

The Myth of Persephone

Name _____

Persephone was the lovely daughter of Demeter, the Greek goddess of harvest. One day as Persephone walked through a field picking flowers, Hades, the god of the underworld, kidnapped her. He caused a huge chasm to open in the ground beneath her. Persephone fell into the chasm, and it closed over her. She was not seen again for a long time.

Demeter grieved for her lost daughter. She lit a torch and went searching for her all through the world. "Have you seen my daughter?" she asked the trees, the clouds, the wind, and the blowing grasses. But no one could tell her where Persephone was. In her despair, Demeter forgot to take care of the earth. The ground dried up, and the grain could not grow. The trees produced no fruit. The sad earth shivered and mourned with Demeter.

Finally, Demeter asked the sun, "Have you seen my daughter?"

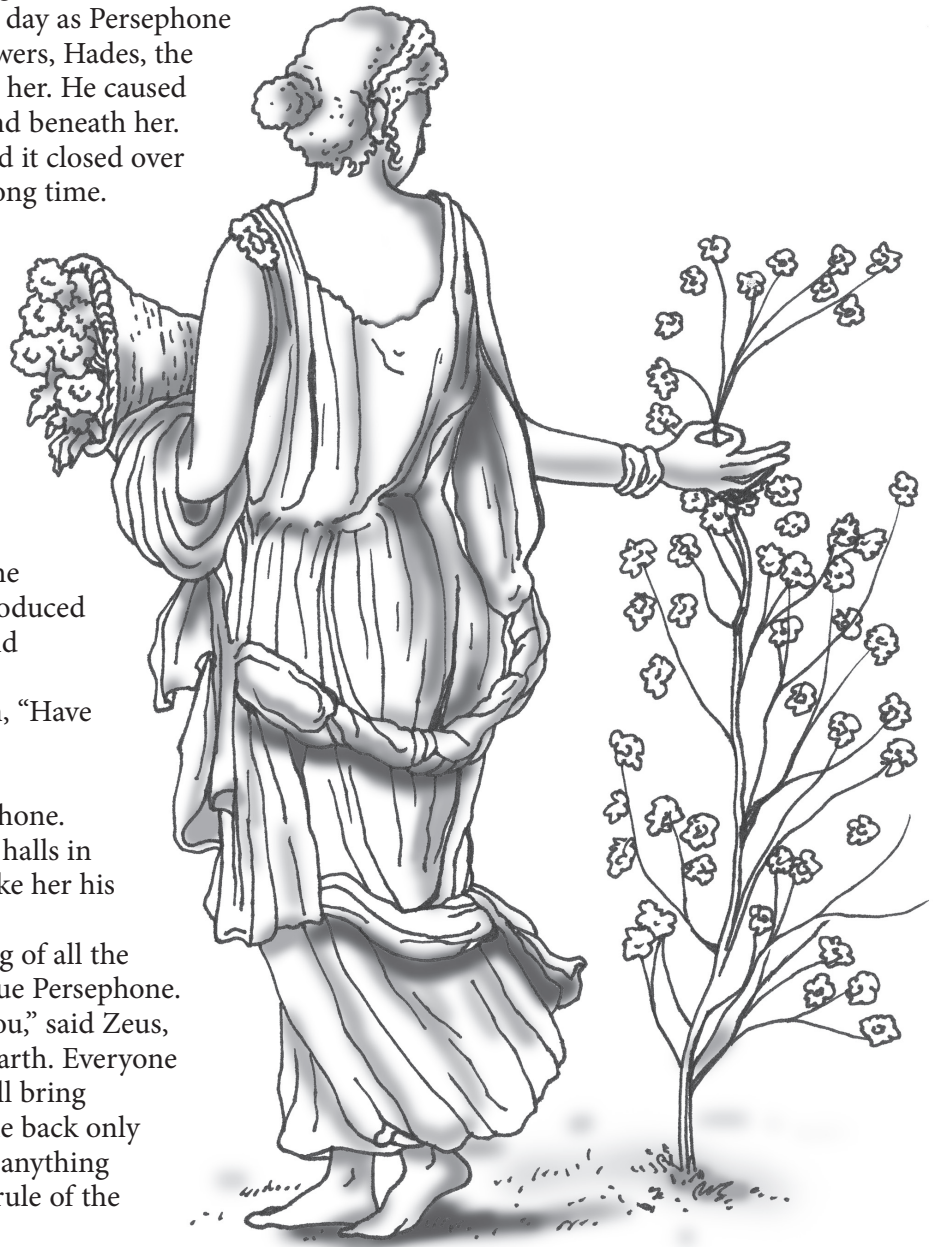
The sun, who saw everything, answered, "Yes, I have seen Persephone. Hades has taken her captive to his halls in the underworld. He intends to make her his queen."

