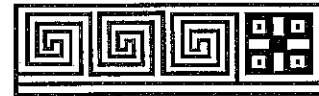


ARIADNE



(8) or (7)

5 pages

Ariadne, known as the High Fruitful Mother or Most Holy, showed great resourcefulness and courage. When fourteen Athenians arrived at Crete for the sacrifices to the Minotaur, Ariadne begged Daedalus to help her save Theseus. She had fallen in love with him and admired his courage. Ariadne took the magic ball of thread, giving it to Theseus in exchange for his promise to marry her and take her to Athens. But after their escape, Dionysus appeared to Theseus in a dream, telling him to leave Ariadne on the island of Naxos. Theseus abandoned Ariadne, who quickly succumbed to Dionysus's affections. They returned together to Olympus, and she eventually had four children with Dionysus.

Presentation Suggestions

The narrators should sit on either side of the stage. King Minos can sit in an ornate chair or on a high stool to one side. Theseus should have the king on one side and Ariadne on the other side. Dionysus should be on the other side of Ariadne. The minor characters, Daedalus and the Athenian, can be standing slightly behind the other characters.

Props

King Minos can wear a crown. Ariadne should be dressed as a princess. Theseus could carry a sword. The other characters can be dressed simply. Consider having a ball of yarn on the stage. Consider creating a backdrop that shows islands and sailing ships on the horizon.

Delivery Suggestions

Ariadne should sound persuasive when talking with King Minos and Daedalus. She should then sound angry when abandoned by Theseus. King Minos should sound autocratic and cold about the sacrifices. Theseus should sound confident and bold. Dionysus should sound reassuring and kind.

Characters

- ▣ Narrator 1
- ▣ Narrator 2
- ▣ King Minos
- ▣ Theseus
- ▣ Ariadne
- ▣ Daedalus
- ▣ Athenian
- ▣ Dionysus,

ARIADNE

Narrator 1: Many years ago, King Minos enraged Poseidon, who had demanded that a white bull be sacrificed to him. But the king's wife, Pasiphaë, was entranced with the white bull and entreated King Minos to spare it. When King Minos honored his wife's wishes to let the white bull live, Poseidon punished them by causing Pasiphaë to give birth to a monster, the Minotaur. This monster ate nothing but human flesh.

Narrator 2: Daedalus constructed a labyrinth under the palace in Crete with a maze of passageways impossible to navigate. It kept the Minotaur imprisoned, and as long as it had enough flesh to eat, the monster was quiet.

Narrator 1: To keep the monster fed, King Minos had to raid nearby islands, bringing back fresh victims. But one day the tables were turned, and King Minos's son was accidentally killed while visiting Athens. King Minos seized upon this opportunity to threaten Athens with an attack unless they provided seven young women and seven young men as sacrifices for the Minotaur every nine years.

Narrator 2: The King of Athens, King Aegeus, consented, infuriating the Athenians who resented seeing their youth murdered. Twice, the sacrifice was paid. But as the third time approached, a young hero became known for his daring exploits. King Aegeus discovered the young man was in truth his son, Theseus, who volunteered to take the place of one of the next victims. He was confident that he could slay the Minotaur and stop the senseless sacrifices. His father agreed to let him try, and the seven young women and seven young men set sail for Crete.

Narrator 1: King Minos and Pasiphaë had a lovely daughter, Ariadne, and with the arrival of the fourteen victims, our story of Ariadne truly begins.

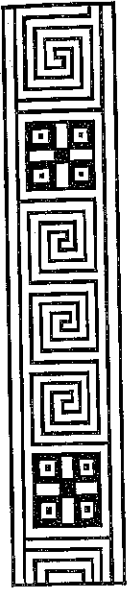
King Minos: Bring the victims to me! I want to ensure that they are indeed going to satisfy the Minotaur. Who speaks for the group?

Theseus: I speak for the Athenians. We are prepared to meet the Minotaur, but I request that you let us go with honor.

King Minos: What do you mean by that request?

Theseus: I only ask that you let me take my sword with me.

King Minos: That will hardly save you from the Minotaur, but go ahead if you think it will bring you honor.



Narrator 2: Ariadne was quite taken with Theseus's confidence and demeanor. She despised the thought that he was destined to die to satisfy this gruesome beast's appetites.

Ariadne: Father, why must we sacrifice these fine young people?

King Minos: You know why, my daughter. If the Minotaur doesn't eat regularly, he will plague us with his howling. Try not to think about it.

Narrator 1: But Ariadne couldn't stop thinking about the handsome young Athenian. She realized that she had fallen in love with him. That night, she went to see Daedalus to request his assistance.

Ariadne: Daedalus, I need your help.

Daedalus: Of course, I will do anything in my power to help you.

Ariadne: I don't want to see Theseus and the other Athenians killed by the Minotaur. Theseus has a sword, but even if he manages to kill the Minotaur, how would he find his way out of the labyrinth?

Daedalus: That is easy to remedy. Take this magic ball of thread. Tell Theseus to tie the end to the gate and to let it out as he enters the labyrinth. Then he can find his way out.

Ariadne: Thank you, Daedalus. I'll be forever in your debt if this works.

Narrator 2: Later, Ariadne sneaked to the prison so that she could speak to Theseus.

Ariadne: Theseus, I have come to help you escape the labyrinth. You'll have to kill the Minotaur on your own, but if you succeed, I can get you out.

Theseus: How can you do that?

Ariadne: There is a way, but before I tell you, you must make me a promise.

Theseus: What is that?

Ariadne: I want you to marry me and take me back to Athens with you.

Theseus: If I escape, I will gladly marry you. Our ship is waiting for us to escape, and then you can return with me.

Ariadne: Then here is what you do. Take this magic ball of thread. Tie the end to the gate when you enter. Keep unrolling it as you search for the Minotaur. When you are ready to escape, you can follow it back.

Theseus: Thank you Ariadne. This will be a great help. You are as clever as you are beautiful.

Narrator 1: Theseus carefully tied the ball of thread to the gate. As soon as he set the ball down, it began to unroll, leading him through the winding passages and up and down the stairs. Theseus followed it until he heard the snoring of the Minotaur. He wasted no time in attacking the monster. The monster roared so loudly that the island shook. But Theseus had surprised the monster. He leaped at the Minotaur, killing it with his bare hands. He followed the thread back to the gate where Ariadne waited for him.

Ariadne: You made it! Let's free the others and then set sail for Athens.

Theseus: Thank you, Ariadne, but first we have to ensure that your father doesn't follow us.

Ariadne: I have an idea. Have some of the men go to my father's ships and bore holes in them. That will slow them down, and we will be able to escape.

Narrator 2: They soon set sail. Theseus was delighted at bringing back a beautiful bride, but in the middle of the first night of the return journey, he had a disturbing dream. He went to one of his fellow Athenians to discuss it.

Theseus: I have had the most distressing dream.

Athenian: Tell me about it, Theseus.

Theseus: I dreamed that Dionysus spoke to me. It was so real that it seemed like he was here on the ship.

Athenian: What did he say?

Theseus: He told me that I was forbidden to marry Ariadne, and he insisted that I set her ashore on the island of Naxos.

Athenian: You have no choice, Theseus. If Dionysus truly wants Ariadne, he'll let nothing stand in his way of getting her.

Theseus: But I promised to marry her, and I've grown to love her.

Athenian: Do you want to jeopardize all our lives? You have no choice.

Narrator 1: When they arrived at Naxos, Theseus suggested that everyone go ashore and rest. Ariadne fell into a deep sleep, and while she slept, Theseus and the others slipped away. Soon Ariadne woke up and saw a young god approaching her.

Ariadne: Where is everyone? And who are you?

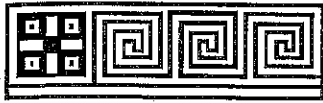
Dionysus: I am Dionysus, and you have been sleeping soundly. How did you get here?

Ariadne: My father is King Minos, and I helped Theseus and the other Athenians escape from the Minotaur in the labyrinth. Theseus promised to marry me, but now I am here alone.

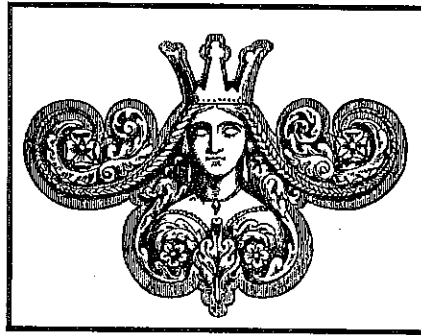
Dionysus: Theseus is not worthy of you. Look, his ship is nearing the horizon as he returns without you. Come with me, and I'll take you to Olympus where you'll rule alongside me.

Narrator 2: Ariadne was enchanted with the handsome god and agreed to return with him. When they married, Dionysus presented her with a golden diadem made by Hephaestus. This gift later became a constellation.

Narrator 1: Ariadne had four children, named Thoas, Staphylus, Oenopion, and Peparethus. She lived a long life alongside her husband.



ATHENA



8 or 7

4 pages

Athena's name comes from the Sumerian *Anatha*, meaning queen of heaven. She is also known as Pallas, which means maiden in Greek. In this myth, Zeus fears that his first wife, Metis, will give birth to a son who will take away his throne. He tricks Metis into becoming a fly and swallows her whole. When Metis gives birth, her daughter Athena springs to life, fully grown, from Zeus's head. Athena becomes a just, although stern, ruler. She deals with the young mortal girl Arachne's boastful ways by turning her into a spider, and she successfully challenges Poseidon to gain control of Athens.

Presentation Suggestions

The two narrators can stand to one side, with Zeus next to them. Metis and Hephaestus can be next to Zeus, exiting or sitting down after their lines. Athena should be in the center of the stage, with Zeus on one side and Arachne and Poseidon on the other.

Props

Zeus, Metis, Hephaestus, Athena, and Poseidon can be dressed in robes or regal clothing. Athena could wear headgear to symbolize the helmet she is wearing when born. She could add a shawl over her head to disguise herself as the old woman. Hephaestus could carry a hammer. Arachne should be dressed in simple clothes, befitting a mortal. The stage could be decorated with a loom or with fake spider webs and plastic spiders commonly available at Halloween.

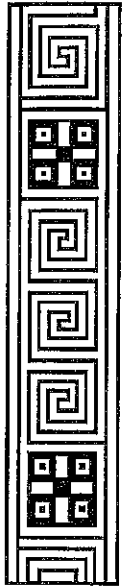
Delivery Suggestions

Zeus should sound powerful, but frustrated when the pounding begins in his head. Athena should change her voice, depending on her lines. When disguised as the old woman, she should sound appropriately old. When she reveals herself to Arachne, she should sound challenging and later angry. When dealing with Poseidon, she should sound confident.

