

HARRY POTTER PORTAL INTO GREEK AND ROMAN MYTHOLOGY

When someone mentions "mythology" what do you think of? It is probably Greek mythology, with Zeus and Poseidon, Hercules and Odysseus. Of course there are hundreds of mythologies around the world, and we will study three of them, but to Westerners Greek mythology is the big one.

The mythology of the ancient Greeks permeates the literature of Western culture in art, drama, and literature, and for centuries artists have used the stories of Greek mythology as inspiration. If you read English or American literature, especially the "classics," you cannot escape references to Greek mythology. The Harry Potter series joins those books as part of a *long* line of books that use Greek mythology to enhance and enrich the story. Being aware of these references and understanding the context in which they are used, can give you a deep understanding of the story and will help you enjoy it even more than if you were unaware of the mythological underpinnings. Understanding the Greek mythological reference to the dog "Fluffy" and of Hagrid giving Harry a flute for a gift, will make reading that part of *The Sorcerer's Stone* so much richer.

The Harry Potter books are *filled* with references to Greek mythology. We can see the influence of Greek and Roman mythology in character names, spells, and even the circumstances in which Harry finds himself. Join me as we explore the Greek mythological underpinnings of the Harry Potter world.

In This Section we'll Learn About:

- The Titans
- The Olympian Gods and Goddesses
- Greek Heroes
- Heroes Who Travel to the Underground
- Heroes Who Use Disguises
- Gods/Goddesses/Humans Who Transform
- Greek Witches
- The Greek Creation Story
- The Story of Persephone
- Roman Gods and Goddesses

The Titans

The Titans, also referred to as the "Elder Gods," are the gods and goddesses who flourished before the Olympian gods (the Olympians are the gods we are most familiar with). Enormous beings with incredible strength, the Titans ruled the world for ages before the age of man. The Titans are considered "primordial" gods, meaning they are the most basic embodiment of some natural force, like the earth, the sky, ocean, moon, or sun.

Mother Goddess and Father God

Gaea (gai-ah)—she is *the* earth goddess. She mated with her son, Uranus, whom she created out of nothing, and they created the other Titans. We still use the word "gaia" to mean the earth or an earth mother.

Uranus—he is the sky god. Son and wife of Gaea, he is the father of many of the Titans. The planet Uranus is named after him.

First Generation Titans

Chronus (crow-nuhs)—the ruler of the Titans and father of many of the Olympian gods and goddesses. Chronos means "time" in Greek.

Rhea (REE-uh)—the wife of Chronus. Considered the "mother of the gods" because she gave birth to the Olympians.

Oceanus (osheeANus)—he is the unending sea around the world. Our word "ocean" comes from him.

Tethys (TEE-thus)—the wife of Oceanus. She and Oceanus produced all the world's rivers and the ocean nymphs.

Hyperion—the Titan of light. He is the father of the sun, moon, and dawn.

Thea—the wife of Hyperion. She is the mother of Helios (the sun), Selene (the moon), and Eos (the dawn). She is associated with brightness.

Mnemosyne (neMO-seenee)—the Titan of memory. She is the mother of the Muses.

Themis (THEE-mis)—the Titan of divine law and order. She is the mother of the Fates.

Iapetus—the Titan of mortal life. He is the father of Epimetheus, Prometheus, and Atlas, three of the second generation Titans.

Phoebe—the Titan of the moon.

Second Generation Titans

Helios (HEE-lios)—the sun.

Eos (ee-ahs)—the dawn.

Selene (suh-LEE-nee)—the moon.

Leto—Titan of motherhood and a protector of the young. She is the mother of Artemis and Apollo, two of the Olympian gods.

Asteria—Titan of oracles, prophetic dreams, astrology, and necromancy. She is the mother of Hecate (**HEH-ka-tee**).

Astreus (ah-STRAY-us)—god of the stars, astronomy, and astrology.

Pallas—Titan of war.

Perses—Titan of destruction. Father of Hecate.

Metis (mee-tis)—Titan of wisdom and knowledge.

Prometheus (pro-MEE-thee-us)—his name means "forethought." He created humans along with his brother Epimetheus. Fortunately for Prometheus, he sided with the Olympians during the great battle between the Titans and the

Olympians. Unfortunately, he tricked Zeus on a number of occasions and was punished severely for it.

Epimetheus—his name means "afterthought" and, predictably, he is not very smart. But he helped create humans with Prometheus.

Atlas—he holds the world up by his shoulders. He fought with the Titans in the big battle with the Olympians and was their fiercest warrior, and Zeus punished him for his betrayal by making him hold the world. The word atlas, which is a book of maps, comes from this god's name. He held up the world, and an atlas shows pictures of the world.

Olympian Gods and Goddesses

There was a great battle between the Titans and what would be come to be known as the Olympian gods.

It was an epic battle, but eventually the Olympians won and banished most of the Titans to Tartarus, a particularly awful place in the underworld.

The Olympians then became the preeminent gods and goddesses in the Greek world. When we in the modern world think of "Greek mythology" we think of the Olympian gods and all of their stories.

Zeus—king of the gods.

- He is the most powerful of the gods.
- The god of the sky and weather—he wields a thunderbolt.

- The god of law and order and fate.
- He fathered many children, both by his wife Hera and mortal women.
- His bird is the eagle.
- His tree is the oak.
- Depicted as a regal man with a black beard.

Symbolism Link! The sacred animal of a god or goddess means that animal is special to the god in some way. Some gods can turn into their animal and some gods are fond of their animal for some reason—Artemis loves the stag because she is a hunter/forest goddess. Some animals are sacred because they represent an aspect of that god; for example, Zeus's animal is the eagle because Zeus is god of the sky and eagles are the “kings” of the sky.

The tree of a god or goddess follows the same concept as the animal. It either represents something about the god/goddess or it is a favorite for some reason. Zeus's tree is the oak because it is strong and mighty like the king of the gods.

In the Harry Potter world, the stag is Harry's patronus, a special animal, because it is associated with his father. Hawkes the Phoenix is a special animal to Dumbledore, and one could say that it is his 'sacred' animal. If an artist were to depict Dumbledore in the style of the ancient Greeks, he might have Fawkes perched on his shoulder.

Poseidon—god of the sea and waters of the earth.

- Second only to Zeus in order of power.

- He creates earthquakes.
- God of horses and the bull—he gave the first horse to man.
- He is depicted holding a trident and surrounded by sea creatures.

Hades—god of the Underworld and the dead.

- After defeating the Titans, Hades and his brothers Zeus and Poseidon drew lots to see who would rule the heavens. Zeus won and Hades was forever stuck with the Underworld.
- Since so many precious metals and gems are buried in the earth, he is also known as the God of Wealth.
- He rarely comes to earth and is also known as the “Unseen One.” Although the god of the underworld, Hades is not evil, but just stuck in the gloomy underworld.
- He owns the cap of invisibility.
- His sacred bird is the owl.
- Depicted as a dark bearded man holding a bird tipped scepter.

Hera—Zeus's wife and queen of the gods.

- Hera is the goddess of married women.
- Her animals are the cow and the peacock.
- She is usually portrayed in stories as the jealous and vindictive wife of Zeus.
- Depicted as a beautiful woman wearing a crown and holding a royal, lotus-tipped staff.

Demeter (de-MEE-ter)—earth goddess of agriculture, grain, bread, and the fertility of the land.

- Her daughter is Persephone (per-seh-fone-ee)
- Sacred animal is the pig—people offered it to her as a sacrifice to ensure good crops.
- Depicted holding sheaves of wheat and a torch.

Hestia—goddess of the hearth and home.

- She did not play much of a role in stories, but was important in everyday living because every house had a hearth. Meals started and ended with an offering to Hestia.
- Cities had a public hearth devoted to her that was never allowed to go out.
- She is a virgin goddess and usually depicted with a veil, sometimes holding flowers or a kettle.

