

WORDS FROM CLASSICAL MYTHOLOGY #4

NEMESIS



Nemesis was not a goddess but the personification of a concept. The name "Nemesis" means "righteous anger." Her domain was retribution or just, fair revenge. Nemesis did not reside on Mount Olympus with the gods but rather on Earth with mortals. Today a nemesis is an evil opponent, someone who usually wins.

1. According to the ancient Greeks, Nemesis was the personification of _____
2. Which of the following statements is true?
 - A. Prince Harry is the nemesis of his grandmother, Queen Elizabeth II.
 - B. Mother Theresa was the nemesis of poor people.
 - C. Neil Armstrong, first man on the moon, was the nemesis of his crewmates, "Buzz" Aldrin and Michael Collins.
 - D. Adolph Hitler was the nemesis of Jewish people.



Phrygia was famous for its roses, and King Midas had wonderful gardens near his palace. One day his servants found Silenus, a follower of the god of wine Bacchus, asleep among the roses. Midas welcomed him and treated him as a royal guest for 10 days. Then he helped Silenus rejoin Bacchus.

Bacchus was so pleased with Midas that he promised Midas he would grant him one wish. Midas greedily wished that everything he touched would turn to gold.

That night at dinner Midas could not eat or drink anything because it kept turning to gold in his mouth. He went out to his garden for comfort, but the roses turned to gold when he touched them. His young daughter ran outside and asked her daddy to pick her up. Laughing, she grabbed his legs -- and instantly turned to gold.

Horried, Midas hurried to Bacchus to beg him to take back the gift. Bacchus sent him to bathe in source of the river Pactolus and to sprinkle river water on his daughter. To this day people find gold in the sand from that river.

3. When Bacchus offered him a gift, King Midas asked to turn things into _____ just by touching them.
4. Midas's choice was foolish and disastrous. Today if someone has "the Midas Touch," we call them _____.
 - A. foolish
 - B. generous
 - C. successful
 - D. cowardly

HERCULES



Hercules ranks with Odysseus and Theseus as one of the greatest Greek heroes. The son of Zeus and a mortal woman, he killed a pair of snakes while he was still an infant. Everyone knew then that he was no ordinary child.

As an adult, he married the Theban princess Megara. He loved his wife and children, but one day in a fit of madness, he killed them all. When he came to his senses and realized what he had done, he was going to kill himself. However, the Theban ruler Theseus reached out and grasped Hercules' bloodstained hands. According to the Greek tradition, this made Theseus guilty, too.

This act of friendship saved Hercules' life. Theseus convinced Hercules to come to Athens. While he was there, Hercules consulted the oracle of Apollo. The oracle told him to go to King Eurystheus, who would provide tasks for Hercules as penance. If he completed what Eurystheus said, he would be purified from his guilt.

King Eurystheus devised a list called "The Twelve Labors of Hercules." Each was all but impossible. Hercules undertook them willingly in order to atone for his crimes.