Characters

- ▣ Narrator 1
- ▣ Narrator 2
- ▣ Zeus
- ▣ Metis
- ▣ Hephaestus
- ▣ Arachne
- ▣ Athena
- ▣ Poseidon

ATHENA



Narrator 1: Zeus ruled Mother Earth with great strength and power, but he longed to have another child. Although he had several wives, he appreciated the counsel and wisdom of his first wife, Metis, the goddess of prudence.

Narrator 2: But Mother Earth warned Zeus that if Metis gave birth to a son, the son would dethrone him in the same fashion that Zeus had dethroned his father, Cronus.

Zeus: I can't risk losing everything to a son, but I don't want to lose Metis altogether. I'll just have to trick her into staying with me in another form.

Narrator 1: Zeus called Metis to him and suggested that they play a game of changing shapes.

Zeus: Metis, I need some diversion. Let's play our shape-changing game.

Metis: What fun, Zeus! I'll begin the game by becoming a large animal!

Narrator 2: Metis changed into a lion, followed by a fox, and an assortment of animals of varying shapes and sizes.

Zeus: Well done, Metis, but can you become something very small?

Metis: Of course I can! Watch this!

Narrator 1: Metis changed herself into a fly, and in a heartbeat, Zeus opened wide his mouth and swallowed her whole!

Narrator 2: Metis realized she was trapped inside Zeus, so she decided to make the best of it. She settled herself in his head and whispered advice to him from within. But what he didn't realize was that Metis was soon to give birth to a daughter. While inside Zeus's head, she wove a robe and hammered out a helmet for the child.

Narrator 1: As you can imagine, the hammering gave Zeus a pounding headache. He called for the other gods to help him out of his misery. One who came was his son, Hephaestus, who was the god of smiths and fire.

Zeus: What am I to do about this intolerable pounding in my head?

Hephaestus: I can help you, but you'll have to trust me.

Zeus: Anything, Hephaestus, just stop this pounding.

Hephaestus: Give me a moment to use my tools, and the pain will soon be nothing but a memory.

Narrator 2: Hephaestus grasped his tools and split open his father's skull. Athena sprang out, wearing the robe and helmet Metis had created. Zeus was relieved to see that Metis had not borne him a son after all.

Narrator 1: Athena, known as the goddess of wisdom, devoted herself to just causes. She often led armies into battle, alongside Nike, the spirit of victory. During peaceful times she taught crafts and fine arts to others. Arachne, a simple mortal girl from the country who showed great talent with weaving, became one of Athena's favorite students. But Arachne was not always wise, and she took to boasting about her skills.

Arachne: My weaving is so beautiful that nothing compares with it. Not even Athena can exceed my talent!

Narrator 2: When Athena got word of Arachne's boastful ways, she disguised herself as an old woman and spoke to Arachne to see if the rumors were true.

Athena: Your work is lovely, young woman. You show great talent at weaving.

Arachne: Yes, my work gives me great pleasure, especially since it is finer than any other's work, even that of Athena's.

Athena: Why compare yourself to the gods when you can be the very best among mortals?

Arachne: Because I know I'm the best. If Athena thinks she is better, she can just come here and prove it!

Narrator 1: With that challenge in the air, Athena felt compelled to throw off her disguise and confront the foolish Arachne.

Athena: You are not only foolish, but you are also reckless. Let's settle this now with a competition. Sit down at your loom, and let's see just who is the best!

Narrator 2: The goddess and the mortal began to weave. Athena created a majestic portrayal of the gods of Olympus, while Arachne wove an impudent scene of Zeus and his wives. Athena was so appalled at Arachne's arrogance that she tore the tapestry to shreds and struck Arachne with her shuttle. Suddenly,

Arachne felt her head shrink to the size of a pea and her fingers change into long, nimble legs. She had been turned into a spider.

Athena: Impertinent girl, as a spider you can spin and weave forever and challenge no gods or mortals! I'll spare your life, though I could crush you in a moment. Get to work, little one! Weave forever.

Narrator 1: While Arachne worked, Athena, a stern goddess, watched from above. She knew that mortals must worship the gods, and she believed that Arachne's fate was just. She also enjoyed her role as a goddess and especially wanted to rule Athens, her favorite city in Greece.

Narrator 2: Unfortunately, Poseidon, lord of the sea, also wanted to control Athens. One day, as the two gods stood on the outskirts of the city, they decided they would settle the matter between themselves.

Poseidon: Let's have a contest to determine who shall have Athens. Let's say that whoever gives the people the finest gift will rule.

Athena: That seems fair enough. Why don't you begin?

Poseidon: This will be easy enough, for I am going to give the people a marvelous spring, bubbling with cool water.

Narrator 1: And with those words, he struck a cliff with his trident, and a spring came forth. The people of Athens gasped at its beauty, but when they tasted the water, they discovered that it was as salty as the sea Poseidon ruled.

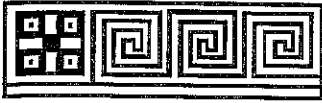
Athena: Now it's my turn to settle this matter for eternity.

Narrator 2: Athena planted an olive tree in a tiny crevice on the rock. The people had never seen an olive tree before and marveled at its food, oil, and wood. They judged that Athena's gift was the better of the two, giving them riches forever.

Poseidon: I concede, Athena. Your gift pleases them more than mine.

Narrator 1: Athena claimed Athens as her own, and she watched over it from her temple on top of the Acropolis.

Narrator 2: With her wise and just leadership and her teaching skills, Athenians prospered, learning arts and crafts and becoming famous for their skills.



CHIRON AND ASCLEPIUS



7 or 6

4 pages

Chiron was one of the centaurs, but he differed from this group of unruly, half-beast, half-man creatures. Chiron was kindly, and he was skilled in all manner of arts and sciences. The gods came to rely on him as a learned and just tutor, bringing him their favorite children to rear. Apollo brought Asclepius to Chiron, who raised him like a beloved son, teaching him the healing arts. Eventually, Asclepius left Chiron to heal the people of Greece. Asclepius became so skilled that he could raise the dead, incurring the wrath of Hades, god of the Underworld, who was being deprived of dead souls. Finally, Asclepius's practice of interfering with fate so angered Zeus that Zeus killed him. Apollo sought revenge by killing the Cyclopes that helped Zeus, earning Apollo a year of slavery on Earth. After being injured in a fight between the centaurs and Heracles, Chiron begged Zeus for mortality so that he could die.

Presentation

The characters can stand in the order of their speaking parts: Narrator 1, Narrator 2, Apollo, Chiron, Asclepius, Hades, and Zeus.

Props

The setting can be an outdoor setting. A mural could show a cave in the background. Chiron could wear a costume that indicates he is a centaur. Asclepius could wear robes and carry a staff that has an artificial snake wrapped around it.

Delivery Suggestions

The characters can use normal voices.

Characters

- ▣ Narrator 1
- ▣ Narrator 2
- ▣ Apollo
- ▣ Chiron
- ▣ Asclepius
- ▣ Hades
- ▣ Zeus

CHIRON AND ASCLEPIUS

Narrator 1: Zeus suspected that Ixion, King of the Lapith people, wanted to carry off his wife, Hera. He created a cloud as a test to see if Ixion would be tempted by it. As he suspected, Ixion thought the cloud was Hera. He married it, which incurred the wrath of Zeus.

Narrator 2: This union prompted an unusual result, the birth of the first centaurs. The cloud emptied them onto the land. The centaurs were wild creatures, half man and half horse. They were vulgar and crude, living without controls of any sort.

Narrator 1: To punish Ixion, Zeus condemned him to whirl on a wheel in the Underworld for all of eternity. The centaurs were left to wreak havoc on the land, kidnapping Lapith women and trampling the crops.

Narrator 2: One centaur was different. Chiron looked like the others, but he was the son of Cronus and therefore immortal. He was a fine teacher, the greatest in all of Greece. He tutored many royal children. One day Apollo brought his son to Chiron.

Apollo: Chiron, this is my son, Asclepius.

Chiron: Good morning, Apollo and Asclepius.

Asclepius: Good morning, Chiron.

Apollo: Chiron, I would like you to raise Asclepius. He has many talents, and I want them fully developed.

Chiron: I would be honored, Apollo, but what of his mother?

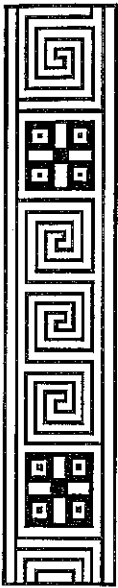
Apollo: She has died. I can't raise him while tending to my other responsibilities.

Chiron: Leave him with me, Apollo. I will love him as my own.

Narrator 1: Chiron began teaching Asclepius the art of healing. He was bright and soon became very skilled. Time passed and Asclepius was ready to assert his independence.

Asclepius: Chiron, I am ready to be on my own now.

Chiron: Why? You have been like a son to me.



Asclepius: And I love you like a father, but I have learned all I can. It's time I found ways to help the people of Greece.

Chiron: Then go with my blessing.

Narrator 2: Asclepius proved to be a fine physician. People were so grateful for his help that they worshipped him as if he were a god. He carried a staff entwined with serpents, which shared secrets of medicine with him.

Narrator 1: Asclepius eventually married and had seven children. His sons became physicians, and his daughters became nurses. Hygeia, his most famous daughter, would methodically scrub her patients with soap and water, demonstrating that cleanliness was critical to recovery. The family's successes became legendary, especially when Asclepius brought the dead back to life, incurring the wrath of the gods. Hades was one of the first to complain to Zeus.

Hades: Zeus, you must do something about Asclepius!

Zeus: What is the trouble, Hades? He helps people, curing them, even saving their lives.

Hades: That's exactly the trouble. He's interfering with fate. It's been months since a soul came to me. I'm being cheated.

Zeus: That is problematic, but let's hear what Apollo has to say.

Apollo: Look at all the good he does. Surely saving a few lives isn't too much when you consider the suffering he has alleviated.

Zeus: I'll let it go for now, but I'll be watching him.

Narrator 2: Zeus kept his word, and when Asclepius accepted gold in exchange for bringing a dead person back to life, Zeus saw and lost his temper. He got a thunderbolt from one of the Cyclopes and hurled it at Asclepius, transforming him into a pile of ashes.

Narrator 1: Apollo was furious with Zeus. He couldn't seek revenge on his father, so he killed the Cyclopes who had provided the thunderbolt. Zeus called Apollo to him.

Zeus: Apollo, you have sought to hurt me by killing the Cyclopes. For punishment, you will serve as a slave on Earth for a full year.