Athena—goddess of war, wisdom, and protector of city life.

- Goddess of the defensive and strategic aspects of war.
- She is also the goddess of pottery, weaving, and other skilled crafts.
- Athena was the first to tame horses for men to ride.
- One of the three virgin goddesses, along with Hestia and Artemis.
- Athena's city is Athens and her temple, the Parthenon.
- Athena's animal is an owl.
- She is depicted wearing a helmet, carrying a spear, and wearing a cloak with the image of the Medusa's head on it. An owl usually either sits on her shoulder or on her head.

Aphrodite (a-fro-DIE-tee)—goddess of love, sex, and beauty.

- She is represented as beautiful and laughing.

- In most stories she was the wife of Hephaestus.
- The dove is her bird.
- Her tree is the myrtle.
- In art she is often depicted nude and accompanied by her son Eros, who we know better as Cupid.

Artemis—goddess of hunting and wild animals.

- Artemis is also the goddess of childbirth and the protector of young girls.
- Depicted as a young girl in a short dress with a bow and arrows.
- The deer and boar are her sacred animals.
- Apollo is her twin brother.

Apollo—god of prophecy, oracles, music, healing, poetry, and archery.

- He is a healer who taught the healing arts to humans.
- God of prophecy.
- His most famous Oracle, given the gift of prophecy by Apollo, resides at Delphi.
- He is light and truth and he utters no false words.
- Apollo is associated with the sun, while his twin sister Artemis is associated with the moon.
- He is represented with bow and arrow, the lyre, and the laurel.
- His animal is the raven.
- Depicted as a beautiful, young, beardless man.

Mythology Connection! Apollo has similarities with the Norse gods Hermod and Balder and the Celtic god Lug. Like Apollo, the Norse god Hermod is a messenger god. The Norse god Balder lives in a hall where no untruth can reside, and he is also beautiful with a radiant light that surrounds him. Like Apollo, the Celtic god Lug is a part of many stories. He gets involved with humans regularly. Lug is also the god of many, many aspects of human life.

Ares—god of war

- Ares is the god of a bloodthirsty kind of war
- The son of Zeus and Hera who both dislike him
- In one famous story he is Aphrodite's lover
- He is represented by a helmet, spear and shield
- His animals are the vulture and the dog
- Depicted as a mature bearded man

Hephaestus (heh-FIE-stus)—god of fire

- A brilliant craftsman, especially with metalwork
- In some stories he was cast out of Olympus by Hera and/or Zeus because of his infirmity
- Represented by the ax and anvil

- His forge is deep in the earth, usually in volcanoes
- He is kindly and peace loving
- Loved by the people and important in the cities, because he is the god of artisans
- Depicted as lame and ugly and riding a donkey

Hermes—messenger god

- Also the god of many other things: travel, hospitality, heralds, trade, thieves, writing, cunning, athletic contests, astronomy, and astrology
- He is the guide into the Underworld for the dead
- Graceful and swift
- He wears winged sandals on his feet and carries a wand with the symbol of the Caduceus on it
- The most cunning of the gods, and also a thief
- Hermes appeared regularly in stories because he was very resourceful and the other gods asked him for help
- Depicted in art with his winged sandals and a traveler's cloak

Dionysus (die-o-NIE-sus)—god of wine.

- He is a demi-god (half-god), son of Zeus and a mortal woman Semele
- The god of celebration and ecstasy and intoxication
- Represented by ivy and vines
- Dionysus is the youngest of the gods and usually accompanied by Satyrs or his female followers, the Maenads

Lesser gods

Eros (air-ros)—god of love. We know him better as Cupid, his Roman name

Hebe (hee-bee)—goddess of youth. Married to Heracles

Iris—goddess of the rainbow

The Muses—the nine Muses are the daughters of Zeus and the Titan Mnemosyne (Titan of Memory).

- The goddesses of song, music, dance, and poetry
- The Muses were the source of inspiration for artists. Artists still refer to the muses today. They often say, "I'm waiting for my muse" or something similar. It means they are waiting for inspiration
- Depicted as beautiful young women

The Muses are...

Clio—muse of history

Urania—astronomy

Melpomene (mel-PAH-meh-nee)—tragedy

Thalia—comedy

Terpsichore (terp-SIK-oree)—dance

Calliope (cal-IO-pee)—epic poetry

Erato—love poetry

Polyhymnia—songs to the gods

Euterpe (yoo-TER-pee)—lyric poetry

The Graces—the daughters of Zeus and the Titan Eurynome (**yur-IN-nah-mee**), the Titan of Water, Meadows, and Pasturelands.

- The goddesses of beauty, grace, festivity, dance, song, and goodness
- The Graces attend Aphrodite and Hera
- They are always depicted together, usually holding hands

The Graces are...

Aglaia (ah-GLI-uh)—represents splendor

Euphrosyne (yoo-FRO-seh-nee)—represents mirth

Thalia—represents good cheer

The Fates—the goddesses of fate

- Assign people their fate or destiny
- Associated with weaving and thread
- The Fates spin out the thread of a person's life. When a person dies, the Fates will cut the thread and become goddesses of death
- Depicted as old women, ugly, and stern

The Fates are...

Clotho (klo-tho)—spins the thread of life and carries a spindle.

Lachesis (LACK-eh-sis)—measures the thread of life, assigning each person his destiny. She carries a staff.

Atropos (A-tro-pos)—cuts the thread of life. She carries scales and a cutting instrument.

Other Gods of the Water

Pontus—the primordial sea god and father of the sea creatures.

Nereus (nee-ree-us)—“Old man of the sea” and god of the fish. Shape-shifter. Depicted as an old man with a staff and sometimes with a fish tail.

Triton—son of Poseidon and also his herald. Depicted with a fish tail and a conch shell trumpet.

Proteus—Poseidon's son. Herdsman of the seals. Also a shape-shifter.

Naiads—fresh water nymphs.

Other Gods of the earth

Pan—god of the wilds, shepherds, hunting, and rustic music.

- Also called the god of panic because his rustic music and wildness excited panic
- Plays pipes of reed
- He loves the wood nymphs, but they do not always return his affections

- Depicted as a man with legs, horns, and tail of a goat

Other Gods of the Underworld

Persephone (per-SEH-fone-ee)—Demeter's daughter. Goddess of spring growth. She is the queen of the Underworld for half of the year.

Greek Heroes

In addition to the Titans and the Olympian gods and goddess, Greek mythology is filled with hero stories. The Greeks loved their heroes! In the Portal to the Mythic Hero is a detailed account of the story of Perseus, a very well-known and beloved Greek hero. In the section below we will also study other hero stories, like Heracles and Odysseus. Here are a few of the heroes of ancient Greece:

Theseus (THEE-see-uhs)—he was the greatest hero of the Athenians and king of Athens at one time. Theseus is best known for entering the Labyrinth on Crete and killing the Minotaur.

Heracles (hair-uh-cleez)—we know him better as Hercules, which is the Roman version of his name. He was the strongest hero, and he performed the

“12 Labors of Heracles,” which included subduing Cerberus, the three-headed dog that guards the gate of the Underworld.

Odysseus (oh-DISS-ee-uhs)—he was a great hero of the Trojan War, but he, along with the other Greek soldiers forgot to pay tribute to Poseidon after their victory in Troy. Poseidon punished them by keeping Odysseus’s ship adrift and lost for ten years. Odysseus and his men had many adventures, including a run-in with the cyclops Polyphemus and a stay on the island of the witch Circe (see her story [here](#)).

Perseus (per-see-uhs)—Perseus had many adventures, but is most well-known for killing the Medusa.

Jason—Jason and his “Argonauts” were sailors and soldiers, famous for capturing the Golden Fleece, a sacred golden fleece of a ram hanging in an oak grove and protected by a dragon (see [page](#) .

