanced by wisdom and mercy.

Retold by Bernard Evslin

Midas

There was a king named Midas, and what he loved best in the world was gold. He had plenty of his own, but he could not bear the thought of anyone else having any. Each morning he awoke very early to watch the sunrise and said, "Of all the gods, if gods there be, I like you least, Apollo. How dare you ride so unthriftily in your sun-chariot scattering golden **sheaves**[1] of light on rich and poor alike-on king and peasant, on merchant, shepherd, warrior? This is an evil thing, oh **wastrel**[2] god, for only kings should have gold; only the rich know what to do with it." After a while these words of complaint, uttered each dawn, came to Apollo, and he was angry. He appeared to Midas in a dream and said, "Other gods would punish you, Midas, but I am famous for my even temper. Instead of doing you violence, I will show you how gracious I can be by granting you a wish. What is it to be?"

Midas cried, "Let everything I touch turn to gold!'"

He shouted this out of his sleep in a strangling greedy voice, and the guards in the doorway nodded to each other and said, "The king calls out. He must be dreaming of gold again."

Wearied by the dream, Midas slept past sunrise; when he awoke it was full morning. He went out into his garden. The sun was high, the sky was blue. A soft breeze played among the trees. It was a glorious morning. He was still half asleep. **Tatters**[3] of the dream were in his head.

"Can it be true?" he said to himself. "They say the gods appear in dreams. That's how men know them. On the other hand I know that dreams are false, teasing things. You can't believe them. Let us put it to the test."

He reached out his hand and touched a rose. It turned to gold-petals and stalk, it turned to gold and stood there rigid, heavy, gleaming. A bee buzzed out of its stiff folds, furious; it lit on Midas' hand to sting him. The king looked at the heavy golden bee on the back of his hand and moved it to his finger.

"I shall wear it as a ring," he said.

Midas went about touching all his roses, seeing them stiffen and gleam. They lost their odor. The disappointed bees rose in swarms and buzzed angrily away. Butterflies departed. The hard flowers tinkled like little bells when the breeze moved among them, and the king was well pleased.

His little daughter, the princess, who had been playing in the garden, ran to him and said, "Father, Father, what has happened to the roses?"

"Are they not pretty, my dear?"

---

[1] Sheaves: large bundles of things tied together.

[2] Wastrel: wasteful person.

3 Tatters: shreds

"No! They're ugly! They're horrid and sharp and I can't smell them any more. What happened?"

"A magical thing."

"Who did the magic?"

"I did."

"Unmagic it, then! I hate these roses."

She began to cry.

"Don't cry," he said, stroking her head. "Stop crying, and I will give you a golden doll with a gold-leaf dress and tiny golden shoes."

She stopped crying. He felt the hair grow spiky under his fingers. Her eyes stiffened and froze into place. The little blue vein in her neck stopped pulsing. She was a statue, a figure of pale gold standing in the garden path with lifted face. Her tears were tiny golden beads on her golden cheeks. He looked at her and said, "This is unfortunate. I'm sorry it happened. I have no time to be sad this morning. I shall be busy turning things into gold. But, when I have a moment, I shall think about this problem; I promise." He hurried out of the garden which had become unpleasant to him.

On Midas' way back to the castle he amused himself by kicking up gravel in the path and watching it tinkle down as tiny nuggets. The door he opened became golden; the chair he sat upon became solid gold like his throne. The plates turned into gold, and the cups became gold cups before the amazed eyes of the servants, whom he was careful not to touch. He wanted them to continue being able to serve him; he was very hungry.

With great relish Midas picked up a piece of bread and honey. His teeth bit metal; his mouth was full of metal. He felt himself choking. He reached into his mouth and pulled out a golden slab of bread, all bloody now, and flung it through the window. Very lightly now he touched the other food to see what would happen. Meat. . . apples. .. walnuts. . . they all turned to gold even when he touched them with only the tip of his finger. . . and when he did not touch them with his fingers, when he lifted them on his fork, they became gold as soon as they touched his lips, and he had to put them back onto the plate. He was savagely hungry. Worse than hunger, when he thought about drinking, he realized that wine, or water, or milk would turn to gold in his mouth and choke him if he drank. As he thought that he could not drink, thirst began to bum in his belly. He felt himself full of hot dry sand, felt that the lining of his head was on fire.