Narrator 2: Apollo accepted his punishment and served his year with ease. Chiron, unfortunately, came to a tragic end. Although Chiron was learned and polished, the other centaurs remained crude and troublesome. During an altercation with Heracles over a jar of wine, the centaurs drew Chiron into their fight.

Narrator 1: One of Heracles's arrows hit Chiron in the knee. Heracles was immediately remorseful, for everyone knew of Chiron's fine work, but the wound would not heal. Chiron begged Zeus to let him die.

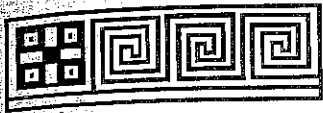
Chiron: Zeus, only you can let me go. The pain is intolerable, and I am ready for eternal rest.

Zeus: You know that I can only make you mortal if someone takes on your immortality.

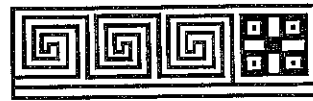
Chiron: Prometheus has offered to take my place, Zeus.

Zeus: Then I will let you die, Chiron. But you will be missed among the greatest of the gods.

Narrator 2: Chiron died in his cave, and Prometheus became immortal. Even today we benefit from the teachings of the great healers, Chiron, Asclepius, and Hygeia.



DAEDALUS AND ICARUS



7 or 6

4 pages

Born of royalty, Daedalus was a clever sculptor, architect, and inventor. After murdering his nephew, Talos, Daedalus was exiled to Crete, where he built the Labyrinth for King Minos. King Minos blamed Daedalus for the loss of his daughter Ariadne because Daedalus helped her destroy the Minotaur with Theseus, and Ariadne left thereafter. King Minos punished Daedalus and his son, Icarus, by imprisoning them in the Labyrinth. Using his ingenuity, Daedalus fashioned wings of feathers, beeswax, and string to escape. The father and son flew from prison like birds. Ignoring Daedalus's warning not to fly too high, Icarus flew too close to the sun, and the wax melted. Icarus plunged into the sea and drowned. Daedalus flew on to the island of Sicily, where he helped King Cocalus build a palace. King Minos followed in pursuit, and Daedalus killed him to avoid recapture. Icarus's story is sometimes told as a morality tale, cautioning listeners not to fly too high.

Presentation Suggestions

The narrators should stand on either side. Talos should stand to one side and exit after his lines. Daedalus should stand in the middle with King Minos on one side and King Cocalus on the other. Icarus can stand on the opposite side of Talos and exit after his lines.

Props

The kings can wear crowns. Talos, Daedalus, and Icarus can be dressed simply. Create a backdrop that shows a magnificent palace on an island with birds flying overhead. Include the sun and ocean.

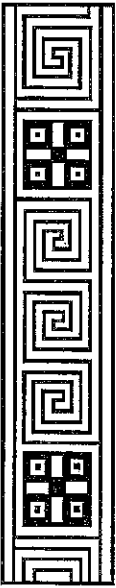
Delivery Suggestions

King Minos should sound angry during most of his delivery. Talos should sound eager to please. Daedalus should sound intelligent and resourceful. King Cocalus should sound forceful and strong.

Characters

- ▣ Narrator 1
- ▣ Narrator 2
- ▣ Talos
- ▣ Daedalus
- ▣ King Minos
- ▣ Icarus
- ▣ King Cocalus

DAEDALUS AND ICARUS



Narrator 1: Daedalus was a royal Athenian, having descended from Cecrops. He was a talented artist, who loved to invent mechanical devices. For a time, he worked in Athens as a sculptor.

Narrator 2: He agreed to tutor his nephew, Talos, and found him to be an apt pupil. Talos especially enjoyed creating new things.

Talos: Daedalus, look at my latest invention. I think you'll find it clever and quite useful.

Daedalus: What is it, Talos?

Talos: I was looking at the jawbone of a serpent, and it occurred to me that it could be the model for this tool that I've designed. Give me a piece of wood, and I'll demonstrate its usefulness.

Narrator 1: Daedalus watched in amazement as Talos showed him his creation—what we now know as a saw.

Daedalus: You are clever, young Talos. This is a fine invention.

Talos: It should indeed be useful, but I have other ideas, too. Let me tell you about some of them.

Narrator 2: Secretly, Daedalus was jealous of Talos, resenting his ingenuity. Daedalus decided to get rid of Talos. They often walked together, so at the next opportunity, Daedalus threw Talos off the top of the Acropolis, ensuring that no one would be cleverer than he was.

Narrator 1: Before long, the body was discovered, and Daedalus was found guilty of murder by the court that met on Areopagus, a hill in Athens. He was sentenced to exile and fled to Crete, where he became an architect and sculptor in King Minos's court.

Narrator 2: It was there that Daedalus was asked to design the labyrinth that would house the fearsome Minotaur, which demanded annual sacrifices of seven young men and seven young women.

Narrator 1: You've heard how Theseus killed the Minotaur and later abandoned Ariadne, King Minos's daughter, on the island of Naxos. King Minos was infuriated when he discovered that his daughter Ariadne had left with the Athenians.

King Minos: Someone had to have helped Ariadne outwit the Minotaur, and there's only one person who could have done it. Daedalus designed the labyrinth, and he is the only one who knows its secrets. He shall suffer for his treachery.

Narrator 2: Daedalus was brought before King Minos, who had given great thought to an appropriate punishment. Of course, Daedalus didn't realize why King Minos had summoned him.

Daedalus: King Minos, how can I serve you?

King Minos: You have dishonored my daughter Ariadne and me. Because of you, she has fled the island with the Athenians. I have no recourse but to sentence you to the very prison you designed. You shall be taken to the labyrinth and held there. And since I have lost my daughter, your son shall also suffer. I won't banish him. I'm not that cruel. Instead, you'll have your son—but he'll be captive with you in the labyrinth. Now go!

Narrator 1: Daedalus accepted his fate, knowing that he had little choice. He resented the imposition on his son, though, and was determined to find a way out for them. He spoke to his son.

Daedalus: Icarus, I have an idea that may help us get out of here.

Icarus: Father, I knew you'd think of something. What can I do to help?

Daedalus: Collect all the feathers you can find. The birds often drop them near the entrance to the labyrinth. I'll go to the beehives nearby. With feathers, wax, and a bit of string, we can escape this underground prison.

Icarus: Father, your cleverness always amazes me. Let's get to work!

Narrator 2: Daedalus and Icarus created huge wings, made of feathers, string, and beeswax.

Icarus: How will these work, Father?

Daedalus: You've watched birds in flight, Son. The principles are the same. We'll climb out of the labyrinth and fly away. But there's one thing you must remember.

Icarus: What is that, Father?

Daedalus: The feathers are held together with beeswax. If you fly too close to the sun, it will melt, and you'll fall back to the Earth.

Icarus: Don't worry Father. I'll take care.

Narrator 1: Just as Daedalus promised, the wings worked perfectly, and together the two flew away from the labyrinth. King Minos, disgusted at their treachery, watched them leave.

King Minos: That accursed Daedalus has outwitted me again! Will I never get my vengeance?

Narrator 2: Meanwhile, Icarus was enjoying his flight. In spite of his father's warning, he kept flying higher and higher. Finally his folly sealed his fate. He flew too close to the sun. The beeswax melted, and the wings disintegrated. Daedalus could only watch helplessly as his beloved son plunged to the sea and drowned. With great sorrow, Daedalus flew on to Sicily, where King Cocalus welcomed him.

King Cocalus: Daedalus, welcome to our island. I have heard of your many skills. Do you think you can design a new palace for me? I hear that you know the procedures for installing running water.

Daedalus: I would be honored to help you in any way that I can. But we must take care in case King Minos comes searching for me.

King Cocalus: Don't worry, for you'll be under my protection. Now, let's get started!

Narrator 1: While Daedalus worked on the new palace, King Minos set off in pursuit of Daedalus in his ship. When he saw the palace construction underway, he knew Daedalus must be involved and went to see the king of Sicily.

King Minos: King Cocalus, I am looking for Daedalus. Is he here on your island?

King Cocalus: I haven't seen him, King Minos. Perhaps he is on one of the nearby islands.

King Minos: Hmm. A shame. Well, I do have a problem that perhaps someone here can solve. I'll leave you this conch shell. I am looking for someone who could pull a thread through its windings. I'll give a sack of gold as a reward.

King Cocalus: An interesting challenge. Let me see what I can do to solve it.

Narrator 2: Attracted by the potential reward, King Cocalus asked Daedalus if he could meet the challenge.

Daedalus: Here's what we'll do. Tie the thread on this ant. Then put a bit of honey at the other end of the shell. Watch what happens.

Narrator 1: When King Minos saw the ant pull the thread through the shell, he knew that only one person could have been so clever as to meet this challenge.

King Minos: There is only one man who could do this. Bring Daedalus to me!

Narrator 2: The Sicilian king had no choice, but he knew Daedalus wouldn't come willingly. He stalled for time, pretending to cooperate with King Minos.

King Cocalus: I will have to dupe Daedalus into coming here. I'm having a feast tonight. Why don't you join us, and you can capture him there. Meanwhile, would you like to bathe after your long journey? My palace is equipped with running water.

King Minos: A good plan! And yes, I would appreciate a bath.

Narrator 1: King Cocalus called for Daedalus so that he could warn him.

King Cocalus: Daedalus, King Minos has caught up with you and demanded I release you to him. I have convinced him that you can be captured at tonight's feast. It's up to you to determine your fate.

Daedalus: Will King Minos bathe before the feast?

King Cocalus: Yes, I extended the invitation to him to use the new baths you have installed.

Daedalus: Then you needn't worry. I'll take care of him.

Narrator 2: As King Minos prepared for his bath, Daedalus made his own preparations. When King Minos stepped into the bath and turned on the tap, boiling water rushed out of the tap, scalding him to death.

Narrator 1: Free of his enemy, Daedalus spent the rest of his life serving the King of Sicily.

Props

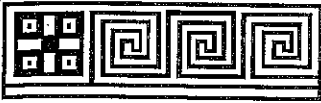
The stage could be decorated with corn stalks, flowers, and plants to represent Demeter's role as the goddess of agriculture. Hades should be dressed in dark, menacing clothing. Persephone and Demeter should be dressed in colorful or flowery clothes. Demeter could slip a dark robe over her clothes when disguised as the old woman. Metaneira and Triptolemus can be dressed in regular clothes, with Zeus and Iris in more regal clothing.

Delivery Suggestions

The characters should adapt their voices to suit the story, varying the delivery as the story progresses.