Atalanta—Atalanta was a young female hero of the Calydonian boar hunt. When Artemis wanted to punish the people of Calydonia for not offering the first fruit of the harvest to her, she sent a boar to attack and kill the Calydonian people. The boar did his job, killing many people, including those who hunted it. Atalanta was among the last group of hunters who went after the boar, and this time the hunters were successful. Atalanta drew first blood and was afterward awarded the boar's skin as a prize.

Greek Mythology in Harry Potter (in alphabetical order)

Now that we have a background in Greek mythology, let's look at the mythological references in the Harry Potter books.

Try it Out! When you read these Greek and Roman names and the stories behind them, think about how they fit in with the related Harry Potter character or story.

ALECTO

In Harry Potter Alecto Carrow is a Death Eater. She and her brother Amycus become teachers at Hogwarts in *The Deathly Hallows*. They torture students who display disobedience to the Dark Lord or show loyalty to Harry.

In Greek mythology Alecto is one of the three Furies. The Furies are goddesses who punish evildoers:

Alecto (Neverending)

Tisiphone (ti-SI-fone-ee) (Avenging)

Megaira (mah-JEER-ah) (Resentful)

- Depicted as ugly hags with red eyes, yellow hair, large wings, snakes in their hair, snakes wrapped around their bodies, and holding whips and torches.
- They punish offenders in the Underworld. If the crime was something the Greeks considered particularly offensive (like killing a king) the Furies pursued the guilty and drove him mad.
- Ancient Greeks never called the Furies by their names because they were afraid of them.

Harry Potter Connection! Most witches and wizards in the Harry Potter world would not say the name “Voldemort,” because they were afraid of him and his Death Eaters.

ALASTOR

In Harry Potter Alastor Moody is an Auror who teaches Defense against the Dark Arts in Harry's fourth year.

In Greek Mythology Alastor is the “spirit” of feuds between family members.

AMYCUS

In Harry Potter Amycus Carrow is a Death Eater who brings his cruelty to Hogwarts in *The Deathly Hallows* where he tortures students with his sister Aleto.

In Greek mythology Amycus was the son of Poseidon and a nymph Melia.

Amycus and the Argonauts

He was the ruler of Bebryces and renown as a skilled boxer. When Jason and the Argonauts came to his land, Amycus challenged the bravest of the Argonauts to a fight. Polydeuces agreed and killed Amycus. A type of laurel grew on Amycus's tomb; legend says that if a sprig of that laurel gets onto a ship it will make the crewmen quarrel, and they won't stop fighting until the laurel is found and thrown overboard.

ANDROMEDA

In Harry Potter Andromeda Black Tonks is the wife of Ted Tonks and the mother of Nymphadora Tonks. Andromeda is Narcissa and Bellatrix's sister and also related to Sirius Black.

In Greek mythology Andromeda became the wife of the Greek hero Perseus after he rescued her from a sea monster.

Andromeda and Perseus

The reason Andromeda was at the mercy of the sea monster in the first place was that Andromeda's mother Cassiopeia (cass-ee-oh-pey-yah) had boasted that she and Andromeda were more beautiful than the sea nymphs, the Nereids. In Greek mythology, it is never wise to upset the gods or goddesses or to compare yourself to them and the Nereids were no exception. They complained to the sea god, Poseidon, and he sent a tidal wave to destroy Cassiopeia's land and then he sent a sea monster to terrorize her people. Andromeda's father consulted with an oracle to discover how to appease the angry god, but the oracle told him that the only way to be rid of the sea

monster was to sacrifice his daughter to it. Unfortunately for the poor girl, Andromeda, her father chained her to a cliff to await the sea monster. The hero Perseus, who had just killed the Medusa, flew by on the winged horse, Pegasus, saw Andromeda and instantly fell in love with her. When the sea monster came out of the water to devour Andromeda, Perseus cut off his head. Perseus then married Andromeda.

ARGUS

In Harry Potter Argus Filch is the caretaker at Hogwarts. He is bad tempered and seems to always be around whenever the kids are out of bed after hours or when they are in restricted areas.

In Greek mythology Argus was a giant with 100 eyes in his head.

Argus and Hera

The story of Argus involved Zeus and one of his many infidelities. Zeus had fallen in love with Io (eye-o), a young mortal woman, but Zeus's wife Hera found out about her, so Zeus turned Io into a cow to hide her from Hera. The cow is sacred to Hera so Zeus knew she would not hurt Io as long as she remained a cow. Not fooled by Zeus's trick, Hera asked to have the "cow" as a gift, and Zeus had no choice but to give her to Hera. Hera took Io and had her watched by Argus, the 100 eyed giant, because with his 100 eyes he could sleep and still always have an eye open. Zeus wanted to save Io, so he asked Hermes to steal her from Argus. Hermes then went to Argus disguised as a mortal young man, playing music and talking to him. Eventually Argus fell asleep, closed *all* of his eyes, and Hermes killed him. Hera was sad at the death of Argus and so took Argus's eyes and put them into the tail of the peacock which was her favorite bird. That's the story of how the peacock got the "eyes" in his tail.

ASPHODEL

In Harry Potter this is an herb used in the Draught of the Living Dead.

In Greek mythology the Asphodel Meadows was one of the realms of the Underworld. The Asphodel Meadows was a neutral place for the dead who were not good enough in life to go to the Elysian Fields nor evil enough to deserve being sentenced to Tartarus. These dead souls could wander in the Asphodel Meadows for all eternity where the Asphodel flowers grew in abundance. A fitting name for an ingredient in the Draught of the Living Dead.

CASSANDRA

In Harry Potter Cassandra Vablatsky is Professor Trelawney's grandmother. She is a "seer."

In Greek mythology Cassandra was a mortal woman with whom the god Apollo fell in love.

Cassandra and Apollo

After falling in love with Cassandra, Apollo gave her the gift of prophecy. However, Cassandra did not return his love. Apollo could not take away the gift he'd given her, because gifts once given by the gods cannot be taken away. Instead he cursed her so that no one would believe her prophecies. Cassandra lived in Troy during the Trojan War and warned the people they would be destroyed by the Greeks but, of course, no one believed her. Troy was destroyed. They should have listened to Cassandra.

Harry Potter Connection! Professor Trelawney is rarely taken seriously and no one listens to her. Professor McGonagall and Hermione both think she is a fraud, as do Ron and Harry, until Harry hears a real prophecy in *The Prisoner of Azkaban*, “...then a loud, harsh voice spoke behind him...IT WILL HAPPEN TONIGHT.” (POA, 405). Just like with Cassandra, people should have taken Professor Trelawney's prophecies seriously!

CIRCE (sur-see)

In Harry Potter Circe is one of the witches on the Chocolate Frog wizard cards.

In Greek mythology Circe was a beautiful and powerful witch.

Circe and Odysseus

Daughter of the sun god Helios and a sea nymph, Circe lived on an island where she would turn visitors to her island into animals. The hero Odysseus and his men had a run-in with Circe. When they landed on her island, Odysseus sent a scouting party ahead to check the land. Circe trapped the men and fed them poison acorns which turned them into swine. Unfortunately for the men, Circe's poison allowed them to keep their human reasoning abilities so they were aware that they were men trapped in the bodies of pigs—an unpleasant fate! Fortunately for the men, one of the scouting party had stayed behind and did not get trapped, so he went back to the ship and told Odysseus what had happened. Odysseus then went to the island to save his men. On his way he

met with the god Hermes (in disguise as a young man) who gave him an herb that would allow Odysseus to eat Circe's food and not be transformed. When Odysseus met Circe and was unharmed by her poison, she was amazed and fell in love with him. She changed his men back, fed them, and they were so happy that they stayed on her island for a year. When they left, Circe told Odysseus how to get through the next part of his journey.

Mythology Connection! In *The Odyssey*, Odysseus and his men landed on Circe's island. It was enchanted by the sorceress and they stayed there for a year. Circe, like Clodna with Tadg, gave Odysseus advice about his life and further adventures.

