

# WORDS FROM CLASSICAL MYTHOLOGY #3

## LETHE



The river Lethe was also called the river of forgetfulness or oblivion. It was one of five rivers separating the Greek underworld from the land of the living. Souls often became drowsy as they listened to the river's murmuring. Those who drank water from the river Lethe forgot everything they had seen while they were in the Underworld. Then they could return to Earth to be reincarnated (born in a new form).

1. The river Lethe was also called "\_\_\_\_\_."
2. Which of the following is an antonym for "lethargic"?
  - A. dry
  - B. safe
  - C. hungry
  - D. energetic

## MUSES

The nine Muses were daughters of Zeus and Mnemosyne (Memory). Each Muse was in charge of one area of the arts:

Calliope, epic poetry and eloquence  
Clio, history  
Erato, love poetry  
Euterpe, lyric poetry  
Melpomene, tragedy  
Polyhymnia, songs to the gods (hymns)  
Terpsichore, dance  
Thalia, comedy  
Urania, astronomy



The Muses provided inspiration and joy. Artists often asked their muse for help.

3. The ancient Greek muses were goddesses in charge of what?
  - A. sports
  - B. tools and technology
  - C. nature
  - D. the arts
4. If you are "musing" about something, what are you doing?
  - A. thinking
  - B. singing
  - C. dancing
  - D. writing a poem



## NYX

According to the Greek story of creation, at first there was nothing but Chaos. Chaos was a huge, wild, disorganized void or "nothingness." Chaos had two children: Nyx and Erebus. Nyx and Erebus were not gods to be worshipped; they were personifications of the concepts of night (Nyx) and darkness (Erebus). Nyx laid an egg, and from it came love. When Love was born, beauty and order came, too. The confusion of Chaos began to disappear. Love created Light and Day. In some stories, Nyx rode across the sky in a chariot, bringing night. The Roman name for Nyx was Nox, and our English words come from Nox.

6. Complete the sentence: It was hard to see the nocturnal animals because \_\_\_\_\_.

- A. it was too dark.
- B. they were too far away.
- C. they moved too quickly.
- D. they lived underwater.

## ODYSSEUS



Odysseus, king of Ithaca, is the greatest of the Greek heroes. During the years of the Trojan War, Odysseus proved to be a natural leader. He was also very clever. In fact, he thought of the Trojan Horse, the trick which brought the war to an end. He is often referred to as "wily Odysseus."

When the Trojan War ended, Odysseus forgot to thank the gods for helping him. This made them angry, and they punished him with a long voyage home. The trip that should have taken about two weeks took 10 years instead. Along the way, Odysseus fought many monsters and misfortunes, was taken prisoner by Circe and Calypso, visited the land of the dead, and eventually lost all of his men. He was able to get home only because Athena changed her mind and helped him.

The story of Odysseus' long voyage with its unexpected twists and turns is told in Homer's epic poem, *The Odyssey*. Our English word comes from the title.

7. Odysseus was the greatest of the Greek heroes. He fought in the Trojan War for 10 years. How long did it take him to get home after the Trojan War?

- A. two weeks
- B. ten years
- C. six months
- D. a year

8. Our word "odyssey" means "a long voyage full of unexpected twists and turns." What caused Odysseus to have such a difficult journey?

- A. He forgot to thank the gods.
- B. The Trojans captured him.
- C. The Trojan Horse injured him.
- D. He was seasick most of the time.

## TANTALUS



Tantalus was the son of Zeus and a mortal mother. The gods and goddesses liked Tantalus. One time he invited all of them to his palace for a great banquet, and they all honored him by attending. No one has ever tried to explain what happened next. Tantalus ordered his servants to kill his son Pelops, boil him in a cauldron, and serve him to the gods for dinner. Of course the gods knew what was on the plates in front of them, and they refused to eat. Instead, they restored Pelops to life, and they devised a unique and terrible punishment for Tantalus. Tantalus was chained in a pool in the underworld. Around the pool were fruit trees heavy with ripe fruit. Whenever he was hungry and reached for something to eat, a breeze blew the branches out of his reach. When he was thirsty and tried to drink, the water drained into the ground. When he stood up, it was there again. He was condemned to spend eternity hungry and thirsty even though he was surrounded by food and water. Today our word *tantalize* suggests tempting someone with something he or she can't have. Something tantalizing is very interesting or desirable.

9. How was Tantalus punished? \_\_\_\_\_

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10. Complete the analogy: *tantalize* is to *tempt* as \_\_\_\_\_.

- A. *lethargic* is to *sluggish*
- B. *nocturnal* is to *daily*
- C. *odyssey* is to *hero*