Characters

- ▣ Narrator 1
- ▣ Narrator 2
- ▣ Hades
- ▣ Demeter
- ▣ Persephone
- ▣ Metaneira
- ▣ Triptolemus
- ▣ Zeus
- ▣ Iris



DEMETER AND PERSEPHONE



Ⓐ or Ⓑ
6 pages

The name Demeter means “barley mother.” The goddess of agriculture, her Latin name, Ceres, inspired the word *cereal*. Persephone, also known as Kore (Proserpina in Latin), was born to Demeter but was abducted by Hades and taken to the Underworld. Demeter disguised herself as an old woman and wandered the world, searching for Persephone. During her travels, she was befriended by Metaneira, who retained Demeter to care for her infant son. When Metaneira suspected Demeter of harming her son, Demeter explained that she was a goddess. She gave Metaneira’s elder son Triptolemus the gift of corn and a winged chariot to distribute it. After more searching, Demeter returned to her throne and decreed that the earth would become barren. Zeus intervened, forcing Hades to return Persephone. Unfortunately, Persephone had eaten the forbidden pomegranate seeds, and this forever linked her to the Underworld. Knowing that Demeter would continue to make mortals suffer, Zeus struck a compromise, sending Persephone to the Underworld for part of each year in what has come to be known as the winter season.

Presentation Suggestions

The narrators can stand on opposite sides of the stage. Demeter should stand in the center with Hades and Persephone seated in chairs in front of her. Metaneira and Triptolemus should be on one side of Demeter, with Zeus and Iris on the other side.

Props

The stage could be decorated with corn stalks, flowers, and plants to represent Demeter's role as the goddess of agriculture. Hades should be dressed in dark, menacing clothing. Persephone and Demeter should be dressed in colorful or flowery clothes. Demeter could slip a dark robe over her clothes when disguised as the old woman. Metaneira and Triptolemus can be dressed in regular clothes, with Zeus and Iris in more regal clothing.

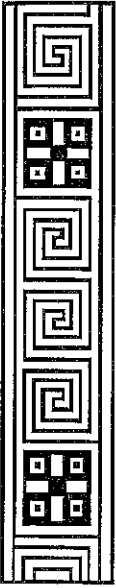
Delivery Suggestions

The characters should adapt their voices to suit the story, varying the delivery as the story progresses.

Characters

- ▣ Narrator 1
- ▣ Narrator 2
- ▣ Hades
- ▣ Demeter
- ▣ Persephone
- ▣ Metaneira
- ▣ Triptolemus
- ▣ Zeus
- ▣ Iris

DEMETER AND PERSEPHONE



Narrator 1: Persephone was the beloved daughter of Demeter, the goddess of the harvest. When Demeter sat on her throne, Persephone played on her lap, and Demeter always took Persephone along on her trips to Earth to watch over the crops.

Narrator 2: Persephone danced through life, enjoying every moment. She was such a delightful youngster that flowers would spring up under her feet. Everyone noticed her, appreciating her beauty and joy. Unfortunately, even Hades, god of the Underworld, who rarely noticed anything outside of his domain, watched the young beauty, falling in love with her grace and spirit. Hades vowed to have her for himself.

Hades: Persephone is indeed a rare young beauty, worthy of being my queen. I know her mother will never let me marry her, so I will simply have to watch for the chance to kidnap her.

Narrator 1: Before long, Hades saw that opportunity unfold.

Demeter: Persephone, play with the nymphs in the field for a while. While you play, gather some flowers that we can take home.

Persephone: I'll make a huge bouquet just for you, Mother!

Demeter: Just remember not to wander off by yourself, daughter.

Persephone: Don't worry, Mother. I have the nymphs to play with.

Narrator 2: But Persephone became so enchanted by the lovely flowers that she wandered away from the nymphs, giving Hades the opportunity he wanted.

Hades: There she is, just above my reach. I'll simply split open the ground, grab Persephone, and take her back to the Underworld with me. She'll adjust to her new life as my queen soon enough.

Narrator 1: Driving his dark chariot and black horses through a crevice in the Earth, Hades captured Persephone. Soon Demeter began to call for her.

Demeter: Persephone, where are you? Come and bring the flowers now.

Narrator 2: Demeter couldn't find Persephone, who had vanished from the meadow. Demeter had no idea that Hades was driving his chariot back to the Underworld, clutching the frightened child as he drove.

Persephone: Where are you taking me?

Hades: To my home, my dear, where you'll be crowned with gold and precious stones.

Persephone: But I don't want to go with you! I want to stay with my mother!

Hades: You'll forget about her in no time, Persephone.

Narrator 1: Hades seated her beside him on the throne, but Persephone was inconsolable. She cared nothing for the gold and jewels, wanting only to see the sun, flowers, and her beloved mother.

Narrator 2: Dead spirits crept out from their hiding places to see the new queen, but Persephone had no interest in their tortured souls. Hades encouraged her to appreciate his gloomy world.

Hades: Persephone, you must come see my garden. Perhaps it will lift your spirits.

Narrator 1: But Persephone found no joy in a garden of weeping willows and whispering poplars.

Persephone: This is hardly a garden. Where are the birds, the fruit, and the flowers?

Hades: Ah, but there is fruit here, the pomegranate. Come and have a taste from the pomegranate tree.

Narrator 2: Persephone knew that she shouldn't eat of the food of the dead, but she longed to try the pomegranate and ate two seeds. Meanwhile, Demeter continued to search for her daughter. Wandering the world in the guise of an old woman. She came to the home of Metaneira, the wife of Celeüs, and their newborn son Demophon. Metaneira recognized Demeter's grace and treated her with great respect.

Metaneira: You are welcome in our home and to our food and drink. Won't you join us for our meal?

Narrator 1: Demeter remained quiet, but she transferred her grief for her missing daughter to love for the young Demophon. Metaneira noticed her devotion to the child and decided to entrust his care to Demeter.

Metaneira: I see that you love babies. Would you like to care for Demophon?

Narrator 2: Demeter nodded and settled in to care for him with great devotion. Becoming quite fond of him, she decided to transform him into a god to ensure his immortality. Each night she anointed him with ambrosia, then hid him in the fire to destroy his mortal nature. The infant began to grow like a god, but Metaneira became suspicious and spied on Demeter, catching her as she put him in the fire.

Metaneira: What are you doing to my son? I'm taking him out now!

Demeter: You foolish woman! By taking him from the fire, you've doomed him to the life of mortals. I would have ensured that he would live forever as a god!

Metaneira: Who are you? How do you have these powers?

Demeter: I came to you in disguise, and I am truly Demeter. I know you think I have betrayed your trust, but I haven't, and I want to show my appreciation for your kindness. Bring Triptolemus to me.

Narrator 1: Metaneira believed Demeter, and sent for her oldest son, Triptolemus, who came at his mother's bidding.

Demeter: Triptolemus, I am giving you great gifts that will benefit both you and your people. Take these grains of corn, a most precious form of sustenance.

Triptolemus: Thank you, but what do I do with it?

Demeter: I will show you how to use a plough and how to harness oxen to do the hard work.

Triptolemus: What do I do after I have ploughed the fields?

Demeter: Sow the field with these grains and tend it with water. In time, corn will grow, which you may eat, but you must always save some grains for the next year.

Triptolemus: This will be a wonderful gift, and I will always be grateful for your generosity.

Demeter: There is one more gift, Triptolemus. I am giving you this winged chariot and these fine dragons to help you spread the grain across your earth. And now I bid you leave, as I must continue on my journey.

Narrator 2: Demeter continued to roam the Earth, giving gifts such as the olive tree. The Earth benefited from the gift of grain and the olive tree, but finally she returned to her temple at Eleusis and prepared to exact her revenge.

Demeter: I have searched throughout the world for my precious daughter, and no one has stepped forward to help me in my quest. No longer will I be the kind goddess helping the crops prosper so that bellies can be full and satisfied. From this day forward, the Earth is forbidden to produce any crops!

Narrator 1: With that heartless pronouncement, the Earth entered a cruel period of drought and devastation. The entire human race would have perished of relentless hunger if Zeus hadn't intervened.

Zeus: Iris, go to Demeter and try to convince her to change her mind.

Narrator 2: Iris went immediately to see Demeter.

Iris: Demeter, Zeus sends me to you, beseeching you to reconsider. The mortals are starving, and you alone can restore bounty to the Earth.

Demeter: Return to Zeus and tell him that until I have Persephone safely home, the Earth and all its inhabitants will suffer as I have suffered.

Narrator 1: Iris returned to Zeus with great haste.

Iris: Zeus, I bring distressing news. Demeter is determined to stay with her plan of revenge and refuses to reverse her directive.

Zeus: Thank you for trying, Iris. Send Hermes to me so that I can put pressure on Hades to return Persephone to Demeter.

Narrator 2: Hades agreed to return Persephone, but he knew that by eating the pomegranate, she would be forever bound to him. The reunion with Demeter was joyful at first.

Demeter: Persephone, what a relief to have you home with me. But I hope you remembered not to eat anything while in the Underworld.

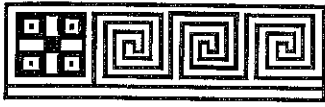
Persephone: I'm sorry, Mother, but I couldn't resist tasting the pomegranate seeds. I missed fruit so much and had so little to enjoy there.

Demeter: My dear, you are lost to me again unless we can convince Zeus to intervene.

Narrator 1: Demeter took Persephone to see Zeus, explained the situation, and begged him to find a solution.

Zeus: You know that once Persephone ate the pomegranate seeds, she was bound to Hades forever. Still, I can't face another devastating year for the mortals. She will be allowed to spend most of her life with the gods, but for three months each year, she must return to the Underworld to fulfill her obligation to Hades.

Narrator 2: Demeter knew that Zeus had found a fair compromise, but she continued to grieve each winter when Persephone returned to the Underworld. This explains why, to this very day, there is a gray period of mourning each year when flowers, seeds, trees, and all that gives life sleeps until Persephone returns from the Underworld.



DIONYSUS



(12) or (9)

7 pages

Dionysus is also called Bacchus, and his name means "lame deity." He is best known as the god of wine, but his place in mythology broadened over the years, and he later became known as the god of vegetation, fruitfulness, theater, pleasures, and civilization. Son of Zeus, he was the only one of the twelve great gods whose mother was a mortal. Dionysus was nearly lost to Zeus when Hera convinced Semele, Dionysus's mother, that Zeus should show himself as a true god. His brilliance in his true form caused Semele to catch fire, almost destroying the unborn child. Zeus saved the infant, then he offered his protection repeatedly as Hera tried time and again to destroy Dionysus. During his wanderings, Dionysus discovered grapes and how to make wine. Eventually he rescued and married Adriane, returning to Olympus where Zeus welcomed him in the great hall.