DEDULUS

In Harry Potter Dedulus Diggle is one of the first wizards Harry encounters at the Leaky Cauldron in *The Sorcerer's Stone*. He is one of the wizards who accompanies Harry to Grimmauld Place in *The Order of the Phoenix* and also helped take the Dursley's into hiding in *The Deathly Hallows*.

In Greek mythology Daedalus (note the name is spelled slightly different) was famous for two things: 1) creating the Labyrinth to house the Minotaur; and 2) the flight of his son Icarus. Daedalus was an extremely talented craftsman, engineer, and inventor living in Athens, but he committed a crime and to avoid punishment he escaped from Athens and went to the island of Crete, which was the home of King Minos.

Daedalus and the Minotaur

Daedalus designed the Labyrinth at Crete to house the Minotaur, a creature with a man's body and a bull's head. King Minos had angered the god Poseidon

and then consulted an oracle to find out what he needed to do to appease the angry god. The oracle told him to build a labyrinth to hide the Minotaur and every year sacrifice 7 girls and 7 boys to the monster. One year the hero Theseus was one of the boys picked for sacrifice. When Theseus got to Crete, Mino's daughter Ariadne immediately fell in love with him and offered to help him kill and escape from the Minotaur. She asked Daedalus for help and he gave her a ball of twine (or silk thread depending on the story) to give to Theseus. When he entered the labyrinth, Theseus tied one end of the thread to a bush and pulled it behind him. Theseus killed the Minotaur (with his bare hands!) and took up his ball of thread and found his way back out of the labyrinth.

Daedalus and Icarus

When Minos found out about the Minotaur he put Daedalus and his son Icarus (ICK-ah-rus) into prison, some stories say it was in the Labyrinth. In prison Daedalus invented an ingenious means of escape—he constructed wings made out of wax for himself and Icarus. Daedalus told Icarus to be cautious and not fly too close to the sun. Unfortunately, Icarus was so thrilled by being able to fly that he forgot his father's caution and flew too near the sun. The wax on his wings melted and he fell into the sea. Daedalus escaped to Sicily, but Minos eventually found out where Daedalus was hiding and invaded Sicily. Daedalus created a way to kill Minos by pouring hot oil on him while Minos was bathing.

Harry Potter Connection! We also see the labyrinth in Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire when the Tri-Wizard champions have to navigate through a maze in order to reach the cup. It is interesting that this cup ultimately leads to the "sacrifice" of a boy and leads our hero to an encounter with a "monster." The "thread" that connects the wands of Harry and Voldemort could be seen as symbolic of the thread that Ariadne gave to the hero Theseus so he could find his way out of the labyrinth. The connection between the two wands eventually leads to Harry's escape.

HERMES

In Harry Potter Hermes is a Weasley family owl.

In Greek mythology Hermes is the messenger god, and in fact, the name Hermes means "messenger" in Greek. Hermes is graceful and swift, wears winged sandals on his feet, and carries the Caduceus (the staff with two intertwining serpents). He appeared often in stories and was one of the primary mentor gods in the story of Perseus. We also meet Hermes in the story of the hero Odysseus.

HERMIONE

In Harry Potter Hermione is one of Harry's best friends. There is no need to go any further, we all know Hermione!

In Greek mythology Hermione was a daughter of Menelaus and Helen. Hermione's mother, Helen, caused the Trojan War because of her great beauty. Helen's aunt Clytemnestra raised her while her parents were away fighting in the Trojan War. The word Hermione is a form of Hermes. It is fitting because Hermione is very clever, just like Hermes.

HESTIA JONES

In Harry Potter Hestia Jones is a witch who, along with Dedalus Diggle, takes the Dursleys into hiding in *The Deathly Hallows*.

In Greek mythology Hestia is the goddess of the hearth and home. In the ancient Greek world there were no stoves or ovens, and every house had a hearth with a fire in it so the women could cook. The household fire was dedicated to Hestia and any outdoor festivals that included a fire always involved a sacrifice to her. Hestia never leaves Mt. Olympus and was rarely depicted in ancient art. Even though there were few stories about her, she was a very beloved goddess, especially with women, who were the guardians of the hearth.

INFERI

In Harry Potter the Inferi are the undead bodies Lord Voldemort uses to instill fear in his enemies. Harry encounters them in the cave with Dumbledore in *The Half Blood Prince* when the Inferi rise up and attack him because he touches the water.

In Roman mythology the Ineri are the inhabitants of the underworld.

LUNA LOVEGOOD

In Harry Potter Luna Lovegood is one of Harry's friends and a member of Dumbledore's Army.

In Roman mythology Luna is a moon goddess. Her Greek equivalent is Selene. Luna actually means "moon" in Latin.

MARS

In Harry Potter Mars is mentioned by the centaurs when referring to either the return of Lord Voldemort or the upcoming conflict between Voldemort and Harry. Ronan says, "*Mars is bright tonight*" in *The Sorcerer's Stone*. Ronan is talking about the planet Mars, but it gets its name from Roman mythology.

In Roman mythology Mars is the god of war. The planet Mars was named after the god because of its red color, the color red being symbolic of war and violence. The god of war was much more important to the Romans than he was to the Greeks, because the Romans engaged in warfare and conquest more than the Greeks. Mars was actually the father of Remus and Romulus, the two legendary founders of the city of Rome.

Harry Potter Connection! In *The Order of the Phoenix*, when Firenze is teaching Divination, he tells the class about reading the stars. He says that “...Wizard-kind is living through nothing more than a brief calm between the two wars. Mars, bringer of battle, shines brightly above us, suggesting that the fight must break out again soon” (OOTP, 603). This is not long before Harry and his allies end up fighting in the Department of Mysteries.

MEROPE

In Harry Potter Merope Gaunt is the daughter of Marvolo Gaunt and is Lord Voldemort's mother.

In Greek mythology Merope is the youngest of the seven daughters of the Titan Atlas (who held up the world) and Pleione (plee-oh-nee), a nymph associated with the goddess Artemis, the goddess of the forest and hunting.

Merope and the Mortal

Orion, the hunter, fell in love with the Pleiades (star nymphs) and pursued them. Artemis pleaded with Zeus to save the Pleiades from Orion, so Zeus turned them into a flock of doves and placed them in the sky. Only six of the Pleiades are visible—Merope, the seventh, is faint and barely visible. The Greek story was that Merope married a mortal, Sisyphus, and bore him children.

Merope hid herself in shame for marrying a mortal and that is why she's the faintest star.

Harry Potter Connection! In *The Half Blood Prince* we learn that Merope Gaunt is shamed by her father, Marvolo and brother Morfin for falling in love with Muggle Tom Riddle, “*My daughter—pure—blooded descendant of Salazar Slytherin—hankering after a filthy, dirt-veined Muggle?*” (HBP, 210). They keep Merope hidden from the world because they are ashamed of her, not only because she loves a Muggle, but because she is a squib. She is the Harry Potter equivalent of the faint star.

MINERVA

In Harry Potter Minerva McGonagall is the deputy headmistress at Hogwarts, the Head of Gryffindor House, the Transfiguration teacher, and a member of the Order of the Phoenix.

In Roman mythology Minerva is the goddess of wisdom and defensive war. Minerva is also the patron of arts and crafts, but not like what we call “arts and crafts” today. Arts and crafts in ancient Rome would have been making pottery, woodworking, metalworking (especially in precious metals like gold and silver), architecture, and literature. In Greek mythology her counterpart is Athena. Athena is the patron deity and protector of Athens. She was born out of the head of Zeus/Jupiter. Minerva/Athena is usually depicted in armor and a helmet with an owl on her shoulder or head.

MORS

In Harry Potter "morsmordre" is the spell that puts the Death Eater skull in the sky after an attack.

In Roman mythology Mors is the goddess of death.

