

MeTEOR Performance Task

Sixth Grade

English Language Arts
From Athena to Zeus

4. What is the difference between polytheistic and monotheistic? Are there differences in the Greek or Roman polytheistic gods and monotheistic gods worshipped in modern religions? What differences do you see in your experience?

Part B:

Read “Myths and Legends: Zeus, supreme god of the ancient Greeks” and answer question 5.

5. Zeus had an ability to both interact with the gods and also humans. In both articles, punishments and rewards are given out dependent on behavior. He was worshipped at the temple in Greece. The Roman and Greek gods are thought of as almost interchangeable. According to the text, what are some of the main differences of Zeus and Jupiter? How are they similar?

6. Using text evidence and with a partner, fill out the “It’s ALL Greek to me!” worksheet. Choose five gods/goddesses that you will research. Discuss the favorable and unfavorable characteristics and how you are deciding why the traits are positive or negative. For example, stubborn might be a negative trait but perseverance can be seen as a positive trait though they have some similarities. Also, come to a consensus on what one word accurately describes the gods/goddesses you chose. One area to pay special attention to is their counterparts in other cultures. You will use this sheet to help with your projects later.

Part C:

Read “Arachne the Weaver” and answer question 7.

7. What character traits of both Arachne and Athena lead to their problems? Do you feel that the competition was “fair”? Why or why not?

8. Using text evidence from all of the articles, what are some of the natural phenomenon or scientific concepts that have been discussed in the works you've read? Choose one and research the myth behind it. Are there any similarities to their present symbols or knowledge? For example, lightning bolts and thunder are attributed to Zeus' fury but his lightning bolt is still one symbols for bad weather and the light seems to come from above the clouds. Using a t-chart, write the phenomenon at the top and then fill in using things that are myth and reality.

9. Myths are often used to explain scientific concepts, the world as we know it as well as moral lessons. Though they were gods, they still seemed to struggle with human characteristics and moral dilemmas. They had faults and were prone to many negative human emotions. What Greek or Roman god do you most identify with? Do a research project over that god or goddess. You will create a research poster illustrating the god/goddess you chose. You may use your notes from "It's ALL GREEK TO ME" if relevant. You will address their character traits, how you identify with them, a "myth" that they are involved in and both the good and the bad of their attributes. On the poster, you must
 - a. Identify the god/goddess and illustrate their symbols and overarching description.
 - b. Discuss their relationship to the other gods/goddesses or mythical beings. (For example, father, sister, friend)
 - c. Address their character traits and whether they are good or bad.
 - d. Relate how you identify with them.
 - e. Summarize and explain a "myth" they are involved in (for example, Athena in Arachne's story).
 - f. Describe both the good and the bad of their attributes.

10. Myths all have a purpose or reason for their existence. Choose a natural occurrence (could be natural disaster, an occurrence in nature or even weather) or moral dilemma and write your own myth. Review and rely on the components of a myth which are also listed on your rubric. You will need to write as well as illustrate your work. Remember the “It’s ALL Greek to Me!” character traits graphic organizer and utilize some of the information from there.

ARTICLES/STUDENT MATERIALS/RUBRICS

“A Short History of Greek and Roman Myth: Gods, Goddesses and Heroes”



An 1866 illustration of the Roman god of the seas, Neptune, who the Greeks called Poseidon, being pulled through water by two horses, with two nymphs alongside him. Library of Congress.

The ancient Greeks were polytheistic, which meant they worshiped many gods. These gods and goddesses lived at the top of Mount Olympus, the highest mountain in Greece. Myths, or stories, described their lives and actions. The gods often got involved with the day-to-day lives of humans. These myths helped to explain the unknown and sometimes teach a lesson.

For example, Zeus, the king of the gods and lord of the skies, carried a thunderbolt when it rained, so the ancient Greeks believed that the thunder and lightning was Zeus showing his anger.

Stories about how the Greek gods behaved and interacted with humans are found in the works of the poet Homer. He created two long poems: the Iliad, which was about the Trojan War, and the Odyssey, which was about the hero, Odysseus. These two poems were passed down orally over many generations.

Greek myths were the reality TV of 900 B.C.

