

HEROES AND MONSTERS

EXPLOITS OF PERSEUS TO THE DEATH OF HERCULES

HEROES AND MONSTERS – SUMMARY

Greek folklore only begins with the stories of the Greek Gods. The second category of Greek mythology involves human, or semi-human heroes, and a spectacular array of monsters and villains. These hero legends are often associated a specific town or region and may have been loosely based on historical characters, since the aristocratic classes in many Greek cities claimed descent from them. The four most important Greek heroes are [Perseus](#), [Jason and the Argonauts](#), [Theseus](#), and [Hercules](#).

There are elaborate stories detailing the exploits of the four heroes mentioned above, most of which involve fending off some of the most creatively horrible monsters ever imagined. Perseus, for example, needed to capture the head of Medusa, a snake-haired gorgon whose horribly ugly visage turned men instantly into stone. Theseus, a prince of Athens, is most famous for killing the Minotaur, a man-eating half-man, and half-bull, responsible for the deaths of hundreds of young Athenian.

Jason and the Argonauts met with dozens of adventures on their voyage, including run-ins with fire-breathing bulls, bronze giants wielding gigantic boulders, flying witches who stole food from sailors' mouths, bewitching maidens who lured soldiers to their death, a sorceress who turned men into animals and a sea-monster who sucked ships into a giant whirlpool.

And all of the monsters so far discussed are just a prelude to the amazing creatures that contended with Hercules, the greatest of the Greek heroes. Lions with impenetrable fur, man-eating horses, a three-headed guard-dog of Hades, birds with metal beaks, serpent-shaped dragons, a multi-headed water monster, and a gigantic rampaging boar, were just a few of the monsters that Hercules was tasked with killing. And beyond these famous champions, are dozens of lesser known heroes such as Bellerophon, the tamer of Pegasus, Atalanta, the huntress, Daedalus, the ingenious craftsman, and Castor and Pollux twin heroes gifted at the arts of Boxing and Wrestling.



PERSEUS AND THE GORGONS

Yet even the well-known hero/monster tales so popular with young people of all ages are only one part of the great panoply of Greek folklore. The stories of Greek mythology are rich, complicated, and varied, and they provided the basis for a great deal of the Greek literature of the classical age. Many of the plays of the great Greek tragedians were based on Greek mythological characters and heroes. The story of Oedipus, the king of Thebes who unintentionally killed his father, is the basis for the famous trilogy by [Sophocles](#). The story of the homecoming of Agamemnon is the subject of the Oresteia tragedy by [Aeschylus](#). The death of Hercules, the murderous jealousy of Jason's wife, the debauchery of Dionysius, and the punishment of Prometheus are just a few other mythological stories that became the subjects of famous Greek playwrights.

A great deal of what we know about Greek mythology comes from the poems, plays, dialogues, and other literary masterpieces of classical Greece. The Gods, heroes, and sorcerers of Greek mythology personified important ideas, virtues, and vices and are still used to symbolize abstract concepts. The story of Narcissus, who fell in love with his own reflection, gave his name to our word for self-love. The story of Icarus, who flew with waxen feathers too near the sun, is a parable of the dangers of hubris. The myth of Echo tells of a talkative nymph who was cursed by Hera to only repeat the words of others.

These and hundreds of other familiar stories are so intertwined with common words and ideas that it is impossible to understand the roots of Western Culture without a good introduction to Greek mythology. The world of Greek folklore, and the extraordinary sophistication and intelligence of the ancient Greeks is a subject of enormous fascination. From [Aesop's Fables](#), which have delighted children for over 2500 years, to the works of the great [Greek Tragedians](#), which are still studied today, Greek mythology and folklore are as foundational to the study of Western Civilization, as Greek history itself.