NARCISSA

In Harry Potter Narcissa Black Malfoy is Draco Malfoy's mother and Lucius Malfoy's wife.

In Greek mythology Narcissus was a beautiful young man.

Narcissus and Echo

Narcissus was a young man whom all the young maidens were in love with, including the nymph Echo. However, Narcissus ignored and spurned all of them. Echo was so upset by his refusal that she hid in a cave and wasted away until the only part left of her was her voice. Some stories say that Narcissus was punished by the gods because of Echo, other stories because of *all* the young women Narcissus spurned. Either way he was punished by Nemesis, the goddess of "righteous anger." When Narcissus went to look at his reflection in a pool of water, Nemesis made him fall in love with himself. He could not tear his gaze away and died pining for himself, looking in the water. The spot where his body lay became the narcissus flower.

Harry Potter Connection! Narcissus staring into his reflection in the pool of water is very reminiscent of the Mirror of Erised. As Dumbledore said, *“Men have wasted away before it, entranced by what they have seen, or been driven mad...”* (SS, 213).

NOX

In Harry Potter "nox" is the counterspell to "lumos." Nox puts out light.

In Roman mythology Nox is the goddess of Night. Her Greek equivalent is Nyx.

NYMPHADORA

In Harry Potter Nymphadora Tonks is a member of the Order of the Phoenix and wife of Remus Lupin. Harry, Ron, and Hermione know her simply as “Tonks.”

In Greek mythology nymphs are groups of female deities usually associated with nature and who live in woods, groves, valleys, or near springs, rivers, and lakes. Some nymphs are associated with a particular god or goddess, usually one of the nature deities like Artemis, Dionysus, or a water god like Poseidon. The nymphs were also known to help mortals on their journeys. The Nereids, nymphs of the sea, helped Jason and the Argonauts navigate through treacherous waters.

POMONA

In Harry Potter Pomona Sprout is the Hogwarts teacher of Herbology and the Head of Hufflepuff House.

In Roman mythology Pomona is a nymph of fruit and fruit trees. She is one of the few distinctly Roman goddess, and she has no Greek equivalent. Pomona loves pruning and grafting her fruit trees and stays in her orchard, and she rarely comes out to interfere in the matters of mortals.

QUIRINUS (queer-EE-nus)

In Harry Potter Quirinus Quirrell is the Defense Against the Dark Arts teacher in *The Sorcerer's Stone*. Possessed by Voldemort, he tries to kill Harry at the end of the book.

In Roman mythology the god Janus sometimes appeared with the name Janus *Quirinus*. Janus is the god of beginnings and endings, doors and gateways, and depicted with two faces, one facing in each direction. He also symbolizes looking forward, so people worshiped him at times of beginnings like weddings and harvests. We get the name of our month January from Janus.

Harry Potter Connection! Professor Quirrell is the Professor with literally two faces! Once he is alone with Harry he removes his turban and reveals the face of Voldemort facing out of the back of his head. It is fitting that Harry should encounter this two-faced wizard at the beginning of his journey as a wizard and as the "*Boy Who Lived*." This encounter is the beginning of his fight with Voldemort.

REMUS AND ROMULUS

In Harry Potter Remus Lupin, a werewolf, a member of the Order of the Phoenix, professor of Defense against the Dark Arts, and friend to James Potter and Sirius Black. "Romulus" is Lupin's code name on Harry Potter Watch in *The Deathly Hallows*.

In Roman mythology Romulus and Remus were the twin sons of Mars, the god of war.

Romulus and Remus and the Founding of Rome

The mother of Romulus and Remus, a mortal woman Rhea, was the daughter of Numitor, the King of a city near what would become Rome. King Numitor was overthrown by his evil brother Amulius, and when Amulius took over he forced Rhea to become a Vestal Virgin. Vestal Virgins were young women devoted to the worship of the goddess Vesta and not allowed to marry or have children. So, when Rhea became pregnant by Mars no one believed her that

he was the father. Her uncle, Amulius, afraid that the twin boys would grow up and overthrow him, put them in a basket and threw them in the river Tiber. The basket washed up on shore and a she-wolf took the boys to her den, suckled them, and took care of them until they had grown a little. After that a shepherd named Faustulus rescued the boys and raised them until they were fully grown. When Remus and Romulus learned about their heritage and that Amulius had exiled their grandfather, they killed Amulius and helped their grandfather, Numitor, become King again. After they had done this Romulus and Remus decided to found their own city. They could not agree on where to build it so they each built their own city and enclosed it with a wall. Remus made fun of Romulus's wall because it was so low. He jumped over the wall into Romulus's town and jeered at his brother. In his anger, Romulus killed Remus. He then went on to found a city—Roma—that became Rome. Eventually, Romulus ascended to Mount Olympus and lived with the gods.

Sound Familiar? The evil Amulius wanted to kill the twins Romulus and Remus because he thought they would kill him when they became adults. Lord Voldemort attempts to kill Harry for the same reason—he thinks Harry is the one person who can kill him. Also like Remus and Romulus, Harry manages to escape (by not dying!) and grows up to fulfill the prophecy to kill the evil lord.

SCAMANDER

In Harry Potter Newt Scamander is the author of *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them*, a textbook at Hogwarts.

In Roman mythology Scamander was a river near the city of Troy, which played a part in the Trojan War.

Scamander and Achilles

According to *The Illiad*, Achilles, one of the Greek warriors, threw Trojan corpses into the river Scamander. The river asked Achilles to stop. Achilles agreed to stop clogging the river, but not to stop the killing. Frustrated with Achilles, Scamander then asked the god Apollo for help. Achilles, always one for getting his way, fought the river, and was dragged downstream and nearly killed. Hephaestus eventually boiled the river to make it let go of Achilles.

SCORPIUS

In Harry Potter Scorpius is Draco Malfoy's son.

In Greek mythology Scorpius was a giant scorpion sent by Artemis and her mother Leto to kill the giant Orion.

Scorpius and Orion

Orion had boasted to them that he would kill every animal on earth, which was not the smartest thing to say to an earth goddess! Artemis, besides being a hunter, also gave protection to animals, especially wild animals. She wanted to stop Orion, so she had Scorpius fight him. They battled and Scorpius won and killed Orion. Zeus had enjoyed the battle, so to reward Orion, Zeus made

him into a constellation. Zeus made Scorpius into one as well, but they appear at different times of the year. The Scorpius and Orion constellations never appear in the sky at the same time.

SPHINX

In Harry Potter the Sphinx appears in the maze in *The Goblet of Fire*.

In Greek mythology the Sphinx appears in a story.

The Sphinx and Oedipus

We usually associate the Sphinx with the earthen statue in ancient Egypt, and rightly so, but the Greek story about Oedipus (ed-i-pus) and the Sphinx was very popular and is still very famous. The Sphinx was a creature with a woman's head, a lion's body, and wings. Hera sent the Sphinx to the city of Thebes as a punishment for the abduction of a boy. The Sphinx accosted travelers and challenged them to answer a riddle: "*What animal has four feet in the morning, two feet at midday, and three feet at sunset?*" The answer is "*man.*" He crawls on hands and knees as a baby, walks on two legs, and then has to use a cane when old. Oedipus answered the riddle correctly and so the people of Thebes made him their king. Dejected, the Sphinx then threw herself off a cliff, killing herself.

Harry Potter Connection! Harry meets a sphinx in the maze in *The Goblet of Fire*, “it had the body of an over-large lion: great clawed paws and a long yellowish tail ending in a brown tuft. Its head, however, was that of a woman.” Like the sphinx in the Oedipus story, she gives Harry a riddle. Harry must answer the riddle correctly to get past her to the goal. Lucky for Harry, he answers correctly and the Sphinx moves aside.

SYBIL

In Harry Potter Sybil Trelawney is the professor of Divination.

In Roman mythology Sybil was a wise woman who could foretell the future. She traveled with Aeneas, the greatest hero of Roman mythology, into the Underworld.