The Greek gods had many human qualities even though they were gods. They constantly fought among themselves, behaved unfairly and were often jealous. Zeus, the king of the gods, cheated on his wife Hera. She often punished him for having his mistresses.



The Greek gods were highly emotional and behaved inconsistently and sometimes immorally. The gods, heroes and humans of Greek mythology were flawed. However, sins were often punished and lessons were taught.

In addition to Zeus and Hera, there were many other major and minor gods in the Greek religion. Athena, the daughter of Zeus, was goddess of wisdom. Aphrodite was the goddess of love, but her brother, Ares, was the god of war. Hermes, who had winged feet, was the messenger of the gods. Poseidon ruled the sea from his underwater palace and Apollo rode his chariot across the sky, bringing the sun with him.

Hades was in charge of the dead in the underworld. Almost all people went to Hades after they died whether they were good or bad. To get there, the dead had to be ferried across the river Styx into Hades by Charon, the boatman.

Moral lessons taught with punishment from the gods

Typically, the gods punished those who were bad. For example, Tantalus, who killed his own son and served him to the gods for dinner, was sent to Hades and made forever thirsty and hungry. Although there was a pool of clear, fresh drinking water at his feet, whenever Tantalus bent down to drink, the pool would dry up and disappear.

Likewise, over his head hung the most delicious fruits. However, when Tantalus reached for them, a wind would blow them just out of his reach. The English word "tantalize" derives from the name Tantalus.

Myths helped explain how the world came to be the way it was. In one myth, Zeus created an incredibly beautiful and nearly perfect woman named Pandora, whose one flaw was that she was very curious and suspicious. Hermes, Zeus' messenger, gave Pandora a golden box, but warned her never to open it because terrible things would occur if she did.

But Pandora's curiosity made her open the special box and out flew all that was evil in the world: pain, sadness, sickness, starvation, etc. Only one thing remained in the box, hope. Humans were able to hold on to hope. This myth explains where misfortune comes from and also teaches a moral lesson to humans about the possible dangers of curiosity.

Heracles tricked into murder and atonement

In addition to myths about gods, the ancient Greeks also told stories about heroes. One of the most famous Greek heroes was Heracles, the world's strongest man. Heracles was the son of Zeus and a woman who was human. Zeus tricked the woman by disguising himself as the woman's husband. Hera, Zeus' wife, was angry about what Zeus had done and wanted to punish his son, Heracles. So she tricked Heracles into believing that his entire family was actually dangerous beasts, so he killed them. When Heracles realized that he had killed his entire family, he agreed to perform 12 tasks for the gods to pay for his crime. One task was to slay the nine-headed monster called the Hydra.

Another task was to clean the Augean stables, which were filled with cows, bulls, goats, sheep and horses and had been filthy for 30 years, so Heracles changed the course of a river to wash away the mess. In the end, he completed the 12 Labors of Heracles and made up for the murder of his family.

Romans borrowed Greek myths for themselves

The origins of Greek Mythology are thousands of years old. By around 900 B.C. the different gods had been put into a real religion. At that time the Greeks already had many city-states, but the Romans were still building their civilization. The Greeks and Romans were neighbors and the Greeks had colonies in Italy. The Greeks had a huge influence on the Romans, who adopted Greek religion and mixed it with their own.

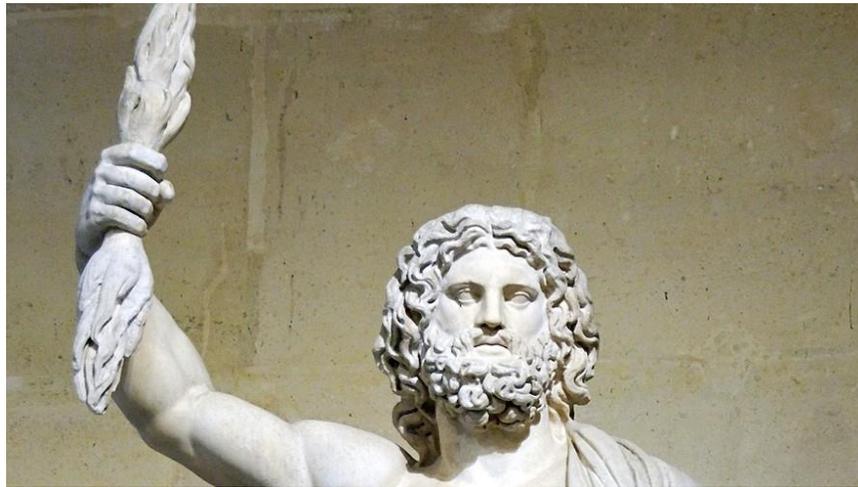
The Romans changed all of the names of the gods, except for Apollo. For example, the Romans had Venus, the goddess of fertility and birth, while the Greeks had Aphrodite, the goddess of love. So, Venus also became the goddess of love. The Greeks had Heracles, the son of Zeus, who performed many deeds of strength, but the Romans claimed him as the son of Jupiter (the Roman name for Zeus), and called him Hercules, who demonstrated different deeds of strength. The Greek hero, Odysseus, became Ulysses in the Roman myth.