"What good is all my gold?" he cried, "if I cannot eat and cannot drink?"

He shrieked with rage, pounded on the table, and flung the plates about. All the servants ran from the room in fright. Then Midas raced out of the castle, across the bridge that spanned the

moat[4] along the golden gravel path into the garden where the stiff flowers chimed hatefully, and the statue of his daughter looked at him with scooped and empty eyes. There in the garden in the blaze of the sun, he raised his arms heavenward, and cried, "You, Apollo, false god, traitor!

You pretended to forgive me, but you punished me with a gift!" .

[4] moat: wide ditch, usually filled with water, surrounding a castle.

Then it seemed to him that the sun grew brighter, that the light thickened, that the sun-god stood before him in the path, tall, stern, clad in burning gold. A voice said, "On your knees, wretch!"

He fell to his knees.

"Do you repent?"

"I repent. I will never desire gold again. I will never accuse the gods. Pray, revoke the fatal wish."

Apollo reached his hand and touched the roses. The tinkling stopped, they softened, swayed, blushed. Fragrance grew on the air. The bees returned, and the butterflies. He touched the statue's cheek. She lost her stiffness, her metallic gleam. She ran to the roses, knelt among them, and cried, "Oh, thank you, Father. You've changed them back again."

Then she ran *off,* shouting and laughing.

Apollo said, "I take back my gift. I remove the golden **taint**[5] from your touch, but you are not to escape without punishment. Because you have been the most foolish of men, you shall wear always a pair of donkey's ears.

Midas touched his ears. They were long and furry. He said, "I thank you for your forgiveness, Apollo. . . even though it comes with a punishment." .

"Go now," said Apollo. "Eat and drink. Enjoy the roses. Watch your child grow. Life is the only wealth, man. In your great thrift, you have been wasteful of life, and that is the sign you wear on your head. Farewell."

Midas put a tall pointed hat on his head so that no one would see his ears. Then he went in to eat and drink his fill.

For years he wore the cap so that no one would know of his disgrace. But the servant who cut his hair had to know so Midas swore him to secrecy, warning that it would cost him his head if he spoke of the king's ears. But the servant who was a coward was also a gossip. He could not bear to keep a secret, especially a secret so mischievous. Although he was afraid to tell it, he felt that he would burst if he didn't.

One night he went out to the banks of the river, dug a little hole, put his mouth to it, and whispered, "Midas has donkey's ears, Midas has donkey's ears. . ." and quickly filled up the hole again, and ran back to the castle, feeling better.

But the river-reeds heard him, and they always whisper to each other when the wind seethes among them. They were heard whispering, "Midas has donkey's ears.. . donkey's ears. . ." and soon the whole country was whispering, "Have you heard about Midas? Have you heard about his ears?"

When the king heard, he knew who had told the secret and ordered the man's head cut off; but then he thought, "The god forgave me, perhaps I had better forgive this blabbermouth." Therefore he let the treacherous man keep his head.

Then Apollo appeared again and said, "Midas, you have learned the final lesson, mercy. As you have done, so shall you be done by."

And Midas felt his long hairy ears dwindling back to normal.

He was an old man now. His daughter, the princess, was grown. He had grandchildren. Sometimes he tells his smallest granddaughter the story of how her mother was turned into a golden statue, and he says, "See, I'm changing you too. Look, your hair is all gold." And she pretends to be frightened.

---

[5] Taint: something evil.

STUDY QUESTIONS

Recalling

1. What did Midas accuse Apollo of wasting?
2. What did Midas wish? What happened to his daughter?
3. What made Midas ask "What good is all my gold"?
4. What change took place in Midas' body? How did people learn of it?
5. What final lesson did Midas learn? What action showed he had learned it?