Demeter went to Zeus, the king of all the gods, and begged him to help rescue Persephone.

"I can see that if I don't help you," said Zeus, "you will continue to neglect the earth. Everyone will die of hunger. Very well—I will bring Persephone back. But she can come back only if she has neither eaten nor drunk anything in the realm of Hades. This is the rule of the underworld."

Hades knew about this rule. So he tricked Persephone into eating some pomegranate seeds. "Persephone may go for now," said Hades. "But she has eaten of my food. She must return to my realm for part of every year."

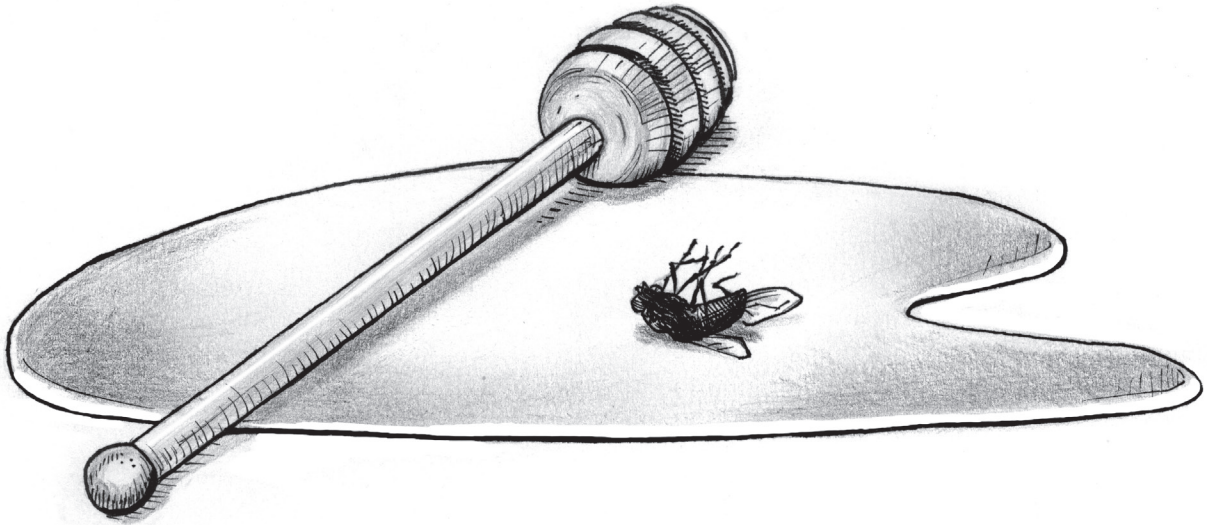
And so each year Persephone returns to her mother. When she comes, the earth rejoices, and spring flowers bloom. The seeds begin to grow, the sprouts shoot up from the ground, and the earth produces a harvest. But then each year when Persephone must go back to the underworld, the earth mourns. Winter returns, the earth grows cold and dry, and nothing grows.