1. **The Nemean Lion:** Hercules had to kill the Nemean Lion, a huge, strong beast no weapon could harm. He choked it to death, then carried the carcass to the King.
2. **The Hydra:** The Hydra had nine heads, one of which was immortal. The other eight were equally dangerous. If a warrior cut off one head, two more grew in its place. Hercules brought his nephew Iolus to help him. As Hercules cut off one head, Iolus seared the neck with a hot brand so a new head couldn't grow. After they cut off the eight mortal heads, Hercules buried the ninth one under a huge rock.
3. **The Golden Stag:** This stag had horns of gold and was sacred to Artemis. Hercules had to capture it alive.
4. **The Erymanthean Boar:** Hercules chased this monstrous wild hog until it was worn out. Then he trapped it in deep snow.
5. **The Stables of King Augeus:** King Augeus had thousands of cattle and hadn't bothered to clean out his stables in years. Hercules rerouted two rivers to flood the stables and clean them quickly.
6. **The Stymphalian Birds:** There were so many birds that the people of Stymphalus considered them a threat. Athena drove the birds out of their hiding places, and Hercules shot them with his arrows.
7. **The Minoan Bull:** Hercules journeyed to the island of Crete and overpowered the savage bull that Poseidon had given King Minos. He put the bull on a boat and brought it to King Eurystheus.
8. **The Mares of Diomedes:** These horses were a special challenge: they ate human flesh. Hercules had to kill King Diomedes first, and then he drove off the mares.
9. **The Girdle (Belt) of Hippolyta:** Hippolyta was the Queen of the Amazons, a race of warrior women. She was willing to help him out and gave him the girdle. As he was leaving, the Amazons mistakenly thought Hercules was kidnapping Hippolyta, so they attacked his ship. Hercules, mistakenly thinking Hippolyta ordered the attack, killed her. He took the girdle and escaped.
10. **The Cattle of Geryon:** Geryon was a monster with three bodies. He lived on Erythia, an island way in the west. On his way to get the cattle, Hercules set up two great stones, called the Pillars of Hercules. Today they are the mighty rocks Gibraltar and Ceuta at the western entrance of the Mediterranean Sea.
11. **The Golden Apples of the Hesperides:** No one knew where the golden apples were, but Eurystheus ordered Hercules to bring them to him. The Hesperides were the daughters of Atlas, so Hercules asked Atlas, the Titan who held up the sky, for help. Atlas asked Hercules to hold up the sky while he went for the apples. When he came back, he told Hercules to just keep on holding up the sky while he delivered the apples. Hercules knew what Atlas was up to. He said he would be glad to hold up the sky if Atlas would take it back for just a moment so he could put a pad on his shoulders. Atlas agreed. Hercules took the apples and left.
12. **Cerberus, the Three-Headed Dog:** Hercules' last job was to bring Cerberus up from the Underworld. Hades, king of the underworld, agreed to let Cerberus go as long as Hercules didn't use any weapons on him. Hercules lifted Cerberus up and carried him to Eurystheus. Cerberus was very dangerous, so Eurystheus made Hercules take him back. That was the last of his labors.

When he died, Hercules was taken to Mount Olympus to spend eternity with the gods and goddesses.

5. Hercules completed twelve labors. Which one required

- A. the greatest strength? _____
- B. the most courage? _____
- D. the most cleverness? _____

6. Complete the analogy: **HERCULEAN** : **WEAK** :: _____ .

- A. hot : warm
- B. spotted : striped
- C. musical : rhythmical
- D. left : right

PANDORA



Prometheus and Epimetheus were brothers during the Golden Age, when no evil existed on the Earth. No one was ever sick or angry or hungry. Everyone spent their days in peace and happiness. Prometheus, whose name means "forethought," was a Titan and was very wise. His brother's name meant "afterthought," and he made a terrible mistake. On Mount Olympus the gods created a young woman. Each one gave her a special gift, such as a silvery gown, a golden crown, great beauty, and garlands of flowers. They named her "Pandora," which means "the gift from all." The gods also gave Pandora a box. Into that box each god had put something harmful, and they warned her never to open it. Then they sent Pandora to Epimetheus. When he saw her beauty, Epimetheus forgot his brother's warning never to accept anything from Zeus. He welcomed Pandora into his home and married her. One day Pandora's curiosity got the better of her. She just had to know what was in the box the gods had given her, so she opened it. Immediately all the troubles of the world flew out: disease, anger, hunger, and many others. Terrified, Pandora slammed down the lid, but it was too late. The Golden Age was ruined. Pandora looked down at the box, startled. Did she hear something inside knocking and saying, "Let me out"? Pandora sighed. No matter what was in there, it couldn't be any worse than what she had already let out, so she opened the box. Out flew Hope, the only good thing the gods had included. Today Hope is often the only thing that sustains people during bad times.