Interpreting

6. Why do you think Apollo was the appropriate god to deal with Midas?
7. Explain at least two traits of Midas' character before he learned his lesson. Give examples of each trait.
8. What change took place in Midas' character after he learned his lesson?

READING AND LITERARY FOCUS

Metamorphosis

A metamorphosis is a change in shape or form, and it occurs frequently in Greek myths. It is one of the elements that make the myths such imaginative reading. Some of the gods, like the sea god Proteus, for example, frequently changed themselves into different shapes, such as a fish, a lion, or a snake. Zeus often changed shape and became a bull, a shower of gold, or even a puff of smoke when he visited earth.

However, gods often used their powers of metamorphosis when they wanted to teach someone a lesson. They usually created a magical change of shape that was particularly appropriate to a person's character. In one ancient story, for example, a young woman who cried a great deal was turned into a fountain.

PROMETHEUS

Retold by Bernard Evslin

Prometheus was a young Titan, no great admirer of Zeus. Although he knew the great lord of the sky hated explicit questions, he did not hesitate to beard[1] him when there was something he wanted to know.

One morning he came to Zeus and said, "O Thunderer, I do not understand your design. You have caused the race of man[2] to appear on earth, but you keep him in ignorance and darkness."

"Perhaps you had better leave the race of man to me," said Zeus. "What you call ignorance is innocence. What you call darkness is the shadow of my decree. Man is happy now. And he is so framed that he will remain happy unless someone persuades him that he is unhappy. Let us not speak of this again."

But Prometheus said, "Look at him. Look below. He crouches in caves. He is at the mercy of beast and weather. He eats his meat raw. If you mean something by this, enlighten me with your wisdom. Tell me why you refuse to give man the gift of fire." A

Analyze Visuals ▶

Notice the expression on the god's face and the position of his arms. What can you **infer** about the emotion he might be feeling?

A GREEK MYTHS

Based on the conversation between the two gods, what aspect of the natural world do you think this myth will explain? Make a **prediction.**

1. **beard:** to confront or defy.
2. **man:** In older translations, the expression *man* was commonly used to refer to all people.

Detail from *Prometheus Carrying Fire,* Jan Cossiers. Prado, Madrid. © Art Resource, New York.

Zeus answered, "Do you not know, Prometheus, that every gift brings a penalty? This is the way the Fates[3] weave destiny—by which gods also must abide. Man does not have fire, true, nor the crafts which fire teaches. On the other hand, he does not know disease, warfare, old age, or that inward pest called worry. He is happy, I say, happy without fire. And so he shall remain."

"Happy as beasts are happy," said Prometheus. "Of what use to make a separate race called man and endow[4] him with little fur, some wit, and a curious charm of unpredictability? If he must live like this, why separate him from the beasts at all?"

"He has another quality," said Zeus, "the capacity for worship. An **aptitude** for admiring our power, being puzzled by our riddles and amazed by our caprice.[5] That is why he was made."

"Would not fire, and the graces he can put on with fire, make him more interesting?"

"More interesting, perhaps, but **infinitely** more dangerous. For there is this in man too: a vaunting pride that needs little sustenance[6] to make it swell to giant size. Improve his lot, and he will forget that which makes him pleasing—his sense of worship, his humility. He will grow big and poisoned with pride and fancy himself a god, and before we know it, we shall see him storming Olympus. Enough, Prometheus! I have been patient with you, but do not try me too far. Go now and trouble me no more with your speculations."

Prometheus was not satisfied. All that night he lay awake making plans. Then he left his couch at dawn and, standing tiptoe on Olympus, stretched his arm to the eastern horizon where the first faint flames of the sun were flickering. In his hand he held a reed filled with a dry fiber; he thrust it into the sunrise until a spark smoldered. Then he put the reed in his tunic and came down from the mountain. B

At first men were frightened by the gift. It was so hot, so quick; it bit sharply when you touched it and for pure spite made the shadows dance. They thanked Prometheus and asked him to take it away. But he took the haunch of a newly killed deer and held it over the fire. And when the meat began to sear and sputter, filling the cave with its rich smells, the people felt themselves melting with hunger and flung themselves on the meat and devoured it greedily, burning their tongues.