More Greek Mythology Characters...

There are some other figures from Greek mythology who are not named in Harry Potter by their proper names, but are referenced. Here are two of them:

CERBERUS (ser-ber-uhs)

In Harry Potter Cerberus is known as Fluffy, a three-headed dog who guards the entrance to the Sorcerer's Stone.

In Greek mythology Cerberus is a three-headed dog who guards the gate to the Underworld to keep out living people. He allows all dead souls to enter, but they cannot return to the realm of the living. This keeps humans from traveling down into the Underworld to visit their families. If you were a hero traveling to the Underworld you had to get by Cerberus—not an easy feat.

Cerberus was only overcome by two heroes:

- *Heracles (Hercules)* who fought Cerberus with his bare hands.
- *Orpheus* who hypnotized Cerberus by playing the lyre.

Harry Potter Connection! Hagrid gave Harry a flute for Christmas in *The Sorcerer's Stone*, *"...inside was a roughly cut wooden flute. Hagrid had obviously whittled it himself. Harry blew it—it sounded a bit like an owl."* When Harry, Ron, and Hermione went after the Stone, Harry lulled Fluffy to sleep with the flute, *"he put Hagrid's flute to his lips and blew. It wasn't really a tune, but from the first note, the beast's eyes began to droop"* (SS,275).

On a side note: notice that Hagrid bought the flute off of a *"Greek chappie."*

CHARON (kair-uhn)

In Harry Potter there is no one with the actual name of Charon, but there is an old man with a boat who ferries people across a lake in *The Sorcerer's Stone*. Harry and the Dursleys travel to the isolated island in his boat to escape the owls and Hogwarts letters.

In Greek mythology Charon is the ferryman who takes dead souls across the river Styx and into the Underworld. He is depicted as an old man with a rickety boat. Dead souls had to pay the ferryman in order to get across the river, so people in ancient Greece were buried with coins on their eyes as payment for the ferryman. If they did not bring money the souls would wander the bank of the river forever.

Heroes Who Descend into the Underworld

One of the adventures for many heroes of mythology, literature, or even modern movies is they have to descend into an "underworld." There are two main reasons heroes descend into an underworld: 1) the underworld represents our deepest, darkest fears; 2) the underworld is a place to learn something important about what the hero needs to do.

In many stories the underworld is not an actual Underworld, but a dark place. It can be represented by caves, underground caverns, or even dark forests—wherever it is dark and forbidding. In Greek and Roman mythology the heroes usually traveled to the actual Underworld, the place where souls went when a person died. Perhaps this is a geographical issue because Greece had no large,

dark, primeval forests like they do in Europe, England, or Scandinavia. In many of those old Northern European and Celtic stories, the hero went into a dark forest (a *forbidding* forest) and there he conquered his fears and came to terms with the world that lives in the dark.

Harry Potter Connection! Harry Potter descends into an "underworld" in every book in the series. It usually happens at the end of each book when Harry is about to meet the final villain. The "underworld" may be the Forbidden Forest, under the school, or even the cave. He goes into an "underworld" to face his fears, like going into the forest and seeing the specter of Voldemort, or to learn something vital to finishing his hero's journey, like going into the forest to visit Aragog or going into the cave to retrieve the Horcrux. In this way Harry's story is similar to many mythological heroes.

Greek and Roman Heroes Who Descended to the Underworld

Heracles—Heracles was the son of Zeus and a mortal woman named Alcmena, but Hera (Zeus's wife) was jealous of Heracles because he was not her child, so she spent his entire life causing him trouble and pain. When Heracles was a baby she sent snakes into his crib, but Heracles was so unnaturally strong for a baby that he killed the snakes with his own hands. His nanny walked into his

room and found him sitting on the floor holding a snake in each hand! Heracles had great strength, but his strength ended up causing him great pain—mostly owing to the vengeance of Hera. Despite Hera's hatred, Heracles received the best education. However, he did not like some of his subjects and even killed his music teacher by hitting him over the head with a lyre. Heracles did not know his own strength and was filled with remorse for killing an innocent person.

Heracles eventually became a big hero to the Thebans (he was born in Thebes (theebes), because he defeated their enemy, the Minyans, in battle. Nothing, with the exception of supernatural power, could defeat Heracles or hurt him. After defeating the Minyans he married the Princess Megara. He loved her and they had several children. Unfortunately for Heracles, the goddess Hera had not forgotten him. She caused a great madness to fall over Heracles, and because he had a propensity for anger and a quick temper already, it got the best of him. He killed his wife and children with his own hands. After the madness subsided he was horrified and dismayed. He thought of killing himself, but went to the Oracle of Delphi to find out what to do instead. The Oracle (influenced by Hera!) told him he needed to purify himself and to do penance. The Oracle also told him to go to King Eurystheus (ur-IS-tee-us) and do whatever penance the King wanted him to do. Hera was influencing the Oracle (of course!) and knew that King Eurystheus would make Heracles' penance cruel and difficult.

The tasks Eurystheus gave to Heracles are called the "12 labors of Heracles." He had to (this is just a brief list of the labors):

1. Kill the lion of Nemea. The lion had been terrorizing the countryside around Eurytheus' country. Weapons could not kill it so Heracles strangled it with his bare hands.
2. Kill the Hydra, the nine headed serpent. Each time he cut off one head two more took its place. He enlisted the help of his nephew Iolaus who cauterized each head after Heracles cut it off.
3. Capture a golden-horned stag sacred to Artemis. He didn't want to harm the stag so he hunted it for a year before finally capturing it.
4. Capture a great boar. He chased it to exhaustion and then trapped it in a snowbank.
5. Clean the stables of Augeas (au-jee-uhs). The horse herd was massive and the stables hadn't been cleaned in a long time. Heracles diverted a river (or two depending on the story) and let the water wash out the stables.
6. Kill the Stymphalian birds. These were vicious, man-eating birds who terrorized the people of Stymphalus. Heracles shook a rattle to flush them from hiding and then shot them down one by one with a bow and arrows.
7. Capture the bull that Poseidon had given to Minos. Minos allowed Heracles to do this and he carried it back to Thebes on his shoulders. He eventually set it free.
8. Tame the man-eating horses of King Diomedes (deyeo-meh-dees) of Thrace. Heracles killed Diomedes first and then tamed the horses by feeding them the body of Diomedes. Gruesome!
9. Acquire the girdle of Hippolyta, Queen of the Amazons (a girdle was a metal or embroidered belt). At first Hippolyta was friendly with Heracles and said she would give him her girdle. Then Hera got involved and

spread a rumor with the other Amazons that Heracles and his crew wanted to kill them. The Amazons and the men started fighting and Heracles killed Hippolyta and took her girdle.

10. Capture and bring back the cattle of King Geryon, a monster who had three bodies joined at the waist. Heracles killed Geryon and rustled the cattle.
11. Bring back the golden apples of the Hesperides (hes-pear-ee-deez). Atlas was the father of the Hesperides. Heracles offered to hold the world while Atlas got the apples. But then Atlas did not want to hold the world any longer so he left Heracles holding it. Heracles had to trick Atlas by asking him to take the world for a short time while he got a pad to put on his shoulders. Atlas put the world back on his shoulders and Heracles took the apples and left. Apparently Atlas wasn't too bright!
12. **Bring Cerberus the three headed dog up from the Underworld. Heracles descended into the Underworld and Hades gave him permission to take Cerberus, as long as Heracles did not use any weapons. Heracles subdued Cerberus using just his bare hands and carried him up to Eurystheus. Eurystheus was so frightened of Cerberus that he asked Hercules to take him back into the Underworld.**

Once he finished the tasks Heracles was set free from his penance. He lived a long time and was involved in many other adventures. When he died Zeus intervened and made Heracles a god. He lives on Mt. Olympus with the other Olympian gods. He even reconciled with Hera and married her daughter Hebe, the goddess of youth.

