

In this unit, students study three well-known stories centered on key “heroes” from Greek mythology: Prometheus, Odysseus, and Arachne. Drawing on the routines and skills established in previous units, students analyze the characters, actions, and themes of the individual myths, but also discuss some of the broader questions and themes raised by these myths, these heroes, and the view of the world presented.

The first myth, “Prometheus,” raises a number of engaging questions about justice, responsibility, and what it means to be human. Students then dive into one of the famous episodes from Homer’s epic poem *The Odyssey*, which recounts the various adventures of the witty and tricky Odysseus as he makes his journey home from the Trojan War. Odysseus’s actions challenge students to consider how character traits can be both beneficial and harmful, and what constitutes leadership. Then students read “Arachne,” a poem by Ted Hughes, which retells Ovid’s famous origin myth. In this sub-unit, students explore the confrontation between the human Arachne and the goddess Minerva. They consider the line between pride and arrogance, but also what it means to speak truth to power. At the end of the unit, students use their understanding of these myths to write an essay arguing whether these myths suggest that humans are destroyed by their pride.

Note: The gods depicted in Greek myths can be violent, selfish, and capricious in their dealings with humans. Students may find some of the depictions of the gods’ actions—and their consequences for humans—upsetting. Provide opportunities for students to express their feelings. It may be helpful to remind students that these myths were one way people tried to understand certain aspects of human life—both the good parts and the cruel parts.

Core texts your student will read:

- "Prometheus" from *Heroes, Gods and Monsters of the Greek Myths* by Bernard Evslin
- Excerpts from *The Odyssey* by Homer, translated by E.V. Rieu
- "Arachne" from *Selected Tales from Ovid* by Ted Hughes

What my student will do/learn:

- Students complete the *Myth World Quest*, a game-like experience that immerses them in the complex world of the Olympian gods and familiarizes them with the primary characters of Greek mythology.
- In “Prometheus,” students perform parts of the narrative to develop a deeper understanding of both Zeus’s and Prometheus’s central arguments about whether humans should have fire.
- In the excerpt from *The Odyssey*, students read and discuss how Odysseus recounts his encounter with the Cyclops to consider what they learn about Odysseus’s character as he interacts with Polyphemus and ultimately escapes his cave.

- Students analyze the central argument between the outspoken human Arachne and the goddess Minerva in Ted Hughes’s retelling of Ovid’s “Arachne” myth. They then develop their argument about whether the talented and outspoken Arachne was treated fairly by the goddess.
- Students use their understanding of myth and its structure to write their own versions of the Prometheus and Arachne myths.
- Students continue to use key classroom routines, including the sharing routine, during which classmates respond to shared writing by noting one effective way the writer used details or evidence.
- Students continue to write in response to prompts 2–3 times weekly, and practice analytic writing in response to text by developing a controlling idea or claim and providing support with details or evidence.
- Students write an end-of-unit essay responding to the following prompt: Using two of the following characters—the humans from “Prometheus,” Odysseus from *The Odyssey*, or Arachne from “Arachne”—answer the following question: Are humans destroyed by their pride? Why or why not? Use your answer to stake a claim about whether or not these characters have been destroyed by their pride. Be sure to support your claim with textual evidence.

Here are some conversation starters that you can use during this unit to promote discussion and encourage continued learning with your student:

1. Do you think that Zeus’s punishment of Prometheus was fair? Considering both Prometheus’s and Zeus’s arguments regarding how fire would affect humans, do you think Prometheus should have stolen fire and given it to humans?
2. Greek myths often pushed readers to consider real human issues. What ideas about human character do you think were raised for Greek listeners when they considered the stories of Odysseus and Arachne? Do you believe that people still think about these ideas today?
3. Can you share a piece of writing with me in which you provide evidence from the text to support your controlling idea or claim? (Provide feedback to your student by finding something in their writing that you can respond to as a reader. For example, “You help me see that humans do deserve fire when you point out how Prometheus compares men without fire to beasts.”)
4. Each of the myths in this unit touch upon the idea of pride. How did pride affect each of the human characters? In what way was it a destructive force? In what way was it a strength?