"This that I have brought you is called 'fire,'" Prometheus said. "It is an ill-natured spirit, a little brother of the sun, but if you handle

aptitude (ăp′tĭ-to͞od′) *n.* natural ability

infinitely (ĭn′fə-nĭt-lē) *adv.* extremely; greatly

SOCIAL STUDIES CONNECTION

Many settings in Greek myths are real places in Greece.

B ASK QUESTIONS

Make sure you understand the **conflict** between Prometheus and Zeus. What questions do you have about what has already happened and about what will happen next?

3. **the Fates:** in Greek mythology, the three goddesses who decide the course of people's lives.
4. **endow** (ĕn-dou′): to provide with a quality or talent
5. **caprice** (kə-prēs′): the quality of acting without planning or thinking beforehand.
6. **vaunting pride that needs little sustenance:** boastful pride that needs little support.

it carefully, it can change your whole life. It is very greedy; you must feed it twigs, but only until it becomes a proper size. Then you must stop, or it will eat everything in sight—and you too. If it escapes, use this magic: water. It fears the water spirit, and if you touch it with water, it will fly away until you need it again."

He left the fire burning in the first cave, with children staring at it wide-eyed, and then went to every cave in the land.

Then one day Zeus looked down from the mountain and was amazed. Everything had changed. Man had come out of his cave. Zeus saw woodmen's huts, farmhouses, villages, walled towns, even a castle or two. He saw men cooking their food, carrying torches to light their way at night. He saw forges[7] blazing, men beating out ploughs, keels, swords, spears. They were making ships and raising white wings of sails and daring to use the fury of the winds for their journeys. They were wearing helmets, riding out in chariots to do battle, like the gods themselves. C

Zeus was full of rage. He seized his largest thunderbolt. "So they want fire," he said to himself. "I'll give them fire—more than they can use. I'll turn their miserable little ball of earth into a cinder." But then another thought came to him, and he lowered his arm. "No," he said to himself, "I shall have **vengeance**—and entertainment too. Let them destroy themselves with their new skills. This will make a long, twisted game, interesting to watch. I'll attend to them later. My first business is with Prometheus."

He called his giant guards and had them seize Prometheus, drag him off to the Caucasus,[8] and there bind him to a mountain peak with great chains specially forged by Hephaestus[9]—chains which even a Titan in agony could not break. And when the friend of man was bound to the mountain, Zeus sent two vultures to hover about him forever, tearing at his belly and eating his liver. D

Men knew a terrible thing was happening on the mountain, but they did not know what. But the wind shrieked like a giant in torment and sometimes like fierce birds.

Many centuries he lay there—until another hero was born brave enough to defy the gods. He climbed to the peak in the Caucasus and struck the shackles from Prometheus and killed the vultures. His name was Heracles.[10]

C GREEK MYTHS
According to this myth, what event allowed people to build homes, farm, and go to war?

vengeance (vĕn'jəns) *n.* the infliction of punishment in return for an offense

D ASK QUESTIONS
What does Zeus do to Prometheus, and why? To **clarify** the answer, think about the conflict between the two gods. Then reread lines 77–82.

7. **forges** (fôr'jĭz): places where metal is heated and hammered into shape.
8. **Caucasus** (kô'kə-səs): a mountainous region in southeastern Europe.
9. **Hephaestus** (hĭ-fĕs'təs): the Greek god of fire and metalworking.
10. **Heracles** (hĕr'ə-klēz'): another name for Hercules, a son of Zeus who was famous for his great strength and courage.

