

Before You Read

This selection also appears in *Elements of Literature*.

Echo and Narcissus

retold by Roger Lancelyn Green

LITERARY FOCUS: RECURRING THEMES

You can probably think of a story whose main character accomplishes something great against all odds. Chances are that you have also read a story about the power of love. Stories are told by people all over the world, and they've been told throughout history. No matter where or when in history we live, people share the same kinds of dreams, fears, and needs. That is why the same **themes**—insights about life—come up again and again in stories. A theme that occurs over and over in literature is called a **recurring theme**.

READING SKILLS: USING CONTEXT CLUES

All readers, even skilled ones, come across unfamiliar words from time to time. Skipping over these words may lead to confusion. Using a dictionary to look up every unfamiliar word you come across would soon become tiring and would slow down your reading. An easier way to figure out a word's meaning is to use **context clues**, the words and sentences that surround an unfamiliar word and help you understand what the unfamiliar word means.

As you read "Echo and Narcissus," use the questions below to help you figure out word meanings.

- Does the surrounding text give clues to the word's meaning?
- Is there a familiar word or word part within the unfamiliar word?
- How is the word used in the sentence?
- Does the meaning I've guessed make sense in the sentence?

SKILLS FOCUS

Literary Skills

Understand recurring themes.

Reading Skills

Use context clues.

Vocabulary Skills

Use context clues.

VOCABULARY DEVELOPMENT

PREVIEW SELECTION VOCABULARY

You may be unfamiliar with these words from “Echo and Narcissus.” Take a few minutes to preview the words before you begin to read.

detain (dē-tān') v.: hold back; delay.

Echo was asked to detain Hera, so Hera’s husband, Zeus, could wander about.

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

Echo tried vainly to attract the young man’s attention.

unrequited (un'ri-kwīt'id) v. used as adj.: not returned in kind.

Unfortunately, Echo’s love was unrequited, for Narcissus loved only himself.

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

Narcissus’s throat was parched, so he eagerly knelt to drink the cool water.

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

Narcissus gazed intently at his reflection in the pool.

USING CONTEXT CLUES

In the Reading Skills for this selection, you learned how to use **context clues** to figure out the meaning of unfamiliar words when you’re reading. Context clues include *definitions, examples, restatements, and contrast words*. The chart below gives examples of context clues for one of your vocabulary words. The context clues are in italics.

Definition	My skin was parched , <i>dry and hot</i> , after the desert hike.
Example	The poor little dog must have been parched . He <i>drank his water thirstily</i> .
Restatement	The land was so parched that it wasn’t fit for crops. The <i>dried out</i> soil would produce no grain this year.
Contrast	Our neighbor’s lawn was parched , but we <i>watered ours regularly to keep it nice and green</i> .

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
10 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.”

20 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 mountain-side 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.

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1. Oreades (ō'rē·ad'ēz).

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 Thebes³ 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:

50 “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?”

2. **Narcissus** (nār-sis'əs).
3. **Thebes** (thēbz).

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.

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-kwit'id) *v.*
used as *adj.*: not returned in kind.

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

60 “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.

70 “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.

80 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!”

4. **Aphrodite** (af'rə-dīt'ē).

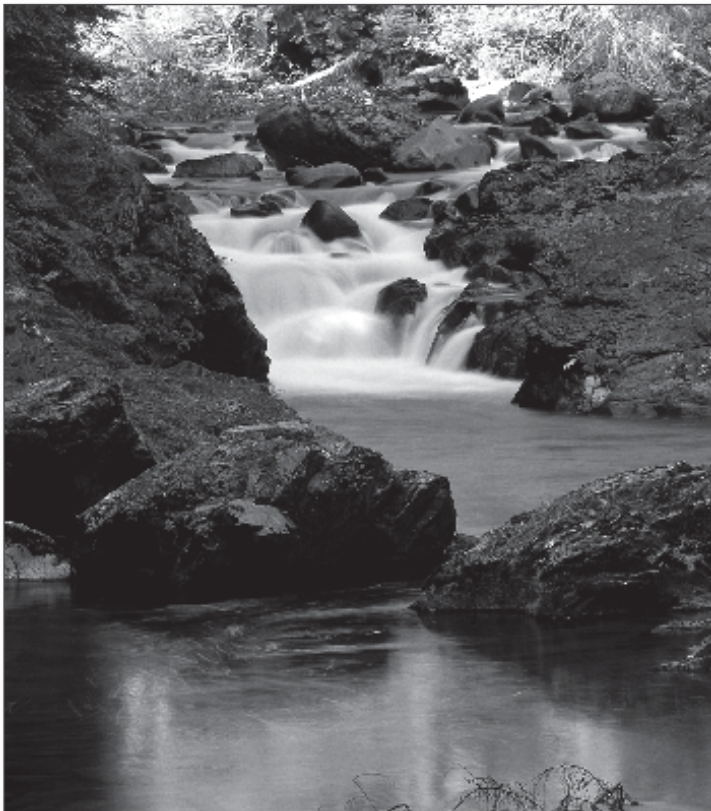
It was not long before Aphrodite made good her threat,
90 and in a very strange way. One day, tired after hunting,
Narcissus came to a still, clear pool of water away up the
mountainside, not far from where he had scorned Echo
and left her to die of a broken heart.

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
100 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 (pärdht) *v.* used as *adj.*: very hot and dry.

CLARIFY

Pause at line 103. What has happened to Narcissus?

VOCABULARY

intently (in-tent'le) *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?

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.

120 “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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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.

Greek statue of Hermes, messenger of the gods.

*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 quiver² 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 girdle⁴ 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 cleft⁶ 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 wafted⁷ 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

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 pomegranate⁸ 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!"

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

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.

9. **Eleusis** [ē'loo'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 not: Arachne (Arak'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 I 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

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

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 wail 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?