

READING

# The story of Demeter and Persephone

**LEVEL**

Intermediate (B2)

**NUMBER**

EN\_B2\_3013R

**LANGUAGE**

English

## Learning outcomes

- I can read and understand the main points in a text about Greek mythology.
- I can read about myths and clearly express my opinion about their meaning.



# Warm-up

**Match** the vocabulary items (1-5) to a definition (a-e). **Answer** the questions.  
You can do this activity in **breakout rooms** or **as a class**.



1 **naïve**

2 **to wither**

3 **doomed**

4 **to grieve**

5 **chasm**

a to be sad when a loved one dies

b (of a plant) to die

c a deep crack in the earth

d when something bad is certain to happen

e lacking experience

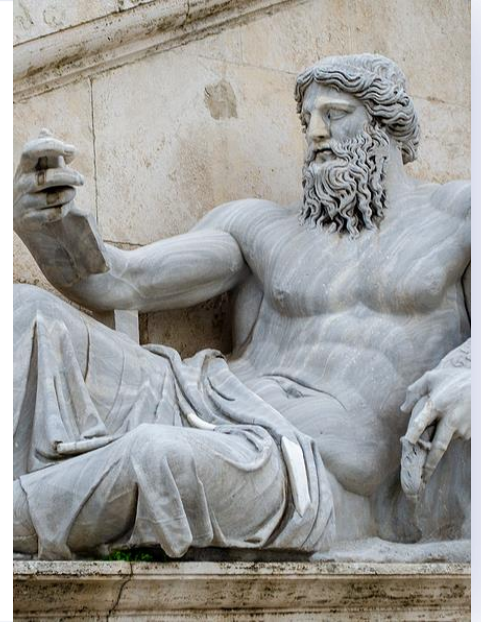
1. Which of these words are new for you? Which did you know already?
2. You will read about the myth of Demeter and Persephone. Based on the words above, make some predictions about the story.



# Reading (1)

**Read** the text. **Answer** the questions in the red box.

Zeus, King of the Gods, had two brothers and three sisters, all of whom had important roles to play in Greek society. Demeter was one of Zeus's sisters. She was the Goddess of the harvest and of the fertility of the earth. As such, all mortals relied on Demeter for their food, and prayed to her for good harvests. Demeter was a kind and caring goddess. She had one daughter, Persephone, who was a sweet, naïve girl. She enjoyed the protection of her mother and her father, Zeus. Persephone's beauty attracted the attention of many of the Gods, but none more so than her Uncle Hades, the God of the underworld.



What role did the Goddess Demeter play in Greek society?

What characteristics are attributed to Demeter?

What characteristics are attributed to Persephone?



Zeus had two brothers and three sisters, all of whom had important **roles** to **play** in Greek society.

The sunny weather and amazing food definitely **played a role** in my decision to move to Greece.

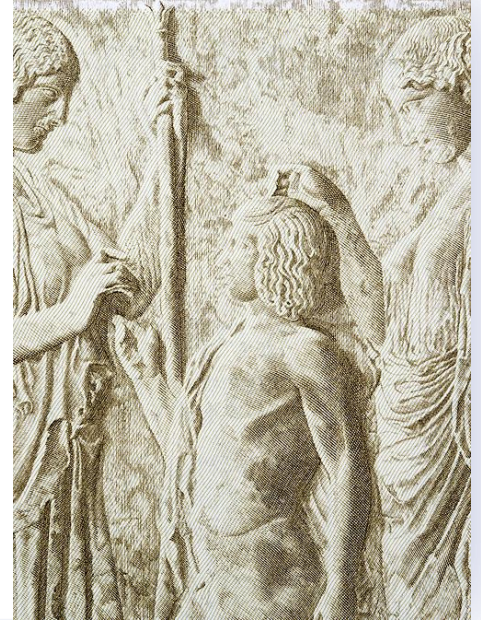
What does it mean to **play a role** in the literal sense? Can you give an example?

What does the phrase mean in the example sentences above?

## Reading (2)

**Read** the text. **Answer** the questions in the red box.

Hades had seen Persephone playing with his dog, Cerberus, and was charmed by her nature. Demeter, fiercely protective of her daughter, kept all the gods away from her and rejected their offers of marriage. Hades took it upon himself to go to Zeus to ask for permission to marry Persephone, and was quietly granted that permission. However, knowing that Demeter would never agree, Hades decided to abduct Persephone and take her to the underworld. One day, when the girl was picking flowers, a chasm opened in the earth. Hades came out and kidnapped her, and took her back with him.



Why was Hades attracted to Persephone?

Why did Hades decide to abduct Persephone?

Where did Hades take Persephone?



# Complete the sentences

Fill in the **gaps** using the words from the text.