Odysseus—Odysseus was a hero on the Greek side of the Trojan War. After the Greeks won the Trojan War they sacked Troy but forgot to pay tribute to the gods and goddesses who helped them along the way. When the Greek fleets started back to Greece Poseidon, the god of the sea, took vengeance on them. Odysseus and his crew were blown off course and then spent the next 10 years wandering the seas trying to get back home. Along the way they experienced many adventures, including being held captive by the sea nymph Calypso on her island and escaping a run-in with a cyclops. At one point Odysseus found himself on the island of the sorceress Circe (**see above**).

Circe told Odysseus he needed to travel to the Underworld and find the soul of the prophet Tiresias who would then tell Odysseus how to get home to Ithaca. But going to the Underworld was no easy feat! In order to get safely into the Underworld, Odysseus had to make a blood sacrifice to attract the spirits to come talk to him. They craved real blood. As soon as he spilt his own blood, the smell of blood attracted all the spirits and Odysseus had to keep them at bay with his sword.

Harry Potter Connection! Harry and Professor Dumbledore had a jaunt into what could be considered an “underworld,” when they journeyed into the cave to find the Horcrux locket. Like Odysseus's blood offering to the spirits, Dumbledore also had to make a blood sacrifice on the cave wall in order for it to open and them to enter. Many dead spirits converged on Odysseus and he had to fight them off. Harry and Dumbledore had to deal with the spirits of the dead, the Inferi. Unfortunately for Harry and Dumbledore these spirits were not happy to see them.

After talking to Tiresias, Odysseus also allowed other spirits to come and drink from the goblet of blood. Odysseus talked to his mother, who died of grief when he did not return home from Troy, as well as many other mothers of warriors who had died at Troy. Then some of the Trojan War heroes approached Odysseus—Agamemnon, Achilles, Ajax (who did not actually speak to Odysseus) and many more. Eventually, it became too much for Odysseus and he left the Underworld.

When Odysseus finally got home, ten years had passed, but his wife, Penelope, had been faithfully waiting for him. His son Telemachus (tel-EHM-ah-kus) had grown into a young man. In those ten years Penelope had been hounded by suitors interested in marrying her, but she and Telemachus kept them all at bay. After he returned home, Odysseus and Telemachus killed the suitors, and he reunited with Penelope.

Orpheus—Orpheus was the son of the King of Thrace and Calliope, the Muse of music, poetry, and dance. Orpheus was the best musician in the world other than the gods themselves. He married Eurydice (yer-RIDI-chee) and loved her very much. Unfortunately for Orpheus, Eurydice was bitten by a snake and died. Orpheus, distraught, decided to descend into the Underworld to retrieve her. While in the Underworld, he played his lyre, and the dead souls loved it. Cerberus let his guard down. Even the god of the Underworld, Hades, was moved to tears by the mournful playing of Orpheus. Orpheus asked for Eurydice back and Hades agreed with the condition that Orpheus not look back on their journey out of the Underworld. Thinking he was out, he turned back to look too soon and when he did Eurydice vanished. Orpheus was so overcome with sorrow that he wandered aimlessly through the land playing his lyre. Unfortunately for Orpheus, he was found, torn apart, and his head thrown in a river by a group of frenzied Maenads (mee-nads). The Muses gathered up all of Orpheus's limbs and placed them in a tomb at the foot of Mt. Olympus to honor him.

Theseus—Theseus was the son of the mortal woman Aethra and Aegeus (ee-jee-uhs), King of Athens or, depending on the story, Poseidon. Theseus had many great adventures, including defeating the Minotaur in King Mino's Labyrinth thus saving the lives of many Athenian children. He also became the King of Athens and beloved by his people. One of his adventures involved descending into the Underworld. He had a widowed friend, Pirithous (py-rith-oh-uhs) and he and Theseus decided they wanted to marry daughters of the god Zeus. Theseus chose Helen, who would become famous for being the cause of the Trojan War. Pirithous chose Persephone, the wife of a god, not a good choice. She lived in the Underworld with her husband, Hades, and to try

to capture her was a crazy task! Rarely were living souls allowed to leave the Underworld.

Undaunted, Theseus and Pirithous went down to the Underworld. Hades knew the two men were there and also knew of their intention to steal his wife. He was a god after all and knew what was going on in his realm! He did not kill them but invited them to sit at his table and dine with him. Unfortunately for Theseus and Pirithous, the chair in which they sat was the Chair of Forgetfulness (it was actually two chairs, one for each of them). Whoever sits in the chair forgets everything and sits there for all of eternity. In one account, the Chair of Forgetfulness binds them with serpents; in other stories, the stone of the Chair grows up and into their flesh, holding them fast.

Theseus was eventually rescued by Heracles on one of his labors, but he could not rescue Pirithous. Hades knew that it was Pirithous who planned to abduct Persephone and so did not allow Heracles to rescue him. In some stories he caused an avalanche to prevent Heracles from pulling Pirithous from the chair, in others the chair just held fast.

Theseus returned to the land of the living and became the greatest hero of the Athenian people.

Stories of the Underworld in Roman Mythology

Psyche (sy-kee)—Psyche was the most beautiful woman in the world, so beautiful that the goddess of love, Venus, became jealous. Out of spite, Venus told her son Cupid, the god of love, to shoot Psyche with his arrow and make her fall in love with a disgusting and despicable man. Cupid fell in love with Psyche when he saw her and did not perform his task. Although she did not fall in love with an ogre, neither did Psyche fall in love with *any* man. Her family went to an oracle to find out what to do, and were told that Psyche had to be left on a hill and a monster would come and claim her as his wife. They did as they were told and left Psyche to her fate and to the monster (nice family!). They placed her on the hill to await the monster, but a gentle breeze lifted her and took her to a beautiful meadow where there was a grand mansion and good food. That night her "husband" came to her, but he was invisible. He visited her every night after that. They grew to love each other and they had a lovely life, but Psyche became lonely. She was told to never try to look upon her husband or he would leave. Eventually, and through the urgings of her jealous sisters who visited her, Psyche started to believe that her invisible husband was the monster and that he would devour her. One night, while her husband slept, she stole a glance at him. It was Cupid and he was the most beautiful man she had ever seen! In her excitement, she spilled some lantern oil on him and he awoke. He fled and went back to his mother Venus. Venus was angry with Psyche for not only her faithlessness in Cupid but for hurting him as well. Psyche wandered the world looking for Cupid and asking for help against Venus's wrath but no one wanted to risk offending the goddess. Finally, Psyche found Venus but Venus was angry and decided that if Psyche ever wanted to find a husband she would have to do some (of course, impossible) tasks.

- For the first task Venus gave Psyche a huge pile of small seeds and told her to sort them by morning. Psyche thought the task impossible so she did nothing. However, some small ants saw her distress and helped her sort the seeds. Venus was angry in the morning but could do nothing since Psyche accomplished the task.
- For the second task Psyche was told to gather the fleece from golden sheep who grazed near a riverbed. Psyche thought of throwing herself in the river out of despair, but the river reeds talked her out of it. They told her to wait until the sheep came to drink out of the river and then collect the fleece that had snagged on the thorny bushes. Psyche did so and took the fleece to Venus.
- For the next task Psyche had to fill a flask with water from the river Styx at a waterfall. The river Styx was the river that ran through the Underworld and the waterfall was surrounded by slimy black rocks and a steep ledge. There was no way Psyche could climb it, but an eagle took pity on her and took the flask in his beak and filled it with the water.
- **Finally, Venus gave Psyche a box and told her to go to the Underworld to collect some beauty from Proserpine (Persephone in Greek). Psyche was able to get in and Proserpine helped her but warned her not to open the box. Curiosity got the better of Psyche and she opened the box. It was cursed and she fell into a deep sleep.**

Cupid, finally healed of his wounds, was now looking for Psyche. He found her and woke her from her enchanted sleep. They reconciled and he took her up to live with the gods as his wife. She became an immortal.