The Flies and the Honey Pot

Adapted from a fable by Aesop

Name _____



A pot of honey had been upset in a shop, and the flies swarmed in to eat it up. None of the flies would move from the spot while there was even one drop of honey left to eat. But after a while their feet became so sticky that they could not fly away. One by one, they began to smother in the luscious sweet liquid.

“We are miserable creatures,” said one. “For the sake of an hour’s pleasure we have thrown away our lives!”

❁
Greediness has its costs.
❁

The Miller, His Son, and Their Donkey

Adapted from a fable by Faernus

Name _____

Characters

Miller
Miller's son
Young girl

Old man
Woman
Townsmen

MILLER and MILLER'S SON drive an imaginary donkey before them as they walk.

MILLER: Poor beast. So stubborn and slow. Probably won't bring in much money at the fair.

SON: Yes, Father, but he is strong. Perhaps someone will buy him to pull a heavy plow.

YOUNG GIRL approaches, laughing and pointing.

GIRL: Look! Did anyone ever see such fools, trudging along the road on foot when they could be riding?

MILLER: Quick, boy, get on the donkey.

SON climbs onto the donkey. Exit YOUNG GIRL.

SON: Father, won't it take even longer now to get to the fair? The donkey hates to be ridden.

MILLER: Perhaps so. But at least we made that girl happy. I won't be laughed at by a girl.

OLD MAN approaches, frowning and rubbing his chin.

OLD MAN: Greetings, gentlemen. You've come along at just the right time. You've proved the point I've just been making to my friends. No one has respect for old age these days. And here is this idle young man riding while his old father has to walk. Get down, you rascal! Let the old man rest his weary limbs.

MILLER: Son, do as he says. I won't have the old man thinking my son doesn't respect me.

SON: *(sighing)* As you say, Father.

SON and MILLER change places on the imaginary donkey. Exit OLD MAN.

SON: It seems the donkey has picked up the pace now, Father.

MILLER: He always responds well when I ride him. He knows who's boss.

WOMAN approaches, hand on hip.

WOMAN: *(angrily)* Why, you lazy old fellow! How can you ride on the beast while that poor little lad can hardly keep up with you on foot?

MILLER: I stand corrected, madam.

SON: Father, what will we do now?

MILLER: The last man thought ill of us while my son rode and I walked. Now this woman thinks ill of us for the opposite reason. Well, son, you might as well get up on the donkey with me. That would make both of them happy.

MILLER pulls SON up on the donkey behind him. Exit WOMAN.

SON: Look, Father. Isn't that the town just up ahead?

MILLER: You're right, son. It won't be long now.

TOWNSMAN approaches.

TOWNSMAN: Please, honest friend, is that your own donkey you're riding?

MILLER: Yes.

TOWNSMAN: Oh, I would not have thought so by the way you load him down. Why, you two fellows are better able to carry the poor beast than he is to carry you!

MILLER: Anything to please you, sir. You heard the man, son. We'll tie the donkey's legs together and hang him from a pole. Then we'll carry him between us on our shoulders.

MILLER and SON walk with the donkey on a pole between them, straining beneath its weight.

MILLER: Careful on this bridge, son. The poor beast doesn't seem to like the noise of the crowd. He's getting awfully fidgety . . . watch out!

MILLER and SON struggle for a moment and then drop the donkey into the water.

MILLER: In trying to please everyone, I've pleased no one, son. And I've lost my donkey into the bargain. Let's get out of here!

The Lion and the Shepherd

Adapted from a fable by Phaedrus

Name _____

Characters

Lion
Shepherd
Shepherd's wife

Servant
Accuser
Judge

LION steps on a thorn; begins groaning in pain and biting at its paw. SHEPHERD sits nearby. LION sees SHEPHERD, approaches limping, and then lies on the ground with its paw in the air.

SHEPHERD: Now that is strange behavior for a lion. Easy, fella. Let's have a look at that paw.