The following chart lists the Greek and Roman names for some of the gods and goddesses.

Greek/Roman	Attributes
Uranus/Caelus Gaia/Tellus Zeus/Jupiter	The first god of the sky The goddess of the earth The Olympian king of the gods and the sky
Hera/Juno	The queen of the gods, and goddess of women and marriage
Poseidon/Neptune	The god of the sea
Hades/Pluto	The god of the underworld
Hestia/Vesta	The goddess of the hearth (public fires for rituals and cooking)
Cronus/Saturn	The leader of the Titans
Demeter/Ceres	The goddess of the harvest
Apollo	The god of the sun, music, and art
Artemis/Diana	The goddess of the hunt and moon
Aphrodite/Venus	The goddess of love
Ares/Mars	The god of War
Athena/Minerva	The goddess of wisdom
Hephaestus/Vulcan	The god of fire, blacksmiths
Hermes/Mercury	The messenger god
Dionysus/Bacchus	The god of wine
Eros/Cupid Pan/ Faunus	The god of love The god of pastures and woods

“Myths and Legends: Zeus, supreme god of the ancient Greeks”

E.M. Berens, adapted by Newsela staff



A statue of Zeus throwing a lightning bolt. Wikimedia Commons

Greek mythology evolved thousands of years ago. There was a need to explain natural events, disasters and events in history. Myths were created about gods and goddesses that had supernatural powers, human traits and human emotions.

The God of the Sky

For the ancient Greeks, Zeus is the supreme god of the universe, the ruler of heaven and Earth. He is the god of the sky, the personification of the laws of nature, the lord of the state, and the father of gods and men.

As the god of the sky, he can produce storms, showers and darkness. At his command, the mighty thunder rolls, the lightning flashes, and the clouds open and pour rain upon the Earth.

As the personification of the laws of nature, he represents the harmonious order of the world. Therefore he is the god of regulated time, as marked by the changing seasons and the cycle of day and night.

Keeping Watch Over All

As the lord of the state, he is the founder of kingly power and the defender of all state institutions. He is the special friend of princes, whom he guards and assists with his advice. He protects the people and watches over the whole community.

As the father of the gods, Zeus ensures that each god performs his or her individual duties. He punishes their mistakes and settles their disputes. For each of them, he acts as a counselor and mighty friend.

As the father of men, he takes a protective interest in the actions and well-being of mortals. He watches over them with care. He rewards truth, charity and uprightness, and punishes lying, meanness, and lack of hospitality. Even the poorest wanderer finds him to be a powerful supporter, for Zeus orders that the mighty people of the Earth should help the needy.

View From Mount Olympus

The Greeks believed that the home of their all-powerful god was on the top of Mount Olympus, the highest mountain in Greece. Its cloudy summit was hidden from mortal view. Zeus lived there with his wife Hera in a palace made of gold, silver and ivory.

The worship of Zeus was central to the religion of the Greeks. As a result, his statues were both numerous and magnificent. He is usually represented as a grand and noble man, his face expressing all the majesty of the supreme ruler of the universe. He can be recognized by his thick masses of hair and rich flowing beard.

He is always accompanied by an eagle, which balances on his staff or sits at his feet. In one hand Zeus usually carries a bundle of thunderbolts, ready to be thrown. He frequently wears a wreath of oak leaves on his head.