Presentation Suggestions

Narrator 1 should sit on a stool, with Narrator 2 sitting on a chair in front of Narrator 1. Hera, Semele, Zeus, and Hermes should be on one side, in order of their speaking. Dionysus should be in the center. Dodona should be on the side opposite the other characters but can leave the stage after his lines. The pirates can come on stage for their part, replacing Dodona. Ariadne can enter for her lines, remaining on stage for the conclusion.

Props

The stage could be decorated with clusters of grapes, greenery, and earthenware jugs. The gods could be dressed in regal clothing. Dionysus can be dressed simply but elegantly. Dodona should look wise, perhaps dressed in flowing robes. The pirates could have mock cutlasses and be dressed in rough clothing.

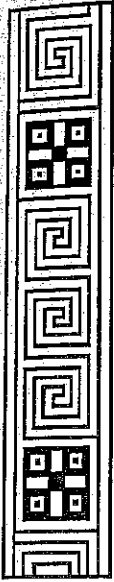
Delivery

The characters generally should use normal voices. Hera should sound persuasive when dealing with Semele. Zeus should sound determined to save Dionysus. Dionysus should sound young. Dodona should sound wise. Pirate 1 and Pirate 2 should sound greedy and ruthless, and Pirate 3 should sound concerned and cautious.

Characters

- ▣ Narrator 1
- ▣ Narrator 2
- ▣ Hera
- ▣ Semele
- ▣ Zeus
- ▣ Hermes
- ▣ Dionysus
- ▣ Dodona
- ▣ Pirate 1
- ▣ Pirate 2
- ▣ Pirate 3
- ▣ Ariadne

DIONYSUS



Narrator 1: Although Zeus was a most powerful god, he never knew when Hera's jealousy would make mischief. Zeus had become enchanted with the princess Semele, the mortal daughter of the King of Thebes. Of course Hera discovered that, once again, Zeus had given in to the temptations of a beautiful woman.

Narrator 2: Hera became infuriated when she learned that Semele was expecting Zeus's child. She disguised herself as an old nurse and went to visit Semele, making small talk to disarm her.

Hera: Good day, Semele. What a lovely palace your father has provided. And I see that you are to be blessed with a child.

Semele: Good day to you. I'm sorry that I don't recall meeting you before. Have we met?

Hera: We've met at the baths, but I'm just a forgettable old woman.

Semele: I doubt that you are forgettable, and I'm glad to become acquainted with you.

Hera: Is your husband at home?

Semele: No, his duties keep him away often.

Hera: Just what does he do?

Semele: He's the mighty Zeus, the god of creation.

Hera: Really? Do you think he's telling you the truth? Many husbands claim to be gods, but few live up to their claims.

Semele: I have no reason to doubt my husband.

Hera: I'm sure you know him well, but if I were you, I'd want to see just how mighty he truly is. I'd ask him to show himself as a god.

Semele: I'll give your words some thought, but now I must rest. Being with child leaves me weary.

Narrator 1: Semele tried to forget about the old woman's comments, but they nagged at her like a pesky fly. Finally, when Zeus came to see her in mortal form, she couldn't ignore her suspicions. She decided to put him to the test.

Semele: Would you grant me any wish, my dear?

Zeus: Of course, Semele. Just name what your heart desires.

Semele: Do you swear to grant me your wish?

Zeus: I swear by the River Styx!

Semele: You say you are a god, but I have little evidence to prove what you claim. Show yourself as you truly are.

Zeus: Semele, that would be disastrous. No mortal can look upon me and survive. Ask anything else of me, but not that.

Semele: But that is the only wish I have—and you gave your solemn oath.

Zeus: My dear, I will fulfill your request, but know that I wish you had never asked for it.

Narrator 2: With those words, Zeus showed himself as the mighty god of thunder, hoping Semele could survive. But he was so brilliant that she instantly caught fire and died.

Narrator 1: Zeus moved quickly and plucked Semele's child from her womb. He sewed him into his thigh and returned to the heavens. Once the child had matured, he took him out, planning how to conceal the babe from Hera. He called Hermes to his throne.

Hermes: Your majesty, how can I serve you?

Zeus: There is a babe who I need hidden away. His name is Dionysus, and it is imperative that Hera not discover him.

Hermes: What about King Athamas and his wife Ino? They would be good parents and can be trusted.

Zeus: Yes, they are a good choice. Take the babe now. Explain to them that he is my son and that I want him to be treated with respect and care.

Hermes: Of course. Trust that he'll be well cared for. I'll keep an eye on him as well.

Narrator 2: Hermes carried the child to King Athamas and Ino. They dressed him as a girl to try to deceive Hera, but she discerned the truth. She used her powers to turn Ino mad, and Zeus had to once again rescue Dionysus. Again he summoned Hermes for help.

Zeus: Hermes, Hera has struck again, and I need you to take Dionysus far away.

Hermes: Do you have any ideas where he'll be safe?

Zeus: I've changed him into a kid for safekeeping. Deliver him to the nymphs in the valley of Nysa. He should be safe there.

Hermes: I'll take him there immediately.

Narrator 1: The nymphs welcomed Dionysus, and he grew up on the mountain of Nysa, playing among leopards and tigers. The muses helped with his upbringing as well. As he grew to manhood, he wandered the valley with the nymphs, discovering grapes and the art of making wine.

Narrator 2: But once again Hera disrupted Dionysus's idyllic life. She discovered that he was still alive and plotted her vengeance. She decided to make Dionysus suffer like Ino, turning him mad.

Narrator 1: But Dionysus was wise enough to realize that he needed help. He sought out Dodona, the oracle.

Dionysus: Dodona, I come beseeching you to help me with my affliction.

Dodona: What is the problem, my son?

Dionysus: I have been struck with madness.

Dodona: I can help you, but then you must follow my directives.

Dionysus: Just tell me what to do, as long as I can think clearly again.

Dodona: You'll soon feel whole, Dionysus. Then you should continue your travels. Take what you know about creating wine to the world. Go on long journeys, share your knowledge, and you'll have grand adventures.

Narrator 2: Dionysus listened well to Dodona and had many exciting escapades. One of his grandest occurred as he was traveling from island to island. He was sleeping on a beach when a band of pirates sailed by. They spied him, plotting his capture and ransom.

Pirate 1: Look at that youth. He must be a prince, yet he lies sleeping as if nearly dead.

Pirate 2: Let's take him with us! He'll fetch a handsome reward, and if he doesn't we can dispose of him easily enough.

Narrator 1: The pirates collected Dionysus without him ever waking up. One of the other pirates wasn't convinced that this kidnapping was wise.

Pirate 3: Look at his features. He is not just a prince, but probably a god. I think we're making a mistake.

Pirate 1: Don't be foolish. What god would hide in such a youth? He is entirely too pretty.

Pirate 2: You worry too much. Let's be off and worry about him later. He looks like he has drunk so much wine that he'll be sleeping it off for hours.

Narrator 2: Dionysus did sleep deeply, but soon the movement of the ship woke him.

Dionysus: Where am I? How did I get on this ship? Where are you taking me?

Pirate 3: Don't worry. Just tell us where you want to go, and we'll take you home.

Dionysus: Then take me to Naxos, for that is my home.

Narrator 1: But the other pirates headed away from Naxos.

Dionysus: This is the wrong direction. Turn the ship!

Pirate 1: Sorry to disappoint you, but we have other plans for you.

Pirate 2: That's right. You're far too valuable a cargo to just return without payment.

Dionysus: You'll regret this. Turn the ship now!

Narrator 2: The men ignored him. Suddenly the ship stood still.

Pirate 1: What has happened to the wind?

Pirate 2: This can't be happening! Man the oars! Row, men!

Pirate 3: I told you that he was a god. You're making a grave mistake.

Pirate 1: It's too late to argue! Help us row!

Narrator 1: In spite of their Herculean efforts, the ship stood still. Soon ivy covered their oars. Vines with huge clumps of fruit hung from the mast. Dionysus stood in the middle of the ship, with tigers, lynxes, and panthers pacing restlessly around him. Wine flowed across the decks of the ship.

Narrator 2: Dionysus looked at all of the pirates except for the one who defended him. As he stared, each one in turn shrank to mere inches. Their arms became fins, their feet became tails, their skin transformed into scales, and their faces turned into fish mouths. They frantically floundered across the deck and lurched into the sea. One pirate remained.

Pirate 3: How can I serve you, my lord?

Dionysus: Do not fear me, but take me to Naxos. I will help you steer the ship.

Narrator 1: And so they sailed on to Naxos, where Dionysus ensured that the faithful pirate would retain the ship and have a life of riches.

Narrator 2: While on the isle of Naxos, Dionysus came upon a young woman, sleeping on the shore, much as he had when he was captured. This was Ariadne, whom Theseus had just abandoned. Ariadne woke, distressed to find herself with a stranger.

Ariadne: Where is Theseus? Who are you?

Dionysus: I am Dionysus, and I found you alone, sleeping soundly. As for Theseus, could that be his ship that I see on the horizon?

Ariadne: That scoundrel! He has left me here with no resources! What am I to do?

Dionysus: You have no need to worry. Tell me your name, and how you came to be betrayed.

Ariadne: I am Ariadne, daughter of Minos and Pasiphaë. I fell in love with Theseus and helped him fight the Minotaur in Crete. He would have been lost in the labyrinth but for the ball of thread I gave him. We escaped to this island, but now he has shown his true self.

Dionysus: Come with me, and I'll protect you. Forget about this worthless scoundrel.

Narrator 1: Ariadne appreciated the young god's kindness and soon fell in love with him. They married, and Dionysus carried her off to dwell among the gods of Olympus. Dionysus's arrival stirred Hera to anger once again.

Hera: I refuse to have the son of a mortal sitting in our royal hall.

Zeus: Hera, you have caused enough mischief! Dionysus stays!

Narrator 2: Dionysus went to Zeus with a request.

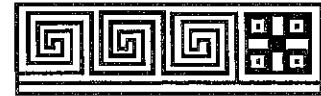
Dionysus: Before I take the throne, I wish to see my mother.

Zeus: Yes, it is time that some wrongs are made right. I'll give you safe passage to Hades. Then you must convince Hades to release your mother.

Narrator 1: Hades agreed to release Semele if Dionysus would give up something he loved. He agreed, giving up the myrtle. Dionysus ascended to Olympus, where he was honored for his gifts of wine and fruit. Zeus rewarded the nymphs for raising Dionysus by making them stars in the constellation of the Hyades. Dionysus enjoyed many years of glory and merriment.