- 1 Hades had to ask Zeus to \_\_\_\_\_ him \_\_\_\_\_ to marry Persephone.
- 2 Persephone was not aware of what was happening to her when she was \_\_\_\_\_ by Hades.
- 3 Persephone's mother, Demeter, was the Goddess of the \_\_\_\_\_.
- 4 Persephone was described as sweet and \_\_\_\_\_.
- 5 Hades came out of a \_\_\_\_\_ in the earth to abduct Persephone.



# Discuss

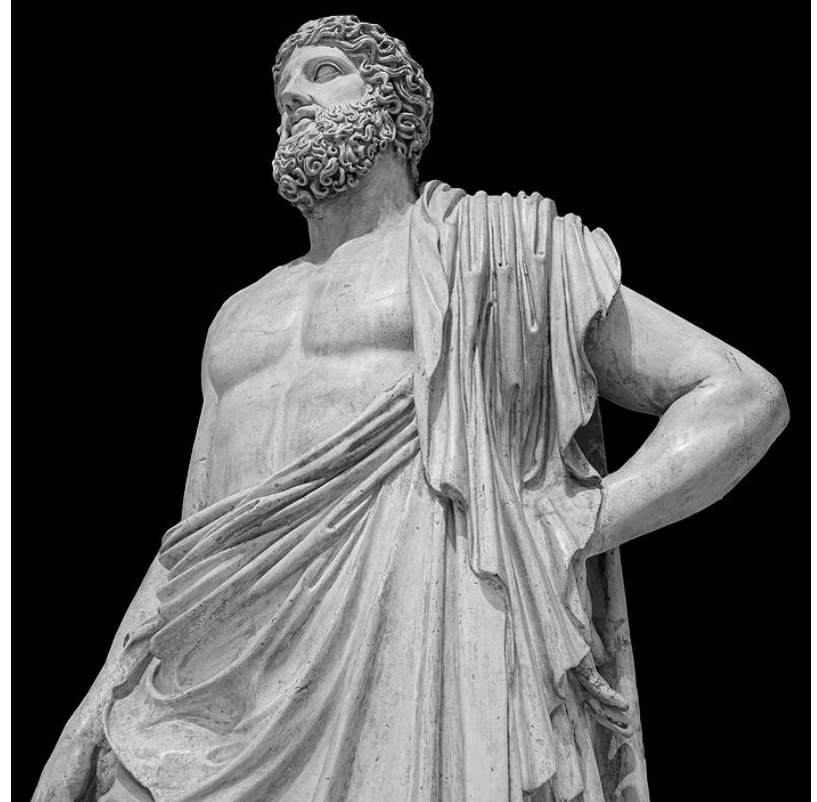
What **impressions** do you get of the characters in the story so far?  
Had you heard about these figures from mythology before?

Zeus

Hades

Demeter

Persephone





## Reading (3)

**Read** the text. **Answer** the questions in the red box.

Demeter had no idea where Persephone had gone. She searched the earth for her, growing increasingly miserable with despair. Finally she went to Helios, the Sun God, for help with finding her beloved Persephone. Helios had seen Hades take Persephone on his daily journey across the sky and, taking pity on Demeter, he told her that her daughter was in the underworld. He counselled her to come to terms with this, stating that Hades was not a bad match for her daughter. Married to the King of the underworld, Persephone would become its queen. Demeter ignored the advice of Helios and continued to grieve over the loss of her daughter. Neglecting her duties as the Goddess of the Harvest, no crops grew on the earth for a whole year, plants withered and died, and a famine struck the land of the mortals.

1. Who does Demeter go to for help?
2. What is Helios' advice to Demeter?
3. How did Demeter express her grief? What effect did it have on the mortals?

## Reading (4)

**Read** the text. **Answer** the questions in the red box.

Meanwhile, in the underworld, Persephone was deeply depressed. Hades tried every day to bring her out of herself. He eventually succeeded in showing her around his kingdom. Persephone found that there were many souls in the underworld who needed her kindness and comfort. At the same time, she was warming to Hades who had shown great persistence in wooing her. As the famine intensified in the mortal world, Zeus decided to send his son, Hermes, to negotiate with Hades to return Persephone to her mother. Persephone was finally persuaded to eat something, having refused all food up until that point. She ate 6 pomegranate seeds offered to her by Hades. When Hermes saw this, he realised that he was too late to save the girl completely: anyone who eats the produce of the underworld is doomed to remain there.

1. What did Persephone discover when she explored the underworld?
2. Why did Zeus send Hermes to the underworld?

## Reading (5)

**Read** the text. **Answer** the questions in the red box.

He used all of his negotiating powers and managed to persuade Hades to allow the girl to return to her mother for six months of the year, and to return to the underworld as its queen for the other six. In the spring, Demeter makes sure that all of the flowers bloom and the crops grow in order to welcome her daughter back from the underworld. In the autumn, when Persephone willingly returns to Hades, Demeter cries and in her sorrow the leaves fall to the ground and the soil becomes barren for six months.



1. What compromise did Hermes find with Hades?
2. What happens in the spring and autumn, according to the myth?



# The natural world: collocation practice

How many **noun + verb collocations** can you form? You can use an online dictionary to help you.