CHARACTERS – HEROES AND MONSTERS

DEMIGODS—SONS OF ONE GOD AND ONE MORTAL

- Hercules** (Son of Zeus) Greatest of Greek demigod heroes. Succeeded in twelve labors.
- Perseus** (Son of Zeus) Legendary hero who killed Medusa, a monster so ugly it turned people to stone.
- Theseus** (Son of Poseidon) Legendary hero, who killed the Minotaur. Ancient King of Athens.
- Pollux** (Son of Zeus) Prince of Sparta, renowned horseman, boxer, and Argonaut. Twin of Castor (a mortal) and brother of Helen.
- Aeneas** (Son of Aphrodite) Trojan hero who escapes from the Destroyed city and founds Rome.
- Minos** (Son of Zeus) King of Crete, patron of Daedalus, and keeper of the Minotaur.

MORTAL HEROES

- Jason** Led a voyage of 'Argonauts' on a quest to recover the Golden Fleece.
- Oedipus** Solved the mystery of the Sphinx, and became the King of Thebes. Then struck with tragedy.
- Bellerophon** Hero associated with Corinth, who killed the Chimera and rode the winged horse Pegasus.
- Castor** Mortal twin of Pollux, prince of Sparta and brother of Helen. Traveled with the Argonauts.
- Daedalus** Renowned craftsman, credited with inventing many ingenious devices, and designing the Labyrinth.
- Icarus** Son of Daedalus who perished when he flew too near the sun with waxen wings crafted by his father.
- Meleager** Hero who hosted the Caledonian Boar hunt, and was a suitor for Atalanta.
- Orpheus** Renowned musician, famed for leading the Argonauts past the Sirens and rescuing his wife from the Underworld.
- Midas** Phrygian king who was granted the "Golden Touch", but repented when he turned his daughter to gold.
- Eurystheus** King of Tiryns, loyal to Hera, who imposes twelve labors upon Hercules.

MORTAL HEROINES

- Andromeda** Ethiopian princess who is doomed to be sacrificed to a sea-monster, but rescued by Perseus.
- Eurydice** Wife of Orpheus, the only mortal ever rescued from the underworld.
- Antigone** Daughter of Oedipus, king of Thebes. Cares for him when he is exiled.
- Atalanta** Famed huntress who hunted the Calydonian Boar and was involved with Meleager.
- Deianeira** Third wife of Hercules who accidentally kills her husband with the Tunic of Nessus.
- Medea** Sorceress wife of Jason, who helps him gain the Golden Fleece.
- Circe** Sorceress daughter of Helios, who enticed sailors with her hospitality and then turned them into animals.
- Hippolyta** Daughter of Ares and Queen of the Amazons. Possessed a magical girdle.

PARTIALLY HUMAN CREATURES

- Centaur** Half-Man, half horse creatures that are usually prone to rowdy behavior. **Chiron**, the famous centaur tutor of Achilles, Jason, and Perseus, was exceptionally noble and wise. **Nessus** was another famous Centaur, known for killing Hercules.
- Satyr** Half-man, half goat creatures associated with Dionysus and drunkenness. **Pan** god of shepherds and flocks is the most famous satyr. **Silenus**, leader of the Satyrs, had the gift of prophesy when drunk.