HELEN



(10) or (9)

6 pages

Although many variations on the legend of Helen exist, this story focuses on her marriage to Menelaus, her elopement with Paris, and the war that followed between the Greeks and the Trojans. Helen relied on her beauty and typically is seen as a rather passive figure who let others control her. She knew that the gods controlled her fate, however, having given her the great beauty that incited passion and wars. The stories of her birth vary. According to the story featured in the following script, Zeus took the shape of a swan to court Leda. One of Leda's eggs held Helen, who grew to be a beautiful woman. Helen's parents struggled to find her an appropriate husband. Menelaus was chosen, but after their marriage, Helen and Paris fell in love and eloped to Troy. Menelaus followed, using the hollow horse to overcome his enemy and retrieve Helen. Helen's adventures continued after her famous rescue from the Trojans, and students may want to investigate versions other than the one presented here.

Presentation Suggestions

Place Helen in the center of the stage with Paris on one side and Menelaus on the other. Place them on stools so that they dominate the stage. Narrator 1, King Tyndareus, Leda, and Odysseus can stand on one side. Narrator 2, Hera, Athene, and Aphrodite can stand on the other side of the stage.

Props

The women should be dressed in flowing, rich clothing, appropriate for royalty and goddesses. King Tyndareus should be dressed in royal clothing. Paris and Menelaus should be dressed in battle clothing. Create a backdrop with a large wooden horse by a walled city.

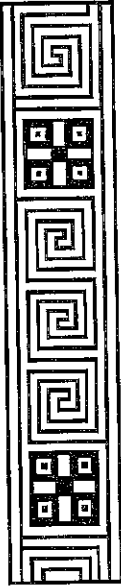
Delivery Suggestions

Paris should sound quiet and somewhat passive. Menelaus should sound more forceful and aggressive. Helen has only a few lines and should sound sweet and compliant. Although their roles are brief, Hera, Athene, and Aphrodite should sound persuasive. All other speakers should use normal voices consistent with their roles.

Characters

- ▣ Narrator 1
- ▣ Narrator 2
- ▣ King Tyndareus
- ▣ Leda
- ▣ Helen
- ▣ Odysseus
- ▣ Hera
- ▣ Athene
- ▣ Aphrodite
- ▣ Paris
- ▣ Menelaus

HELEN



Narrator 1: Zeus looked down from Olympus and saw that Leda was a beautiful woman, so he disguised himself as a swan and courted her. Some time later, Leda laid two blue eggs. One egg held Helen and her brother Pollux, offspring of Zeus and therefore immortal. The other egg held Clytemnestra and Castor, born of Leda and her mortal husband, King Tyndareus.

Narrator 2: Castor and Pollux, dedicated half brothers, grew up to be fine athletes. Castor tamed horses, and Pollux became a skilled boxer. Clytemnestra grew up to be a beautiful young woman, but no one was more beautiful than Helen. Soon King Tyndareus had to find husbands for the two women.

King Tyndareus: Leda, it's time that Clytemnestra and Helen found suitable husbands.

Leda: Agamemnon has expressed interest in Clytemnestra, and as King of Mycenae, he would make a fitting husband.

King Tyndareus: Let's proceed with plans for that marriage. But what about Helen? So many young men seek her favor.

Leda: Let's discuss this with her. Perhaps she has a favorite.

Narrator 1: Helen's parents asked her to meet with them to discuss her future.

King Tyndareus: Helen, it's time that you married. Do you have any favorites among your suitors?

Helen: No, Father. There are so many of them that I can't keep them straight.

Leda: So none have caught your fancy, dear?

Helen: No, Mother. Some are princes; some are handsome; some are kind. They all seem charming—and most persistent!

Leda: Will you be satisfied if we make the decision for you?

Helen: Of course, mother. I know you want the best for me.

Narrator 2: After Helen left, her parents continued to discuss how to resolve the problem of whom to choose as Helen's husband.

Leda: Odysseus would have made a fine husband, and he made some initial inquiries. But when he saw all the other suitors, he withdrew.

King Tyndareus: Why?

Leda: I'm not sure. Why don't you summon him and ask?

Narrator 1: King Tyndareus did as Leda suggested, and Odysseus joined them.

King Tyndareus: Greetings, Odysseus.

Odysseus: Your majesty . . . how may I be of service?

King Tyndareus: Leda tells me that previously you showed some interest in our fair Helen, yet you withdrew from the courting process. Why?

Odysseus: There are so many men who wish to marry her. I feared that if I succeeded, all others would fall to fighting about her. I have become quite fond of Penelope and will seek her hand.

King Tyndareus: You've shown that you are wise and that you care about our people. Do you have any ideas how we might forestall problems with the men who don't win her heart and hand?

Odysseus: Perhaps this strategy would work. Ask the suitors if they will stand by your choice. If they say yes, then ask if they'll promise to help should someone try to steal her.

Leda: Another wise idea, Odysseus. It's worth a try, don't you think, Tyndareus?

King Tyndareus: Yes, Leda. Let's inform Helen and then assemble everyone for the announcement.

Leda: I'm glad you've chosen a suitor for her, dear.

Narrator 2: Helen was summoned and appeared before her parents.

Helen: Have you made a decision, Father?

King Tyndareus: Yes, I've chosen Menelaus of Sparta. He'll make a fine husband, and you'll grace their kingdom. Could you be happy with Menelaus, Helen?

Helen: Yes, Father. I find him pleasing. But what about all the other suitors?

King Tyndareus: Don't worry about that, dear. We have a plan, thanks to Odysseus's wisdom. We've asked the suitors to swear their allegiance and stand by the final decision. They've agreed, and should someone try to thwart our plans, they will fight for your honor.

Narrator 1: Helen married Menelaus and lived happily with him. Years passed, and her fame as the most beautiful woman in the world spread far and wide. Meanwhile, the people of Sparta didn't realize that a young prince of Troy was about to become an instrument of change and war. Some years before, Priam and Hecuba received an omen that their youngest son, Paris, would one day destroy Troy. Instead of killing Paris, they abandoned him on Mount Ida, where shepherds raised him.

Narrator 2: Paris grew to be exceptionally handsome and skilled in games. Once, when he returned to Troy to participate in the games, his sister Cassandra recognized him. Zeus was particularly impressed with his beauty, and when the gods began squabbling over who was the most beautiful goddess, Zeus decided Paris should determine the winner.

Narrator 1: Zeus told Hermes to take Athene, Hera, and Aphrodite to see Paris and determine which should be designated the most beautiful. The winner would receive a golden apple. Each of the goddesses wanted to win and offered a reward to Paris in exchange for the golden apple.

Hera: Choose me, Paris. If you do, I shall give you all of Asia to rule. You would have great honor and even greater power.

Athene: Paris, don't listen to Hera. Choose me and you will be both wise and skilled in combat. You will be admired for your wisdom and will never lose in battle.

Aphrodite: Ah, Paris, I can offer you love. If you say I am the most beautiful, I will give you the love of Helen of Sparta.

Narrator 2: Aphrodite chose to ignore the fact that Helen was married, and Paris found her offer irresistible.

Paris: Aphrodite, you have truly found a way to sway me, for who wouldn't want to have the love of the most beautiful woman in the world? The golden apple is yours.

Narrator 1: Paris departed for Sparta, entering the palace where Helen and Menelaus held court. Eros shot his arrow of love in Helen's heart as she gazed on this splendid young man. Meanwhile, Menelaus departed to attend a funeral, giving Helen and Paris the opportunity to elope. Helen was so infatuated with Paris that she abandoned her home, leaving behind her young daughter Hermione.

Narrator 2: When Menelaus discovered Paris's treachery, he reminded Helen's former admirers of their promise to defend her honor. They assembled a huge fleet and set sail for Troy. The brave warriors set up camp outside the city, waiting for the battle to begin. But first, Paris agreed to discuss the dilemma with Menelaus, hoping to come to a peaceful resolution.

Paris: Menelaus, you are wasting your time if you think your fleet of ships can conquer us. Look at the high walls that surround us. You'll never get past them.

Menelaus: Paris, I don't want to risk the lives of my fellow warriors, but you knew I couldn't let you kidnap Helen.

Paris: But I didn't kidnap Helen. She willingly left with me.

Menelaus: That may be, but I know she still loves me, and we have a daughter to raise!

Paris: Well, you've come all this way, so you must have had a plan.

Menelaus: Let's be fair and settle it between us. If you truly love her, you should be willing to fight for her. And I don't mean for you to send out soldiers to fight on your behalf. This fight is between us—just the two of us—and the winner will have Helen.

Narrator 1: Paris was uneasy with this plan, but Menelaus left him little choice. He preferred leisurely pursuits to combat, but he agreed reluctantly to Menelaus's proposal.

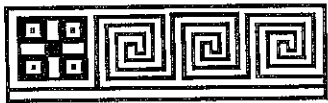
Paris: All right, Menelaus. Let's arrange the combat.

Narrator 2: The duel began, and Menelaus had the advantage until Aphrodite sent a blanket of fog, making it impossible to see. Menelaus could not find Paris, and the battle went unresolved. Menelaus retreated to the camps, and a full-scale battle began, raging on for nearly a decade. During this time, the gods watched as the Greeks and Trojans fought, with some gods and goddesses taking sides. Finally Zeus ordered them to let the mortals decide their own fates.

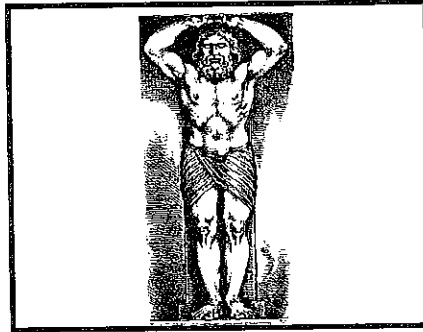
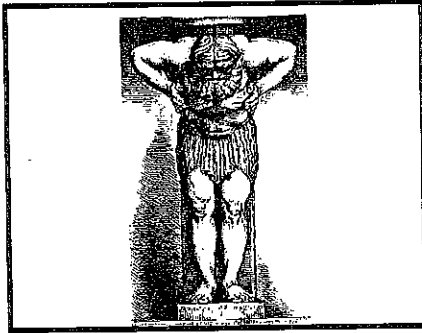
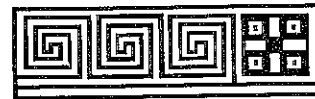
Narrator 1: The Greeks were unable to penetrate the walls of Troy, but they had an equally impressive defense in Achilles. The son of Thetis, Achilles had been dipped in the river Styx, making him invulnerable except where Thetis held his heel when immersing him in the magic waters. Although Paris was not a particularly skilled marksman, Apollo guided him as he drew back his arrow. The arrow struck Achilles in the heel, mortally wounding this favorite hero.