E.g.: harvest + to fail → *The harvest failed that year, causing a food shortage.*

harvest

leaves

famine

produce

flowers

seeds

crops

barren

*to strike*

*to become*

*to harvest*

*to grow*

*to fail*

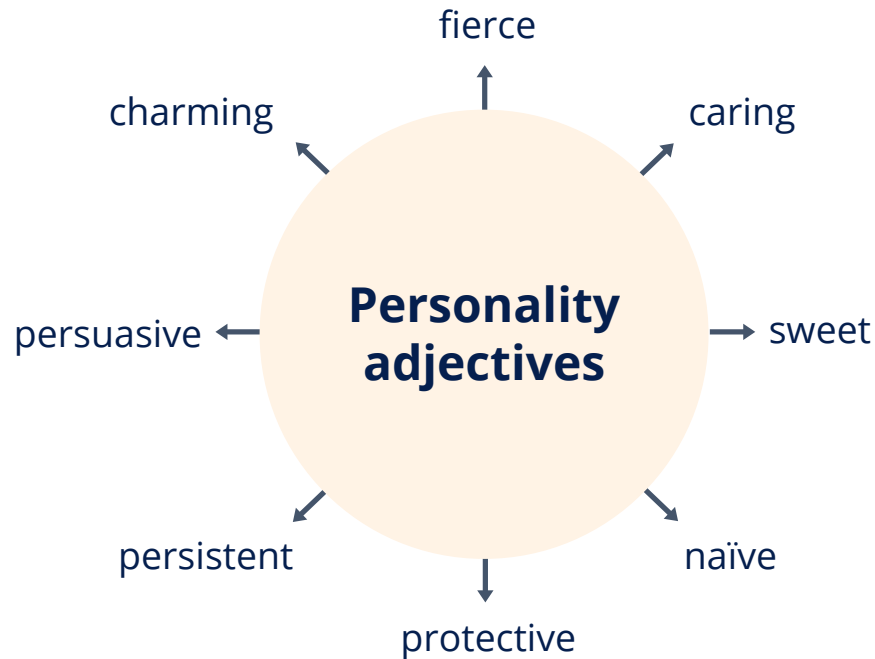
*to wither*

*to bloom*



# Describing personality

1. Which adjectives below describe the different **characters** in the text?
2. Would you use any of these adjectives to **describe yourself**?
3. Can you think of **antonyms** for these adjectives?





## Discuss

**One of the themes of the story is parental love. How is this shown in the story?**

**Can you identify any other themes?**



## Discuss

**Did you find anything in the story shocking or surprising?**

**What real world event(s) does this myth attempt to explain, do you think?**

**Do you know of any other myths that relate to the changing seasons?**

**Why do you think the gods were portrayed as doing both bad and good, and having flaws?**





# End of the lesson

Idiom

***To be in season***

**Meaning:** (of fruit or vegetables) the time of year when this produce is plentiful

**Example:** Strawberries are in season now – let's make jam!



# Additional practice



# Fill in the gaps

Complete the sentences using the words from the text.

1 Young children are often very \_\_\_\_\_.

2 \_\_\_\_\_ someone means taking them by force.

3 Earthquakes often create a \_\_\_\_\_ in the earth.

4 We are \_\_\_\_\_ when we feel very, very sad.

5 After someone dies, we \_\_\_\_\_ for them.

chasm  
naive  
to abduct  
miserable  
to grieve



# Writing activity

Use the **prompt** below to write a short text based on your reading in this lesson. Try to use as much vocabulary from the lesson as possible.

Write a **journal entry** from the perspective of one of the characters from the story.

For example, you could imagine the first day in the underworld from the perspective of Persephone.



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## Discuss



**How do the  
changing seasons  
affect you?**

**Do you have a favourite  
time of year?**





# Answer key

**P.3:** 1. (e) 2. (b) 3. (d) 4. (a) 5. (c)

**P.7:** 1. grant; permission 2. abducted/kidnapped 3. harvest 4. naïve 5. chasm

**P.12:**

harvest + (fail)

leaves + (grow, wither)

famine + (strike)

produce + (grow)

flowers + (grow, bloom)

seeds+ (grow)

crops + (grow, harvest, fail, wither)

barren + (become)

**P.19:** 1. naïve 2. Abducting 3. chasm 4. miserable 5. grieve



# Summary

## Text about Greek mythology:

- *naïve; to wither; doomed; to grieve; chasm*
- *One day, when the girl was picking flowers, a **chasm** opened in the earth.*
- *Demeter ignored the advice of Helios and continued to **grieve** over the loss of her daughter.*

## Opinions on the Greek myths:

- *to play a role → This myth **played a role** in explaining the changing of the seasons.*
- *fierce → She was a **fierce** goddess.*



# Vocabulary

naïve

to wither

doomed

to grieve

chasm

to play a role

fierce