MONSTERS

- Scylla** Six headed sea-monster that grabbed sailors from every vessel that approached her.
- Charybdis** Giant sea monster in the shape of a whirlpool, who consumed vessels that sailed too close.
- Harpies** Ugly winged bird-women, who torment people by snatching their food away.
- Sirens** Beautiful Sea Nymphs who lure sailors to their death with alluring song.
- Symplegades** (Clashing Rocks) A pair of Rocks in the Bosphorus that smash ships between them as they pass.
- Talos** Bronze giant who protect Crete by hurling boulders at passing ships.
- Cyclopes** One-eyed, man eating giants.
- Laestrygonians** Man-eating giants encountered by Odysseus
- Sphinx** Monster with a woman's head, a lion's body, wings, and a serpent's tail.
- Medusa** One of the Gorgon sisters, So ugly she turned humans to stone.
- Cetus** Sea Monster in the shape of a large shark or killer whale.
- Minotaur** Man-eating Creature with the head of a bull and body of a man. Lived in Cretan labyrinth.
- Procrustes** Bandit who stretched his victims, or cut of their legs in order to fit them into an iron bed.
- Chimera** Fire-breathing monster with a goat's body, a lion's head, and a serpent's tail.
- Pegasus** Winged Horse, fathered by Poseidon, captured by Bellerophon.
- Caledonian Boar** Giant Boar sent by Artemis to ravage Aetolia. Subject of a famous hunt.
- Geryon** Three-bodied, four winged giant.
- Antaeus** Giant wrestler, who drew his enormous strength from contact with his mother Gaia (earth).
- Nemean Lion** Giant lion, whose fur was invulnerable to mortal weapons.
- Hydra** Many headed serpent that grew two heads whenever one was cut off.
- Erymanthian Boar** Giant boar that haunted the region of Mt. Erymanthos, Achaia in Western Greece.
- Stymphalian Birds** Man-eating birds with beaks of bronze and metallic feathers.
- Ladon** Hundred headed sea serpent who guards the apples of the Hesperides.
- Cretan Bull** White bull that carried Europa to Crete. Father of the Minotaur.
- Mares of Diomedes** Fire-breathing, man-eating horses, kept by a Thracian giant.
- Cyberus** Three-headed dog that guarded the entry to Hades.
- Achelous** River God of the largest river in Greece, who fought Hercules for the hand of Deianeria.

RECOMMENDED READING – HEROES AND MONSTERS

CORE READING ASSIGNMENTS *

Haaren - <u>Famous Men of Greece</u>	<u>Perseus</u> to <u>The Fall of Greece</u> (4)
Guerber - <u>The Story of the Greeks</u>	<u>Daedalus and Icarus</u> to <u>The Taking of Thebes</u> (8)
Shaw - <u>Stories of the Ancient Greeks</u>	<u>The Race of Atalanta</u> to <u>How Death Was Conquered</u> (13)

SUPPLEMENTAL RECOMMENDATIONS

Baldwin - <u>Old Greek Stories</u>	<u>The Quest of Medusa's Head</u> to <u>The Cruel Tribute</u> (6)
Peabody - <u>Old Greek Folk Stories</u>	<u>Orpheus and Eurydice</u> to <u>Oedipus</u> (6)
Francillon - <u>Gods and Heroes</u>	<u>Orpheus and Eurydice</u> to <u>The Apple of Discord</u> (18)
Macgregor - <u>The Story of Greece</u>	<u>Danae and Her Little Son</u> to <u>Acrisius Killed by Perseus</u> (4)
Lang - <u>A Book of Myths</u>	<u>Deirdre</u> to <u>Perseus the Hero</u> (4)
Harding - <u>Greek Gods and Heroes</u>	<u>The Labors of Heracles</u> to <u>Quest for the Golden Fleece</u> (4)
Hawthorne - <u>The Wonder Book</u>	<i>entire book</i>
Hawthorne - <u>Tanglewood Tales</u>	<u>The Minotaur</u> to <u>The Golden Fleece</u> (2)
Colum - <u>Golden Fleece</u>	<i>entire book</i>
Church - <u>Stories from Greek Tragedians</u>	<u>The Love of Alcestis</u> to <u>Antigone</u> (5)
Morris - <u>Historical Tales - Greek</u>	<u>Voyage of the Argonauts</u> to <u>Seven Against Thebes</u> (3)

ALSO RECOMMENDED

Kingsley - <u>The Greek Heroes</u>	<i>entire book</i>
Hutchinson - <u>The Golden Porch</u>	<i>entire book</i>
Tappan - <u>Story of the Greek People</u>	<u>In the Days of Myths</u> to <u>Days of Myths (cont.)</u> (2)
Kaufman - <u>Young Folks Plutarch</u>	<u>Theseus</u> (1)

* Level I and II Study Questions are based on **Core** Reading Assignments.