Narrator 2: The Greeks took immediate revenge on Paris and killed him with a poisoned arrow that Heracles gave to Philoctetes. The Greeks then prepared to depart, seemingly giving up the battle. They boarded their ships, leaving behind a gift for the Trojans, a large wooden horse. The Trojans triumphantly drew the horse into the city, regarding it as a fine trophy of war.

Narrator 1: But in the dead of night, this hollow horse opened up, and armed Greek soldiers stole out, ready to destroy Troy and capture Helen. After the bloody battle, very few Trojans survived. Aphrodite guided her son Aeneas along with his father Anchises, his wife Creüsa, and son Ascanius to Mount Ida, where he founded another city. Menelaus, enchanted as always by Helen's beauty, forgave her and set sail for home. After eight years of travels, Helen finally returned to Sparta with Menelaus at her side.



HERACLES



(12)

11 pages

Heracles's story is one of the longest and most complex of the myths. Hera despised Heracles because he was the son of Zeus and Princess Alcmena. She tried to kill the son as an infant, but Heracles used his incredible strength to kill the serpents Hera sent. However, Heracles's strength worked against him when he killed his tutor, Linus. This was just the first of many murders, most instigated by Hera's meddling. To atone for his misdeeds, Heracles had to complete ten labors or tasks. Heracles completed twelve labors over a period of many years, becoming increasingly famous for his heroism. Once released from his labors, he continued fighting in many campaigns. Finally, Heracles's beloved wife, Deianeira, was tricked into poisoning him, and Heracles ascended to Mount Olympus on a cloud. Because of the episodic nature of Heracles's lengthy story, this script is divided into three acts. The Muses assist Heracles and others in the description of his adventures.

Presentation Suggestions

Have the following characters sit on chairs in this order: Narrator, Polyhymnia, Clio, Calliope, and Erato. Have the following characters stand behind the other characters in this order: Melpomene, Terpsichore, Euterpe, Thalia, and Urania. The following characters should sit on stools to one side: Eurystheus and Heracles.

Props

The Muses can have props appropriate to their gifts: sheet music for Polyhymnia, a history book for Clio, poetry books for Calliope and Erato, a map of the stars for Urania, a tragedy drama mask for Melpomene, dance shoes for Terpsichore, a flute for Euterpe, and a comedy drama mask for Thalia.

Delivery Suggestions

The characters can use normal voices, but they should practice their parts to ensure a smooth delivery.

Characters

- Narrator
- Polyhymnia
- Clio
- Calliope
- Eurystheus
- Heracles
- Urania
- Erato
- Melpomene
- Terpsichore
- Euterpe
- Thalia

Heracles: I've heard of this lion. It is actually one of Echidna's offspring, which Zeus had allowed to live as a challenge to future heroes, isn't it?

Eurystheus: That's right. I want you to kill that beast. Do you think you can do it?

Heracles: I will use all my powers to fulfill your request.

Clio: In spite of the beast's thick hide and its great size, Heracles was up to the task. He blocked the cave's exit, drove the lion back into its cage and then used his incredible strength to squeeze the lion to death. After using the lion's own claws to skin it, he delivered the skin to Eurystheus, and his first labor was completed.

Urania: Remember that Zeus honored Heracles's skill by adding the lion to the constellations.

Narrator: That's right, he did. But that's just the beginning of his labors.

Erato: I'll pick up the story from here. A lot happened before Heracles's second labor. On his way home from killing the lion, he met messengers from Erginus, the king of Orchomenus. Each year they collected tributes from the Thebans. Heracles decided it was time for this practice to stop. He cut off each man's nose and ears and hung them on a rope around his neck. Then he told the messengers to take back the noses and ears as their tribute! Erginus was furious and immediately marched against Thebes. But Heracles defeated them and avenged himself further by requiring them to pay a tribute that was double the amount that had been requested!

Narrator: And this is when Creon, the king of Thebes, rewarded Heracles by giving him his eldest daughter, Megara, in marriage.

Melpomene: That's right, and Iphicles married her sister. Megara had several children with Heracles, and this should have been a happy time for him. But Heracles never learned to control his rage. There have been many rumors as to exactly what happened, but all we know for sure is this: Heracles killed his children. Some say he threw them into the fire. Others say he killed them with his bow and arrows. If it hadn't been for Athena's intervention, he even would have killed his own father. Athena saw what was happening and struck Heracles, rendering him unconscious.

Narrator: But why would he kill his children?

Melpomene: That has never been clear, but many think Hera was responsible for Heracles's acts of madness. Also, he was simply so strong that he could kill with ease. Some say that Hera hoped he would do something so despicable, he'd be forced into exile. Anyway, Heracles became so worried about Megara's safety that he gave her to his nephew Iolaus.

Narrator: Let's hear about the Hydra, who was involved in his second labor.

Eurystheus: Heracles, you were clever with the lion. Let's see if you can perform this task. You've heard of the Hydra who is the offspring of Echidna and Typhon, haven't you?

Heracles: Yes, it is a snake with many heads that breathe out poisonous air.

Eurystheus: That's right. It kills anything that it comes near, from crops to people. Conquering that Hydra is your next challenge.

Erato: Heracles took his nephew Iolaus along and asked him to keep a fire burning in the forest while he held his breath and began his attack. Heracles used every weapon he had, including arrows and a saber, to attack the Hydra. He'd destroy one head, and a new one would grow up in its place. Finally, he began having his nephew give him burning brands so he could cauterize the stumps of the heads.

Narrator: But wasn't the main head immortal?

Erato: The story has it that the central head was indeed immortal, but Heracles cut it off, buried it, and put a huge rock on top of it. Then he rendered his arrows poisonous by dipping them in the Hydra's blood. Hera was so angry at Heracles's success that she sent a huge crab to help the Hydra. But the crab only managed to nip Heracles in the heel before Heracles crushed it. Heracles returned to Eurystheus.

Heracles: Eurystheus, I've destroyed the Hydra, as you requested.

Eurystheus: So I've heard. Don't think you can rest, young man. This time you won't be able to simply kill a creature. Instead you must capture it.

Heracles: What shall I capture?

Eurystheus: A dreadful boar with fearful tusks lives on Mount Erymanthus. You must bring it back alive!

Terpsichore: Heracles began chasing the boar all over the mountain, yelling at it relentlessly. Finally, he chased the boar into the snow, where it sank to the tops of its massive legs. Heracles caught it and then dragged and rolled it down to the gates of Mycenae. Eurystheus was so terrified when he saw the beast that he hid himself in an urn! Finally, he came out to give Heracles his fourth labor.

Eurystheus: There are five hinds, all larger than bulls, with gilded horns.

Heracles: Those are the ones Hera captured, aren't they?

Eurystheus: That's right. She wanted four to pull her chariot. She let the fifth one roam freely, wearing a collar with an inscription that it was dedicated to Artemis. I want you to kill that hind.

Heracles: How can I do that? Killing a sacred beast is an impious act.

Eurystheus: Forget about impiety. Kill the beast.

Euterpe: So Heracles chased the hind for a year. It finally became tired enough that Heracles could wound the animal as it tried to cross the river Ladon in Arcadia. Then Heracles caught it and began to carry it on his shoulders. As he was passing through Arcadia, he met Artemis and Apollo, who accused him of wanting to kill a sacred animal. After a brief exchange, Heracles convinced them that he was only carrying out Eurystheus's directive, so he was allowed to continue on his way, completing his fourth labor.

Act II: The Next Four Labors

Narrator: For his first four labors, Heracles killed a lion, destroyed the Hydra, captured the boar, and killed the hind. Upon his return, he faced another daunting challenge.

Eurystheus: You've done well, Heracles, but do you think you can outwit the Stymphalian birds?

Heracles: I know little of them, except that they live in the forest on the shores of Lake Stymphalus.

Eurystheus: Like the hind, they ruin the crops in their relentless quest for food. No one can destroy them because their feathers are made of brass. One brass feather striking the head of a mortal causes certain death.

Heracles: I've heard rumors that the birds then make a meal of their victims.

Eurystheus: I've heard that's true. Another complication is that the forests are nearly impenetrable.

Heracles: Don't worry, Eurystheus. I have some ideas. *(To the audience)* I'll use the skin of the lion I killed in my first labor for protection. I'll create a din by striking together bronze castanets. I'll use poison arrows to kill the birds as they fly out of the thickets to escape the noise.

Thalia: As he planned, Heracles killed many of the birds. The few that escaped never returned.

Narrator: This completed Heracles's fifth labor. His next task was particularly distasteful.

Eurystheus: Heracles your next challenge involves King Augias, the son of Helios, the Sun. Augias has huge herds of cattle, but he never cleans his stables. Piles of manure lay everywhere. Not only is the entire area unsightly and repulsive, the manure is damaging the soil in the region. Your task is to clean the stables. Don't think it will be easy, Heracles. It's a huge task.

Urania: But Heracles was not only capable of the challenge, he also issued his own challenge to King Augias. Heracles bragged that he could clean the stables in a day. When King Augias scoffed, they entered into a bet. If Heracles succeeded, part of the kingdom would be his.

Narrator: What happened?

Urania: Heracles wasted no time in diverting the course of two rivers through the stable yards, washing the manure across the land. Heracles returned to Eurystheus's throne.

Heracles: I've completed the task of taking care of the manure.

Eurystheus: That may be, but you made a mistake, Heracles.

Heracles: There was no mistake. I completed the task, as you directed.

Eurystheus: But you placed a wager with King Augias, and you won. You've been compensated with part of his kingdom. Therefore, the completion of this task does not bring you any closer to being finished with your labors.

Narrator: Seems as if Eurystheus was determined to make Heracles's life miserable.

Polyhymnia: He had no choice. Hera was pressuring him to assign increasingly difficult labors. Wait until you hear about the seventh labor!

Eurystheus: Perhaps this time you'll limit yourself to the task at hand, Heracles. I know you've heard about how Minos promised to sacrifice anything that appeared in the sea to Poseidon. He fulfilled that promise until he saw how beautiful the Cretan Bull was.

Heracles: I heard that Minos was so struck by its beauty that he sacrificed a different bull.

Eurystheus: That's right. Of course, this infuriated Poseidon, who got his revenge by making the Cretan Bull untamable. For your next labor, bring the bull to me—alive.

Polyhymnia: Heracles tried to get Minos to help him, but Minos told him he would have to do it alone. Eventually, Heracles caught the bull, and according to witnesses, he rode on its back as it swam to Greece. After presenting the animal to Hera, Eurystheus wanted to dedicate it to her, but she freed the bull instead. It eventually wandered to Attica.

Narrator: Heracles returned to Eurystheus for his eighth labor.

