

# The Greek Myths

Three great stories, and what they mean

The gods you met in booklet 2 are about to start causing trouble.

This belongs to **Henry**.

1. Alphabet

2. Gods

3. Myths

4. Buildings and Games

## The big idea

A myth is a story the Greeks told to explain the world and to pass on what mattered to them. Learn the story first. The facts then stick to it.

# How to tell a story in an answer

The longer questions ask you to retell a myth. Use this shape and you will not get lost.

**1**

## **Beginning**

How it started, and who set it off.

**2**

## **Middle**

The key events, in order.

**3**

## **End**

How it finished, and the result.

### **Two things that lift the marks**

- **Name the people.** Use their names, not "a man" or "she".
- **Say the theme.** One line on what the story is really about, such as love, pride, or cleverness.

Linking words keep it in order: first, then, after that, in the end.

# Demeter and Persephone

**The big question:** Why do the seasons change? The Greeks told this story to explain it.

## The story

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- 1 Persephone, the daughter of Demeter, is picking flowers in a meadow.
- 2 **Hades**, god of the underworld, bursts out of the ground and carries her down to be his queen.
- 3 **Demeter** searches the whole earth for her daughter. In her grief, she lets nothing grow. Crops die and people starve.
- 4 Zeus orders Hades to give Persephone back. But she has eaten a few **pomegranate seeds** in the underworld, and anyone who eats its food must return.
- 5 So a deal is struck. Persephone spends part of each year below with Hades, and part above with her mother.

**Demeter** goddess of the harvest, the mother

**Persephone** her daughter, taken below

**Hades** god of the underworld

## Why this causes the seasons

### Persephone is above ground

Demeter is happy, so plants grow.  
This is **spring and summer**.

### Persephone is below ground

Demeter grieves, so nothing grows.  
This is **autumn and winter**.

So the year turns because a mother is happy for half of it and heartbroken for the other half. When her daughter comes home, the world blooms. When she leaves, it dies back.

### Themes

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- A mother's love for her child.
- Loss and return.
- The cycle of nature, growing and dying back each year.

### Watch out

Different versions give a different number of seeds. The important point is not the exact number. It is that eating the food of the dead means Persephone must keep returning below.

# Demeter and Persephone: your turn

QUICK CHECK

1. Who is Persephone's mother?

2. Who takes Persephone, and to where?

  

3. What does Persephone eat that means she must return?

EXPLAIN

4. Explain how this story explains the seasons.

EXAMPLE ANSWER

The story says Persephone must spend part of the year below ground with Hades, and part above with her mother Demeter. When Persephone is below, Demeter is too sad to let anything grow, so the plants die and it is autumn and winter. When Persephone comes back up, Demeter is happy again, so crops grow and it is spring and summer. So the changing seasons are really Demeter's feelings, turning year after year.



# Jason and the Golden Fleece

**The big question:** What happens when a young hero is sent on a quest meant to kill him?

## The story

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- 1 **Jason** should be king, but his uncle has taken the throne. The uncle promises it back if Jason fetches the **Golden Fleece**, a magical golden sheepskin in a faraway land. He expects Jason to die trying.
- 2 Jason gathers a crew of heroes, the **Argonauts**, named after their ship, the **Argo**. They set sail.
- 3 They survive many dangers. The most famous are the **Clashing Rocks**, two cliffs that smash together on passing ships. The Argonauts send a dove through first, then row hard as the rocks reopen.
- 4 At the land of the fleece, the king sets deadly tasks. His daughter **Medea**, a princess with magic, falls in love with Jason and helps him pass them.
- 5 With Medea's help, Jason takes the Golden Fleece and sails home.

**Jason** the hero on the quest

**Argonauts** his crew of heroes

**Argo** their ship

**Medea** the princess whose magic helps him

# Jason: your turn

## Themes

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- The hero's quest, a long journey to win a prize.
- Teamwork, a whole crew of heroes, not one man alone.
- Cunning and help win the day, as much as strength. Medea's magic, not muscle, gets the fleece.

### QUICK CHECK

1. What is Jason sent to fetch?

2. What is the name of his ship, and what is his crew called?

  

3. Who helps Jason with her magic?

### EXPLAIN

4. Jason does not win the fleece by strength alone. Explain what really helps him succeed.

# The Trojan War

**The big question:** How did one bad choice start a ten year war, and how did a wooden horse end it?

## How it began

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- 1 Three goddesses argue over who is the fairest. **Paris**, a prince of Troy, is chosen to judge. **Aphrodite** offers him the most beautiful woman in the world, so he picks her.
- 2 That woman is **Helen**, already married to a Greek king. Paris takes Helen back to Troy.
- 3 The Greeks are furious. A huge Greek army sails to Troy to get Helen back. The war begins.