Orpheus and Eurydice

Retold by
Olivia Coolidge

In the legend of Orpheus the Greek love of music found its fullest expression. Orpheus, it is said, could make such heavenly songs that when he sat down to sing, the trees would crowd around to shade him. The ivy and vine stretched out their tendrils. Great oaks would bend their spreading branches over his head. The very rocks would edge down the mountainsides. Wild beasts crouched harmless by him, and nymphs[1] and woodland gods would listen to him enchanted. E

Orpheus himself, however, had eyes for no one but the nymph, Eurydice.[2] His love for her was his inspiration, and his power sprang from the passionate longing that he knew in his own heart. All nature rejoiced with him on his bridal day, but on that very morning, as Eurydice went down to the riverside with her maidens to gather flowers for a bridal garland, she was bitten in the foot by a snake, and she died in spite of all attempts to save her.

Analyze Visuals ▶
Describe the listeners' expressions. How can you **connect** this ancient scene to your own experience with music?

E GREEK MYTHS
Note what quality makes Orpheus special. According to the first sentence, how much did the Greeks value this quality?

1. **nymphs** (nĭmfs): divine beings represented as beautiful maidens who live in natural places such as trees.
2. **Eurydice** (yŏŏ-rĭd′ĭ-sē).

Orpheus in the Underworld (1863), Louis Jacquesson de la Chevreuse. Oil on canvas, 115 cm × 145 cm. Musée des Augustins. Toulouse, France. © akg-images.

Orpheus was **inconsolable.** All day long he mourned his bride, while birds, beasts, and the earth itself sorrowed with him. When at last the shadows of the sun grew long, Orpheus took his lyre and made his way to the yawning cave which leads down into the underworld, where the soul of dead Eurydice had gone.

Even grey Charon, the ferryman of the Styx,[3] forgot to ask his passenger for the price of crossing. The dog, Cerberus, the three-headed monster who guards Hades' gate, stopped full in his tracks and listened motionless until Orpheus had passed. As he entered the land of Hades, the pale ghosts came after him like great, uncounted flocks of silent birds. All the land lay hushed as that marvelous voice resounded across the mud and marshes of its dreadful rivers. In the daffodil fields of Elysium[4] the happy dead sat silent among their flowers. In the farthest corners of the place of punishment, the hissing flames stood still. Accursed Sisyphus,[5] who toils eternally to push a mighty rock uphill, sat down and knew not he was resting. Tantalus,[6] who strains forever after visions of cool water, forgot his thirst and ceased to clutch at the empty air.

The pillared hall of Hades opened before the hero's song. The ranks of long-dead heroes who sit at Hades' board looked up and turned their eyes away from the pitiless form of Hades and his pale, unhappy queen. Grim and unmoving sat the dark king of the dead on his ebony throne, yet the tears shone on his rigid cheeks in the light of his ghastly torches. Even his hard heart, which knew all misery and cared nothing for it, was touched by the love and longing of the music. F

At last the minstrel came to an end, and a long sigh like wind in pine trees was heard from the assembled ghosts. Then the king spoke, and his deep voice echoed through his silent land. "Go back to the light of day," he said. "Go quickly while my monsters are stilled by your song. Climb up the steep road to daylight, and never once turn back. The spirit of Eurydice shall follow, but if you look around at her, she will return to me."

Orpheus turned and strode from the hall of Hades, and the flocks of following ghosts made way for him to pass. In vain he searched their ranks for a sight of his lost Eurydice. In vain he listened for the faintest sound behind. The barge of Charon sank to the very gunwales[7] beneath

inconsolable (ĭn′kən-sō′lə-bəl) *adj.* impossible or difficult to comfort

VISUAL VOCABULARY

lyre (līr) *n.* an ancient stringed instrument resembling a small harp

F ASK QUESTIONS

What **questions** do you have about what the underworld is like? Reviewing what you've read, along with the footnotes, might help you find answers.