Eurystheus: I am sure you know King Diomedes, ruler of Thrace. He owns four mares that eat any stranger who ventures onto his land. Bring back the four mares—alive.

Clio: Heracles traveled to Thrace, taking along some volunteers. After subduing the grooms in charge of the horses, they began to lead the mares away. But when they reached the beach, the local citizens attacked them. As Heracles fought back, the mares killed his companion, Abderus, who was a son of Hermes. Heracles killed the local inhabitants and then killed Diomedes, the king. He fed Diomedes to the mares, taming the horses in the process. After returning with the mares, he presented them to Eurystheus and was ready to accept his next assignment.

Act III: The Final Four Labors

Narrator: After killing many of the Stymphalian birds, cleaning King Augias's stables, capturing the Cretan bull, and capturing four mares, Heracles was ready for his next labor. Eurystheus's daughter, Admete, gave Heracles his ninth labor. Can you tell us about it, Calliope?

Calliope: Admete sent Heracles to the Amazons' kingdom to capture Hippolyta's girdle. The girdle had once belonged to Ares who had given it to Hippolyta as a symbol of his power over her. Once again, Heracles took some volunteers with him as he sailed to Themiscyra, the port of the Amazon's land. Hippolyta was ready to give him the girdle, but Hera intervened. She disguised herself as an Amazon and spread a rumor that Heracles was going to abduct their queen. Soon they were engaged in a battle. While common Amazons fought in the battle, the noblest challenged Heracles directly, fighting him individually. But Heracles won battle after battle. After Heracles captured their great leader, Melanippe, Hippolyta traded the girdle for Melanippe's freedom. Heracles believed that Hippolyta had betrayed him, and a battle followed. In the course of the fighting, Heracles killed Hippolyta.

Narrator: Didn't Heracles have another adventure on his way home?

Calliope: Yes. He was off the coast of Troy when he found Laomedon's daughter, Hesione, chained to a rock. Laomedon had promised Poseidon a reward for building the walls of Troy, but Laomedon betrayed Poseidon. In retaliation, Poseidon sent a sea monster to destroy Troy. Laomedon, desperate to stop the sea monster, offered his daughter as a sacrifice to save his land. When he saw Heracles sailing by, he begged Heracles to help him. Laomedon promised to give Heracles some splendid horses that had been a gift from Zeus to his father. Heracles waited for the monster, and when it rose out of the water with its mouth wide open, Heracles dived into it and cut its entrails to ribbons. He emerged without a scratch. But once again, Laomedon broke his word, and Heracles left without the promised horses.

Narrator: If Eurystheus had accepted all of Heracles's efforts, this would be his last labor, but things didn't go smoothly for Heracles, even though he continually succeeded in his tasks. He returned to Eurystheus.

Eurystheus: For your next labor, you must journey to the island of Erythia, far to the west in the gulf of Gaderia. Geryon, the great giant who lives there, owns a fine herd of cattle that is guarded by another giant, Eurytion.

Heracles: I've heard of Geryon. He is huge, with three bodies, three heads, six arms, and six feet. No mortal has ever dreamed of challenging Geryon. I'll need help, Eurystheus.

Eurystheus: Do what you must, but kill the monster.

Narrator: What did he do first?

Erato: Heracles knew he would need help, so first he organized his armies on Crete. Then they sailed to his first landing at Libya. He had various adventures there, killing the giant Antaeus and all beasts of prey. Finally, he came

to a valley where two rivers met. There he founded the city of the hundred gates. Heracles found the heat of the Libyan Desert intolerable and decided to use his arrows to shoot down the sun. The sun begged him not to shoot, and Heracles suggested a trade. Each day, Helios crossed the ocean in a huge vessel, the *Cup of the Sun*. Heracles knew that if he had this vessel he'd be able to reach Erythia easily. When threatened by Heracles's arrows, the sun had no choice but to agree to the arrangement. Melpomene, why don't you continue with the story?

Melpomene: Well, Heracles still had obstacles ahead. He reached Iberia where the three sons of Chrysaor camped with their vast armies. Heracles challenged their leaders to combat and killed them without even involving the armies. He went on to Erythia and was met with Geryon's two-headed dog. Heracles raised his club and killed the dog with one blow. Then he killed Eurytion, who was guarding the cattle. Heracles started off with the cattle, but Geryon followed and engaged him in a grim battle. Hera appeared and tried to help Geryon. But Heracles shot an arrow into her breast, and she fled. Heracles prepared his bow again, carefully aiming an arrow at the exact place where Geryon's three stomachs joined. Heracles hit the mark, and Geryon thundered to the ground, dead from his wound.

Narrator: How did Heracles get all those cattle back home?

Melpomene: He took the northern route, passing the coasts of Spain, Gaul, Italy, and Sicily. In Liguria, he fought off an army of natives, running out of arrows in the course of the battle. The country had no stones, so Heracles asked Zeus for help. Zeus obliged by sending stones down from the heavens like rain. In Calabria, one of his bulls escaped and swam to Sicily, so Heracles simply swam after it. Hera tried again to stop him, sending gadflies, which attacked the herd and drove them mad. The herd scattered throughout the foothills of the mountains of Thrace. Heracles rounded up most of them, but some escaped and became the wild Scythian herds that wandered the hills. Finally he delivered the rest of the herd to Eurystheus, who sacrificed them to Hera.

Narrator: His eleventh labor was especially dangerous. Eurystheus had become desperate to best Heracles.

Eurystheus: Heracles, I want you to bring me Cerberus, the watchdog for the Underworld.

Heracles: Do you mean the dog with three heads, whose jaws drip venomous slobber?

Eurystheus: Yes, but that's not all. His body ends in a dragon's tail, and instead of hair, he is covered with snakes. You'll have to learn the secrets of the Underworld to complete this task, Heracles.

Terpsichore: Zeus, recognizing the danger of this labor, asked Hermes and Athena to help Heracles. Heracles first had to be purified and then taught the secrets that would prepare him for the terrors he would face.

Narrator: How did Heracles get to the Underworld?

Terpsichore: Hermes escorted him there, where all but two of the dead, the Gorgon Medusa and the hero Meleager, fled when they saw him. Heracles drew his sword, but Hermes reminded him that the dead were empty shadows. Heracles met Theseus and Pirithous who were both still alive but were chained by Pluto because they had tried to rescue Persephone. Heracles was allowed to free Theseus, but Pirithous had to stay and continue his punishment. Heracles also released Ascalaphus, who was being held under a huge rock.

Narrator: Did Heracles ever meet with Pluto?

Terpsichore: Yes, he finally reached Pluto and asked his permission to take Cerberus away. Pluto said he could, but only if he overpowered the dog without using the weapons he had brought with him, wearing only his breastplate and lion skin. Heracles agreed, and set out after Cerberus, who was crouching at the mouth of the Acheron. Ignoring the dog's thunderous barks from all three heads, Heracles grasped the dog's neck with his hands. He ignored the stings from the dog's forked tongue at the end of his tail and held on until the dog was overpowered. Heracles then returned to Earth, but once Cerberus saw daylight, he grew mad with fear and spewed venom all over the Earth. This caused the poisonous aconite plant to spring from the ground.

Narrator: Eurystheus was terrified when he saw Cerberus! Once again, Eurystheus hid in an urn. He didn't know what to do with the beast.

Eurystheus: Heracles, take that horrid animal back to Pluto! Then you can complete your final labor.

Heracles: What will I do, Eurystheus?

Eurystheus: Long ago, when Hera married Zeus, Gaia gave her golden apples as a wedding present. Hera planted them in a garden near Mount Atlas, but the daughters of Atlas would steal the apples. To protect her precious fruit, Hera had a dragon with one hundred heads guard the tree. Find the tree and bring me three apples.

Heracles: But how am I to find the garden?

Eurystheus: That is for you to figure out.

Narrator: How did Heracles find the garden?

Euterpe: The only person who knew where to find the tree was Nereus, the Old Gray Man of the Sea, and he refused to tell Heracles. When Heracles seized Nereus to squeeze the secret out of him, Nereus began changing shapes, taking on the form of all kinds of animals. But Heracles held on until Nereus told him that the garden was west of the setting sun, close to where the Titan Atlas stood, holding up the sky. Heracles set out toward the setting sun. He had many adventures on the way. When he climbed the Caucasus, he found Prometheus being tortured by an eagle that ate away his liver every day. Prometheus told Heracles that he'd never be able to collect the golden apples. Only a god could pick the apples of immortality. Then Prometheus said the only way Heracles could get them was to have Atlas pick the three golden apples for him.

Narrator: How did Heracles convince Atlas to help?

Euterpe: Atlas was quite naturally weary from holding up the sky, so Heracles offered to hold the sky while Atlas collected the three golden apples. Atlas agreed, but after getting the apples, Atlas told Heracles that he himself was taking the golden apples to Eurystheus while Heracles continued to hold up the sky. Heracles agreed, but asked Atlas to hold the heavens while Heracles put a cushion on his shoulders. As soon as Atlas had resumed his burden, Heracles picked up the apples and fled, eventually delivering the apples to Eurystheus.

Narrator: That was his twelfth labor. Was Heracles finally free of these challenges?

Thalia: Zeus was very pleased with his son, for Heracles had become the most famous hero on Earth. Heracles traveled all over Greece, helping many people with more heroic deeds. This infuriated Hera, so she made him insane for a time. While mad, Heracles killed many men, angering Zeus. This time Zeus determined Heracles's punishment, sentencing him to serve for three years as a slave to Queen Omphale of Lydia. She made him wear women's clothes and sit at her feet sewing and spinning. After three years of such humiliation, Heracles was humbled.

Narrator: What happened after he was released from his punishment?

Urania: Heracles became a great soldier, leading many successful campaigns. He married Deianeira, the love of his life, after winning her in a fight with the river god Achelous. They had a son and enjoyed their life together. But Deianeira's intense love for Heracles led to his death. During a journey together, the centaur Nessus tried to steal Deianeira. Heracles shot an arrow into Nessus's heart, mortally wounding him. As Nessus lay dying, he convinced Deianeira that a potion made of his blood would ensure that Heracles would always love her. Sometime later she decided to use it, dipping Heracles's tunic in it. When he donned the cloak, the poison was activated, and Heracles knew he was dying. Deianeira could not bear this, and in her grief, she committed suicide.

Narrator: Heracles ended his life with great dignity. He ordered his servants to build him a funeral pyre and to light the fire. They all refused, except for Philoctetes, who lit the fire. Heracles rewarded Philoctetes by giving him his bow and arrows. The sky opened with a clap of thunder, and Heracles ascended to Mount Olympus on a cloud, leaving us only stories of our beloved hero.