## How it was fought and won

- 4 The war lasts ten years. The greatest Greek warrior is **Achilles**. The greatest Trojan is **Hector**, a prince and Paris's brother.
- 5 Achilles kills Hector in a duel. Later Achilles himself is killed by an arrow to his **heel**, his one weak spot.
- 6 The Greeks win with a trick. They build a giant hollow **Wooden Horse**, hide soldiers inside, and pretend to sail away, leaving it as a gift.
- 7 The Trojans pull the horse inside the city. That night the soldiers climb out, open the gates, and the Greek army takes Troy. **Troy falls**.

**Paris** Trojan prince who takes Helen

**Helen** the cause of the war

**Achilles** greatest Greek warrior

**Hector** greatest Trojan warrior

### Themes

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- Pride, on both sides.
- Love and the terrible cost it can bring.
- Cleverness beating strength. Ten years of fighting were won by one clever trick.

#### Watch out

The Wooden Horse was the **Greeks'** trick. The Trojans were fooled by it. That is why a "Trojan horse" today means a hidden trick. Also, only Achilles' heel was weak, not all of him.

# The Trojan War: your turn

## QUICK CHECK

1. Who took Helen to Troy?

2. Name the greatest warrior on each side.

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3. How did the Greeks finally get inside the city?

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## COMPARISON

Compare Achilles and Hector as warriors.

### EXAMPLE ANSWER

Achilles and Hector were the two greatest fighters in the war, but on opposite sides. Achilles was the champion of the Greeks, almost impossible to beat because his whole body was protected apart from his heel. Hector was the champion of the Trojans, a prince fighting to defend his own city and family. Achilles fought for glory and revenge, while Hector fought to protect his home. In the end Achilles killed Hector, but was later killed himself by an arrow to his heel.


## Extended answer

Use the story shape from the start of this booklet: beginning, middle, end. Name the people. Add the theme.

### EXTENDED ANSWER

Tell the story of the Trojan War. Explain how it began and how it ended.

#### EXAMPLE ANSWER

The war began with a choice. Paris, a prince of Troy, was asked to judge which goddess was the fairest. Aphrodite offered him the most beautiful woman in the world, Helen, so he chose Aphrodite. The problem was that Helen was already married to a Greek king. When Paris took Helen to Troy, the Greeks sailed there with a huge army to get her back.

The war then lasted ten years. The greatest Greek fighter, Achilles, killed the greatest Trojan, Hector, in a duel. In the end the Greeks won not by force but by a trick. They built a giant hollow Wooden Horse, hid soldiers inside, and pretended to leave. The Trojans pulled it into the city, and that night the hidden soldiers opened the gates. Troy fell. The story shows how pride and love led to disaster, and how cleverness finally beat strength.


# How the gods drive the myths

Every one of these stories is set off by a god. That is the link the exam rewards.

- **Demeter** and her grief are the reason for the seasons.
- **Hades** taking Persephone starts that whole story.
- **Aphrodite's** promise to Paris starts the Trojan War.

So the gods from booklet 2 are not separate from the myths. They are the cause of them. If you can name the god behind each story, you understand why it happened.

## Memory aids

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- **Achilles heel.** We still say this for someone's one weak spot. The phrase locks in the whole story.
- **Trojan horse.** Still means a hidden trick. It reminds you how Troy fell.
- **Seasons = Demeter's mood.** Daughter home, world blooms. Daughter gone, world dies back.
- **Jason needs a team.** Argonauts on the Argo, plus Medea's magic. Not a one man job.

# What to revise first, and answers

## 1 The three stories in order

Beginning, middle, end for each. The extended question lives here.

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## 2 The main people in each myth

Naming them is half the marks.

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## 3 The theme of each

One line on what the story is really about.

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### The must know floor

- Demeter and Persephone explain the seasons.
- Jason is sent for the Golden Fleece, sails on the Argo with the Argonauts, and Medea helps him.
- Paris takes Helen, the Greeks attack, Achilles and Hector are the champions, and the Wooden Horse wins it.
- One theme for each story.

## Answers

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### Demeter and Persephone

1. Demeter.
2. Hades takes her, down to the underworld.
3. A few pomegranate seeds.

### Jason

1. The Golden Fleece.
  2. The ship is the Argo. The crew are the Argonauts.
  3. Medea.
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4. The help of Medea and her magic, and his crew, rather than his strength alone.

### **The Trojan War**

1. Paris.
2. Achilles for the Greeks, Hector for the Trojans.
3. By hiding soldiers inside a giant Wooden Horse, which the Trojans pulled into the city.