SHEPHERD cautiously takes the LION's paw, examines it, and nods.

SHEPHERD: You've stepped on a thorn, haven't you? Easy now. Just relax while I pull it out for you.

SHEPHERD pulls out thorn. LION sits up, rubs head on SHEPHERD's leg, and then exits.

SHEPHERD: Glad the poor fella let me help him. He must have been in desperate pain to act so tame.

SHEPHERD exits but returns a moment later, hands tied behind back, accompanied by SHEPHERD'S WIFE and SERVANT. ACCUSER follows.

ACCUSER: I tell you, woman. It was your husband who stole one of my sheep. We stopped our flocks to drink at the same stream. I noticed it missing right after he left.

SHEPHERD'S WIFE: My husband is not a thief! It's true that you found the sheep with his flock, but he did not steal it. The sheep probably wandered off on its own!

SERVANT: Now, folks, we'll let the judge decide this case. Come along quietly.

They all approach JUDGE, who is seated. Lights go down.

Lights come up again. JUDGE is still seated. SHEPHERD is kneeling. SHEPHERD's WIFE is weeping. ACCUSER stands nearby, looking triumphant.

JUDGE: I have no choice but to believe your accuser, Shepherd. The sheep was found with your flock. It's your word against his. You know the law. Sheep steal-

ing is a crime punishable by death. You will go to prison for now. You are condemned to be thrown to the lions.

Lights go down.

As lights come up, JUDGE, ACCUSER, and SHEPHERD's WIFE stand together. SERVANT holds onto SHEPHERD's arm. LION waits in corner.

JUDGE: You may speak your final words, Shepherd.

SHEPHERD: To my beloved wife, I say goodbye. Thank you for standing by me in my reproach. To my accuser I say, let justice be done. If you have accused me justly, may you be rewarded. If not, may the truth be brought to light.

JUDGE: Servant, take him into the arena.

SERVANT: Yes, Your Honor.

SERVANT leads SHEPHERD to corner where LION waits. SERVANT opens a door, pushes SHEPHERD through it, and shuts it quickly. SHEPHERD and LION face one another in silence. Then LION slowly approaches, rubs his head against SHEPHERD's leg, and places his paw on SHEPHERD's knee.

JUDGE: What can this mean? I've never seen anything like it! Servant, bring the shepherd out!

SERVANT opens the door and lets SHEPHERD out of the arena.

SHEPHERD: Your Honor, justice has been done this day. The lion is the same one I helped long ago in the forest. He recognizes my innocence and refuses to put me to death.

JUDGE: I believe you, sir. Your compassion and kindness must be remarkable for this ferocious beast to show you such gentleness. Servant, see that the lion is set free again in the forest. Shepherd, you are pardoned this day.

SHEPHERD runs to his wife as ACCUSER exits angrily.

The Wind and the Sun

Adapted from a fable by Aesop

Name _____

Characters

Wind
Sun
Traveler

Narrator 1
Narrator 2
Chorus (a group of any
size that speaks its lines
in unison)

Some Greek dramas included a chorus. The chorus was a group of actors who usually did not participate in the action of the play. Instead, they commented on the play and often explained its theme to the audience. They sometimes sang, and other times they spoke their lines in unison.

WIND and SUN stand up on chairs, opposite one another. WIND is angry. SUN is calm.

NARRATOR 1: A dispute arose between the wind and the sun.

WIND: I am stronger than you! I can lift objects off the ground and set them down somewhere else. That is more than you can do.

SUN: You *are* strong. But I think in a contest between the two of us, you would find that I am stronger.

TRAVELER enters, wearing a coat and glancing anxiously at the sky as he walks.

WIND: Let's settle the point, then. See that traveler walking along the road? Whichever of us can make him take off his coat soonest is truly the stronger one.

SUN: Fair enough. You begin.

WIND and TRAVELER act out the following scene as it is narrated.