Journeys On Earth

Zeus was first worshipped at Dodona in the Epirus region of northwestern Greece. This famous oracle sat at the foot of Mount Tomarus. Here, the voice of the invisible god was supposed to be heard in the rustling leaves of a giant oak tree. Through the oracle, Zeus announced to mankind the will of heaven. Later, Zeus was worshipped at Olympia in Elis, where there was a magnificent temple dedicated to him.

The Greeks believed that Zeus sometimes took on a human form and visited Earth. He descended from heaven to punish the guilty and reward the good.

On one occasion Zeus descended and made a journey through Phrygia, in present-day Turkey. He did not receive a kind welcome until he reached the humble home of an old man and his wife. The couple entertained him with great kindness and gave him what little food they had. To reward them for their generosity, Zeus asked the pair to name any wish they desired. The old couple begged that they might serve the gods and end life together. After living out the rest

of their lives in worship, they were transformed by Zeus into trees, to remain forever side by side.

On another occasion, Zeus made a journey through Arcadia, a region in Greece. The people of Arcadia recognized him as the king of heaven and honored him with great respect. But Lycaon, their king, doubted the divinity of Zeus. He ridiculed his people and vowed to kill the supreme god. Before Lycaon could execute his wicked plan, however, Zeus turned the Arcadian king into a wolf.

Goddesses In Control

The Roman god Jupiter is frequently confused with the Greek Zeus. Both are the head of the Olympic gods. Jupiter is the lord of life and has total power over life and death. In this way, he differs from Zeus, who was somewhat controlled by the sway of the Fates.

The Fates were three goddesses who controlled the destinies of gods and men. Zeus often descends to Earth to visit mankind, taking on various disguises. Jupiter, however, always remains essentially the supreme god of heaven, and never appears upon the Earth.

“Arachne the Weaver”

By ReadWorks

It may seem difficult to take Greek myths seriously. After all, they tell of angry gods, dueling goddesses, snake-haired women, and beasts consisting of both animal and human parts. But mythology was a significant influencing factor in the day-to-day lives of the people of ancient Greece. They didn’t have televisions or the Internet. There was no Google then, no encyclopedias, and no way to look some piece of information up quickly and learn it. Instead, the ancient Greeks turned to stories and legends to understand how the world around them operated. They used myths to explain the things they didn’t understand, like thunder and earthquakes. And they used myths to make scary things seem less frightening. Over time, myths changed, and their events and details varied from one telling to the next, but their narrative outcomes remained largely the same.

Mythology, in the time of ancient Greece, was used not only to explain various phenomena that we now understand via scientific truths, but to account for the origins of humankind. It answered questions like, “What happens after death?” and, “Why does humanity exist at all?” Myths were also often entertaining, and sometimes humorous and intriguing; remember that there weren’t TV episodes or movies in ancient Greece, so people had to entertain themselves in other ways. But more than that, myths told people how to live, and how to tell right from wrong. These stories included morals intended to teach valuable life lessons and instill ethics in their readers. Take, for instance, the story of Arachne.

Arachne was a young girl famed in her region for her spinning and weaving. Her cloth was said to be the softest and fairest of any in the land—so fine that some believed it to be spun from gold. Because of her skills, Arachne was prideful. She thought herself the best spinner and weaver in the world, and she was certain that no one could match her talents and gifts. One day, an old woman walked past Arachne weaving on her loom and asked her, “Who taught you to weave so well?” Arachne replied that she had taught herself, and that she was the best spinner and weaver in the world. “But perhaps Athena, the goddess of craft and weaving, taught you to spin and weave without your knowing it?” Arachne, in her vanity, replied, “No, not even Athena is as good as I am.” The old woman then tore away her disguise and revealed herself as Athena. She was enraged that a mortal could be boastful and would dare to compare herself to a goddess. And so, Athena challenged Arachne to a spinning and weaving contest.