3. **Styx** (stĭks)**:** in Greek mythology, the river across which the souls of the dead are transported.
4. **Elysium** (ĭ-lĭz′ē-əm)**:** the home of the blessed, or those who were judged to have lived well, after death.
5. **Sisyphus** (sĭs′ə-fəs)**:** a cruel king of Corinth condemned forever to roll a huge stone up a hill, only to have it fall down again.
6. **Tantalus** (tăn′tə-ləs)**:** a king who, for his crimes, was condemned to stand in water that receded when he tried to drink.
7. **gunwales** (gŭn′əlz)**:** the upper edge of the side of a vessel.

his weight, but no following passenger pressed it lower down. The way from the land of Hades to the upper world is long and hard, far easier to descend than climb. It was dark and misty, full of strange shapes and noises, yet in many places merely black and silent as the tomb. Here Orpheus would stop and listen, but nothing moved behind him. For all he could hear, he was utterly alone. Then he would wonder if the pitiless Hades were deceiving him. Suppose he came up to the light again and Eurydice was not there! Once he had charmed the ferryman and the dreadful monsters, but now they had heard his song. The second time his spell would be less powerful; he could never go again. Perhaps he had lost Eurydice by his readiness to believe. G

Every step he took, some instinct told him that he was going farther from his bride. He toiled up the path in reluctance and despair, stopping, listening, sighing, taking a few slow steps, until the dark thinned out into greyness. Up ahead a speck of light showed clearly the entrance to the cavern.

At that final moment Orpheus could bear no more. To go out into the light of day without his love seemed to him impossible. Before he had quite **ascended,** there was still a moment in which he could go back. Quick in the greyness he turned and saw a dim shade at his heels, as

Orpheus Leading Eurydice from the Underworld (1861), Jean Baptiste Camille Corot. Oil on canvas, 112.3 cm × 137.1 cm. © Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. © Bridgeman Art Library.

COMMON CORE L 5b

Language Coach

Antonyms Antonyms are words with opposite meanings. You can sometimes figure out the meaning of an unfamiliar word in a sentence when its antonym appears in the same sentence. Read lines 50–52. The word *descend* is an antonym for *climb.* Can you tell what *descend* means?

G **GREEK MYTHS**

Recall the rule Hades gave to Orpheus. **Predict** whether Orpheus will obey it.

ascend (ə-sĕnd′) *v.* to go or move upward; rise

indistinct as the grey mist behind her. But still he could see the look of sadness on her face as he sprung forward saying, "Eurydice!" and threw his arms about her. The shade dissolved in the circle of his arms like smoke. A little whisper seemed to say, "Farewell," as she scattered into mist and was gone. H

The unfortunate lover hastened back again down the steep, dark path. But all was in vain. This time the ghostly ferryman was deaf to his prayers. The very wildness of his mood made it impossible for him to attain the beauty of his former music. At last, his despair was so great that he could not even sing at all. For seven days he sat huddled together on the grey mud banks, listening to the wailing of the terrible river. The flitting ghosts shrank back in a wide circle from the living man, but he paid them no attention. Only he sat with his eyes on Charon, his ears ringing with the dreadful noise of Styx.

Orpheus arose at last and stumbled back along the steep road he knew so well by now. When he came up to earth again, his song was pitiful but more beautiful than ever. Even the nightingale who mourned all night long would hush her voice to listen as Orpheus sat in some hidden place singing of his lost Eurydice. Men and women he could bear no longer, and when they came to hear him, he drove them away. At last the women of Thrace, maddened by Dionysus[8] and infuriated by Orpheus' contempt, fell upon him and killed him. It is said that as the body was swept down the river Hebrus, the dead lips still moved faintly and the rocks echoed for the last time, "Eurydice." But the poet's eager spirit was already far down the familiar path.

In the daffodil meadows he met the shade of Eurydice, and there they walk together, or where the path is narrow, the shade of Orpheus goes ahead and looks back at his love. I

H ASK QUESTIONS
Reread lines 66–74. What is the "dim shade" at Orpheus' heels? Why does the shade disappear? If you're not sure, try rereading lines 41–45 and then rereading this passage to **clarify** your understanding.

I ASK QUESTIONS
How are Orpheus and Eurydice reunited? If you have any **questions,** review this page.

8. **women of Thrace** (thrās)**, maddened by Dionysus** (dī′ə-nī′səs)**:** Thrace was a Balkan region colonized by the Greeks; Dionysus was the god of wine.