7. What was the only good quality in the original Pandora's Box? _____

8. Pandora's name means "all gifts," but she is famous for bringing all the troubles into the world. The name for that contradiction is _____.

- A. irony
- B. suspense
- C. personification
- D. simile

PSYCHE



Psyche was a beautiful young woman, the youngest of three daughters. Men came from many lands to admire her, but no one wanted to marry her.

Her father was concerned, so he consulted an oracle. The priestess of Apollo said Psyche was fated to marry a winged monster who was even stronger than the gods. She said Psyche must be dressed in deepest mourning and left alone on the top of a hill. Her husband would take her away.

Everyone was upset by this news, but Psyche faced it bravely. When the day came, she dressed as though she were going to her death and joined the procession to the top of the hill. She said good-bye to her family and waited. They returned to their homes and mourned for her.

When it grew dark, a soft, gentle wind lifted Psyche up and carried her to a peaceful meadow. She slept. She woke up next to a beautiful mansion overlooking a lovely river. She went to the door and heard voices telling her to enter, that the house was hers and they were her servants. They brought her delicious food to eat, and gentle music filled the house. She was alone, but somehow she knew that her husband would come in the evening. And she knew he would not be a monster.

Psyche was right. Her husband was everything she could have hoped for, except for one thing: she never saw him. He left before dawn and only returned to his home after dark. He warned Psyche never to try to see him.

Psyche decided she had to see him. One night she waited until he was sleeping quietly and lit an oil lamp. She was astonished at how handsome he was. She began to tremble, and some of the oil spilled out of the lamp onto his shoulder. He woke up, realized that she had broken her promise, and left. She ran after him into the night, but he said, "Love cannot live where there is no trust."

That's when Psyche realized that her husband was Cupid, the god of love. No wonder the oracle had said she would marry a winged monster stronger than the gods! How many times had Cupid shot one of his arrows into a god or goddess to make them fall in love with a mortal? Psyche scolded herself for not keeping her promise.

Determined to win him back, Psyche decided to go to Venus, the goddess of love and Cupid's mother. She would offer herself as a servant to try to win Venus' favor. But Venus was angry and gave Psyche a series of tasks. First Psyche had to sort out a heap of very small seeds into separate piles. She could never have done it by herself, but a group of ants took pity on her and sorted them for her.

The second task was to bring Venus golden fleece from the sheep that grazed near the riverbank. The sheep were very fierce. Psyche thought of throwing herself into the river because the task was so hard. A kind reed, however, spoke to her and told her to wait until evening. The sheep would walk through the thicket to get water from the river. After they left, Psyche could get the fleece that was hanging on the briars.

For the third task, Venus ordered Psyche to bring her a flask of water from the river Styx. The banks of the river were very dangerous, slick and steep and rocky. As she tried to figure out how to get the water, an eagle swooped down and took the flask, flew to the waterfall and filled it, then brought it back.

Finally Venus said that taking care of Cupid's wounds had robbed her of her beauty. She ordered Psyche to take a box to Proserpina, Queen of the Underworld, and ask her to put some of her beauty into it. The journey to the underworld was long and dangerous, but again Psyche had help along the way. Proserpina filled the box, and Psyche began the difficult journey back.

On the return trip, Psyche grew curious about what the beauty charm was. She finally opened the box. She didn't see anything inside, but before long she was sound asleep.

Cupid, who was well enough to leave his mother's palace by now, found her by the side of the road. He awakened her and sent her on to Venus. Then he flew up to Mt. Olympus. Jupiter himself blessed the marriage and gave Psyche ambrosia to eat, making her immortal. Once Psyche became an immortal, Venus no longer objected to the marriage, and Cupid (the god of love) and Psyche (whose name means "soul") were always together after that.

9. Why might the oracle have been correct in describing Cupid as "a winged monster who was even stronger than the gods"? _____

10. A person's psyche includes all of the following except which one?

- A. mind
- B. soul
- C. self-esteem
- D. body