



# ABOUT RELIGION AND MYTHOLOGY

Religion played an important role in the daily life of the ancient Greeks. Families began their day with prayers at an altar in the courtyard of their homes. They believed in many gods and goddesses. Each of the gods and goddesses were in charge of a different aspect of life. The ancient Greeks believed that their gods looked like humans and felt human emotions. People also thought the gods had magical powers and lived forever. They thought the gods created disasters, made people go to war, or even helped people fall in love. The Greeks offered prayers, gifts, and animal sacrifices to the gods so they would help and protect them in their everyday lives.

The ancient Greeks had 12 main gods, known as the Olympians, who made their home on Mount Olympus. They believed that Zeus sat on a golden throne atop Mount Olympus

and ruled the family of gods. Hades, god of the Underworld, was also considered a main god. However, his brother Zeus did not often welcome him on Mount Olympus.

To please the gods, people built beautiful temples for the gods and goddesses to live in when they visited Earth. Each temple had a statue of the god it honored. The Athenians built a beautiful temple called the Parthenon for the goddess Athena. The solid gold and ivory statue of Athena inside the temple was 40 feet (12 m) tall.

The Greeks believed that Zeus loved watching great athletic events, so every four years the city-states met to compete at Olympia.

Myths were an important part of religion. Many myths were tales of the lives of the gods. Others explained acts of nature.

## GREEK GODS AND GODDESSES

<b>Zeus</b> king of the gods	<b>Apollo</b> god of the Sun, light, and music	<b>Aphrodite</b> goddess of love and beauty	<b>Demeter</b> goddess of the harvest
<b>Hera</b> queen of the gods	<b>Artemis</b> goddess of hunting	<b>Poseidon</b> god of the sea	<b>Ares</b> god of war
<b>Athena</b> goddess of wisdom and war	<b>Hermes</b> messenger of the gods	<b>Hestia</b> goddess of the home	<b>Hephaestus</b> god of fire

## ▣ MIXED-UP MYTHS ▣

### PERSEPHONE AND THE GOD OF THE UNDERWORLD

**P**ersephone was the lovely daughter of Demeter, goddess of the harvest. One day Persephone wandered off while helping her mother in the garden. Hades, god of the Underworld, saw Persephone and immediately fell in love with her. Hades grabbed poor Persephone and swept her off to his gloomy underground palace.

Hades made her a beautiful throne and gave her precious jewels and fine robes. This did not please Persephone, who missed the sunlight of Earth and her mother. She refused to eat the food of the dead that Hades gave her. Only a few seeds from a pomegranate kept her alive.

On the earth above, Demeter was beside herself with grief over the loss of her daughter. She was so depressed and angry that she refused to let anything grow. The earth became icy and the plants died. People and animals were starving,



and the gods pleaded with Demeter to bless the earth again.

Zeus knew he must help the earth, even though he hesitated to interfere with Hades' plans.

After all, Hades was his brother.

Zeus called Hermes, messenger of the gods, to tell Hades that he must release Persephone for at least part of the year.

On winged feet, Hermes sped downward to the Underworld. He told Hades that Zeus had ordered the release of Persephone. Persephone would stay with Hades half of the year, but she would get to live with her mother on Earth the other half. Hades dared not disobey the king of the gods, so he sent Persephone home in a chariot.

Demeter was so happy to see her daughter that she blessed the earth and it blossomed anew again.

#### STORY ELEMENTS

**Characters:** Persephone, Demeter, Hades, Zeus, and Hermes

**Setting:** Earth and the Underworld

**Problem or situation:** The earth died when Demeter was sad.

**Ending or resolution:** The earth came alive when Persephone returned to her mother.

**Explanation:** This Greek myth explains the changing of the seasons from winter to spring.

## MIXED-UP MYTHS

### STORY ELEMENTS OF A MYTH

#### CHARACTERS

**Zeus**, king of the gods

**Hera**, queen of the gods

**Athena**, goddess of wisdom and war

**Apollo**, god of the Sun, light, and music

**Artemis**, goddess of the hunt

**Hermes**, messenger of the gods

**Aphrodite**, goddess of love and beauty

**Poseidon**, god of the sea

**Hestia**, goddess of the home and hearth

**Demeter**, goddess of the harvest

**Ares**, god of war

**Hades**, god of the Underworld

(other gods and heroes may be added to your list)

#### SETTINGS

**agora**, a busy marketplace

**Acropolis**, sacred hill

**Mount Olympus**, home of the gods

**Olympic Games**, at Olympia

**Parthenon**, temple for Athena

**Aegean Sea**

(other places may be added to your list)

#### PROBLEMS OR SITUATIONS

earthquake shakes city

monsters in the sea

solar eclipse

volcanic eruption

battle for power

love and jealousy

(other problems may be added to your list)

#### ENDINGS OR RESOLUTIONS

built a new temple

reclaimed the kingdom

sent to Sparta to live

defeated the serpent

rode off on a golden chariot

found the treasure

(other endings may be added to your list)

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

## ▣ MY VERY OWN MIXED-UP MYTH ▣

Write the elements on your cards below.

<b>CHARACTERS</b> _____ _____	<b>SETTING</b> _____ _____
<b>PROBLEM OR SITUATION</b> _____ _____	<b>ENDING OR RESOLUTION</b> _____ _____

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title

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## THE OLYMPIAN GODS



**ZEUS**



**Z**eus was the king of all the gods. He lived on Mount Olympus. Zeus controlled the sky and weather and his family of gods. Zeus was fair, but if angered he threw thunderbolts at evildoers.

**HERA**

**H**era was the wife of Zeus and queen of the sky. She was the goddess of all women, mothers, and marriage. Hera had three symbols: the cow, a pomegranate, and a peacock.

**ATHENA**

**A**thens (also spelled Athene) was goddess of wisdom, law, and war. She was also the protector of cities. The city of Athens was named after her. Her symbols were the owl and the olive tree.

**APOLLO**

**A**pollo was the god of the Sun, light, truth, music, archery, and healing. His symbols were the lyre (a musical instrument) and the laurel tree. Artemis was his twin.

## THE OLYMPIAN GODS

### HERMES

**H**ermes was the messenger of the gods. He reported events on Earth to the gods. Hermes wore a winged hat and winged shoes, and carried a staff.

### APHRODITE

**A**phrodite was the goddess of love and beauty. She inspired love and protected people that were in love. Her symbols were doves, roses, sparrows, dolphins, and rams.

### POSEIDON

**P**oseidon was the god of the sea and all water. He controlled storms, sea monsters, and earthquakes. Poseidon could protect or destroy ships. His symbols were a trident, dolphins, and horses.

### ARTEMIS

**A**rtemis was the goddess of the hunt and the Moon. She protected young girls and wild animals. Her symbols were the bow and arrow, deer, dogs, and the cypress tree. Apollo, the sun god, was her twin.

## THE OLYMPIAN GODS

### HESTIA

**H**estia was the goddess of the hearth and home. She protected people's homes from evil. Every family had a shrine dedicated to her. She is often shown sitting in front of a wood fire.

### DEMETER

**D**emeter was the goddess of the earth, plants, and harvests. She protected the crops in the fields. Her daughter, Persephone, helped Demeter. Her symbol was a sheaf of wheat or barley.

### ARES

**A**res was the god of war. He was brave, angry, and terrible. Ares protected the soldiers on the fields. His symbols were a burning torch, a spear, dogs, and vultures.

### HEPHAESTUS

**H**ephaestus was the god of fire and armor. He protected craftsmen and metalsmiths while they worked on bronze weapons and tools. His symbols were a hammer and an anvil.