The rules of the contest were simple: each woman would weave a tapestry, and Zeus, king of the gods, would act as the judge. If Arachne won, Athena would never weave again. And if

Athena won, Arachne would never spin or touch a loom for the rest of her life. Hundreds gathered to watch the two women weave. Arachne wove a cloth from the finest silk. It was said that the cloth was so fine it could barely be felt, but that it had the strength to hold a hundred men. On the cloth, Arachne depicted the failings of the gods, portraits of the gods acting immorally and foolishly. Athena, on the other hand, is said to have spun with sunbeams, the sky, the fields, and the clouds. She wove a tapestry that showed the gods in all their strength and glory, praising them for their splendor. It was obvious that Athena's cloth was more spectacular than Arachne's. Even Arachne, upon seeing Athena's tapestry, hid her face in her hands in shame.

In one version of the myth, Athena shredded Arachne's cloth into pieces when she saw how the girl had insulted the gods. But both women knew who the victor was, and Arachne realized that she would never be able to touch a loom again. Ashamed and devastated at her loss, Arachne attempted to kill herself. Athena, taking pity on Arachne, stopped her. Athena insisted that Arachne remain true to her word and never again spin or touch a loom. Athena then transformed her into a spider so that she could continue to spin and weave beautiful tapestries. All spiders, in Greek mythology, are said to be the children of Arachne. This particular Greek myth served to warn against the dangers of pride and vanity, as well as caution those seeking to compete against or humiliate the gods.

Name

Date

“It’s ALL Greek to Me!”

Using the table below, choose your five favorite Greek Gods or Goddesses and fill the Character Trait chart below. Be sure to use text evidence and appropriate research.

Greek God or Goddess	One Word Description	Appearance	Favorable Traits	Unfavorable Traits	Counterpart in other cultures (IE Roman)

Name

Date

Natural Phenomenon or Scientific Concept:

MYTH

REALITY

Sixth Grade Poster Rubric

CATEGORY	5	4	3	2	1	Points Earned
Creativity/ Originality	The poster shows a very original presentation of the materials which captures the viewer's attention and shows that the student went over and beyond the requirements, which were all met and exceeded. A great deal of time was spent on creativity.	The poster shows a lot of originality; good variety and blending of materials. The poster is very interesting to the viewer. The student spent a lot of time on the work and most of the requirements were met. A lot of time was spent on creativity.	The poster has some originality and variety of materials. Some but not all the requirements were fulfilled. It shows some creativity and that moderate amount of time was taken to create the poster. Viewers have some interest.	The poster has little originality or variety of materials. Few of the requirements are met. It shows little creativity and that minimum amount of time was taken to create the poster. Viewers have little interest.	The poster has no originality. Insufficient use of materials. None of the requirements were met. It shows no creativity and that almost no time was taken to create the poster. Viewers have no interest.	
Quality of Poster Presentation	The poster is effective in relating all of the topics and requirements. Physical appearance of project show attention to detail in terms of lettering, organization, typing proofreading, neatness, picture & art labels etc.	The poster is interesting and adequately addresses the requirements and topics. Good physical appearance. Minor flaws in details.	The poster is somewhat interesting and vaguely addresses the requirements and topics. Appearance is not very appealing. Moderate errors in details.	The poster is not interesting and barely addresses the requirements and topic. Some vital elements are missing. Physical appearance is not appealing. Major errors in details.	The poster is not interesting and badly done and does not meet the requirements or topic. Vital elements are incomplete or not appropriate. Unappealing with extreme errors in details.	

WRITE YOUR OWN MYTH

(10 points each totaling 100)

1. Myth **explains** a natural phenomenon or **teaches** a moral lesson.
2. Myth contains at least **one Greek god**, either from historical Greek mythology or created by student.
3. Myth has a **beginning**. It tells the reader who wants what.
Introduce the main character.
Establish the setting.
Decide what the character wants.
4. Myth introduces a **Conflict/Problem**.
The conflict is the problem the main character must overcome or confront. What or who is your character struggling with and why?
5. The myth includes a **Rising Action**.
This is where the problems come into the story. The rising action focuses on the characters trying to conquer their problem or avoid being defeated.
6. Myth has a **Climax**.
This is the event(s) leading to solving the problem.
7. The myth has a **Falling Action**.
Write about what happens once the problem is out of the way. Give the character what he/she wants.
8. **Resolution/Ending**
Write an ending that gives the reader a satisfying end.
9. **Spelling, Grammar, Punctuation**
This will include good, well-written sentences.
10. **Illustrations**
Illustrations are relevant and add interest to the story.



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