NARRATOR 2: The wind began and blew with all his might.

CHORUS: A cold, fierce blast!

NARRATOR 1: Stronger and stronger he blew.

NARRATOR 2: But the stronger he blew, the closer the traveler wrapped his cloak around him, and the tighter he grasped it with his hands.

CHORUS: Brrrrrrrr!

NARRATOR 1: At last the wind retreated, seeing it was time for him to give up.

SUN: Now it is my turn.

SUN and TRAVELER act out the following scene as it is narrated.

NARRATOR 2: The sun broke from the clouds and beamed down on the traveler.

CHORUS: A warm, pleasant glow!

NARRATOR 1: Brighter and brighter the sun beamed, until he had frightened away the damp air and the cold.

CHORUS: Ahhhhhh!

NARRATOR 2: The traveler welcomed the warmth and loosened his grasp on his cloak. As the sun shone still brighter, he sat down, overcome with the heat, and threw off his coat completely.

WIND: Sun, you have conquered fairly. Now I see that persuasion is better than force.

CHORUS: A kind and gentle manner will open a man's heart sooner than all the threats in the world!

The Old Woman and the Physician

From a fable by Aesop

Name _____

Characters

Old Woman
Physician
Narrator 1

Narrator 2
Chorus (a group of any
size that speaks its lines
in unison)

Some Greek dramas included a chorus. The chorus was a group of actors who usually did not participate in the action of the play. Instead they commented on the play and often explained its theme to the audience. They sometimes sang, and other times they spoke their lines in unison.

OLD WOMAN sits in a chair.

NARRATOR 1: An old woman had become blind, so she called in a physician.

PHYSICIAN enters and examines her eyes.

OLD WOMAN: Good doctor, if you will restore my eyesight, I will give you a handsome reward.

CHORUS: Ohhhhhh! A handsome reward!

OLD WOMAN: But if you do not cure me, you will receive nothing.

CHORUS: Nothing! All that work for nothing!

PHYSICIAN: Woman, I accept your bargain.

NARRATOR 2: From time to time, the physician tinkered with the old woman's eyes.

NARRATOR 1: He put drops in them.

PHYSICIAN puts eye drops in OLD WOMAN's eyes.

PHYSICIAN: This might sting a little, madam.

CHORUS: Ow!

NARRATOR 2: He shined a bright light in them.

PHYSICIAN: You might see a faint glow, madam.

CHORUS: *(covering eyes)* Very faint indeed!

NARRATOR 1: But every time he visited her, he also carried off some of her furniture, paintings, and jewelry.

PHYSICIAN carries off items while OLD WOMAN stares straight ahead.

CHORUS: *(gasps)* Stop, thief!

NARRATOR 2: After a time he began to treat her eyes in earnest and cured her.

OLD WOMAN: I can see! Oh, doctor, I can see!

PHYSICIAN: *(clearing throat, coughing)* And now, madam, the . . . ah . . . little reward you mentioned?

CHORUS: The reward! The handsome reward!

OLD WOMAN: *(looking around the room)* Hmmm. That will take some time, sir. I don't have it with me today. Give me a little time.

NARRATOR 1: Day after day, the physician pleaded with the woman for his payment. But she kept putting him off with excuses.

NARRATOR 2: At last, the physician summoned her before the judge. The judge called upon her for her defense.

OLD WOMAN: Your Honor, what this good doctor says is true enough. I promised to pay him a generous fee if my sight were restored . . .

CHORUS: A generous fee! A handsome reward!

OLD WOMAN: and nothing if my eyes were not cured.

CHORUS: Nothing! All that work for nothing!

OLD WOMAN: He says that I am now cured. But I say I can't possibly be. Before my blindness came on, I could see all sorts of furniture and goods in my house. But now when he says he has restored my sight, I cannot see a single one of them.

CHORUS: He who deceives must be prepared for the consequences!