Sound Familiar? A princess put into an enchanted sleep by a vengeful mother figure. A handsome prince/god looking for the princess and awaking her from her slumber. The two lovers living happily ever after. The story of Psyche and Cupid sounds very much like a fairy tale.

Aeneas (ay-nee-uhs)—Aeneas was the son of Venus, the goddess of love, and Anchises (an-key-seez) a mortal man. The story of Aeneas is told in the book *The Aeneid* written by the poet Virgil. Aeneas was one of the greatest Trojan heroes, next to Hector, and one of the few who escaped Troy after the Greeks invaded the town. Aeneas escaped with his father, son, and some other lucky Trojans after being warned and helped to escape by his mother, Venus. After leaving Troy, Aeneas had many adventures on land and on the sea which took many years, mainly because they were hassled by Juno, before he reached Italy. During the trip some of Aeneas's men died, including his beloved father. Aeneas was told by a prophet that when he reached Italy he needed to consult the prophet Sibyl because she could tell the future.

When Aeneas landed in Italy he first went to the cave of Sibyl. She told him he needed to go to the Underworld to talk to his father who would give him guidance. Sibyl agreed to go with Aeneas into the Underworld.

Aeneas came to a place where the path into the Underworld led in two directions. To the left was Tartarus where the Titans had been banished and where souls received punishment for their misdeeds. To the right were the Elysian Fields where good people and heroes rest after they die. The Elysian Fields were beautiful and happy and the souls there sang, rode horses, and played games. It was there that Aeneas found his father, Anchises. Anchises showed Aeneas all the souls who waited to become mortal again. These were the souls who would become Aeneas's descendants and would become the future leaders of Rome. Anchises told Aeneas a few more details about what to do in the future, and then the two separated. Aeneas went back up to the earth and back to Rome.

Harry Potter and His Travels to the “Underworld”

As stated above, Harry descends into an "underworld" in each book. Sometimes he does so more than once; for example he'll go into the Forbidden Forest and also into an underground world. Both are examples of underworlds if defined as being a place of darkness where the hero must learn something about his journey or overcome his fears.

Harry Potter Connection! When Harry is killed by Voldemort in The Deathly Hallows he goes into the "underworld" of King's Cross station and meets with Dumbledore, a father figure to him. Dumbledore gives Harry advice on what to do when he goes back to his world, just like Aeneas's father tells him what to do when he goes back to the living world.

Another Connection! Similar to Aeneas meeting his father, Odysseus meeting Tiresias and many fellow soldiers, and Orpheus finding his wife, Harry meets the souls of dead friends and family members when he is in an "underworld." Harry is aided by the souls of his dead family and friends on two occasions. When he fights Voldemort in the cemetery (one of Harry's "underworlds") their wands connect and the specters of fellow "warrior" Cedric, Harry's parents, and the old Muggle come out of Voldemort's wand to help Harry. Also, as he walks to certain death in the Forbidden Forest (another "underworld") in the *Deathly Hallows*, Harry turns over the Resurrection Stone and is immediately surrounded by the spirits of his dead family and friends. They surround him, give him love and light and warmth, and aid him on his journey back to the world of the living.

In The Sorcerer's Stone: the first "underworld" experience for Harry is when he is taken into the Forbidden Forest as punishment for being out after hours. Hagrid is Harry's guide into the forest, *"he led them to the very edge of the forest...he pointed down a narrow, winding earth track that disappeared into the thick black trees."* The centaur Ronan says that the forest, "hides many secrets." When Harry and Draco must go into the forest without Hagrid they go deeper, *"they walked for nearly half an hour, deeper and deeper into the forest, until the path became almost impossible to follow because the trees were so thick."* Harry encounters Voldemort for the first time in the dark forest, and even though Voldemort is just a shadow of himself, he is still strong enough to make Harry's scar hurt and to frighten Harry tremendously.

The literal underworld in *The Sorcerer's Stone* is under the school. Harry, Ron, and Hermione drop into an underground place to find the Sorcerer's Stone, *"cold, damp air rushed past him as he fell down, down, down, and...."* This underworld is guarded by a mythological creature—the three headed dog Fluffy (Cerberus). This underworld also has many obstacles, all of the protections for the Stone, but Harry, Ron, and Hermione are able to get by all of them.

In The Chamber of Secrets, the first "underworld" for Harry is, similar to *The Sorcerer's Stone*, in the Forbidden Forest. Harry and Ron venture into the forest to talk to the spider Aragog. Aragog lives deep in the forest, *"...everything outside his little sphere of light was pitch black. He had never been this deep into the forest before."* As said before, it is very symbolic for the hero to journey deeply into the forest, because it is there that he'll find out deep, dark secrets. In Harry's case these are not his secrets but secrets that can help him solve the mystery of the chamber of secrets and to discover the identity of the heir of Slytherin.

The literal underworld, once again, is under Hogwarts. Harry, Ron, and Lockhart go under the school, through a pipe that leads to the Chamber of Secrets, *“it was like rushing down an endless, slimy dark slide....he knew that he was falling deeper below the school than even the dungeons.”* Again, Harry must leave his friends behind and finish the task by himself—Hermione is petrified, and Ron is stuck in the tunnel with Professor Lockhart. This time the villain is Voldemort as his Horcrux Tom Riddle.

Mythology Connection! In many of the old mythology stories, the hero must defeat a monster, like a dragon or sea monster (see the Greek story of Perseus and the Norse story of Sigurd). Harry also has to defeat a real monster—the basilisk. Once he does so, and survives, he can also defeat the evil Lord.

In The Prisoner of Azkaban the “underworld” is not quite as obvious. They do not go under the school as they did in the first two books. In this book they go through the tunnel under the Whomping Willow into the Shrieking Shack. Ron is dragged by Sirius (as the black dog) and then Harry and Hermione follow, *“Harry went next; he crawled forward, headfirst, and slid down an earthy slope to the bottom of a very low tunnel.”* They are only underground for a short time, but the tunnel does lead to the main bad guy and more knowledge for our hero.

Harry and Hermione then run into the forest to escape Lupin when he is a werewolf. In the forest they encounter the dementors, so Harry must conjure a patronus and defeat the dementors. The dementors are formidable monsters, and Harry must perform powerful magic in order to save himself and Sirius from them.

Symbolic Tidbit! Patronuses help fight dementors by emitting light—they are symbolically defeating darkness with light. In this symbolic and mythological sense darkness represents the unknown and things we fear. Light helps to expose those fears and it brings the unknown out of the dark and into what is known and understood. The patronus represents this light for Harry, *“the blinding light was illuminating the grass around him...it was bright as a unicorn...Harry saw, by its brightness...”* (POA, 385). The light of the patronus dispels the dark creatures.

In The Goblet of Fire the labyrinth and the cemetery are the two “underworld” places for Harry.

Harry’s labyrinth is part of the Tri-Wizard tournament tasks. He has to defeat some monsters along the way, but it is the final meeting with Voldemort that is his real task. Their meeting is also very symbolic of an underworld—they meet in a cemetery, *“they were standing instead in a dark and overgrown graveyard.”* A cemetery, of course, is a place of death. This is the place where

Harry first sees someone die (he was just a baby when his parents were killed), and it is the place where *he* will die if he does not defeat Voldemort.

The Order of the Phoenix returns to the formula of the first two books. First, Harry journeys into the forest with Hermione and Professor Umbridge. Harry does not know where Hermione is heading nor does he know what she has in mind. But as three humans in the forest without the protection of Hagrid, they are at risk, *“they walked on for what seemed a long time, until they were once again so deep into the forest that the dense tree canopy blocked out all light.”* Sounds very much like the way the forest was described in the first two books. It is dangerous and they are attacked by the centaurs. Harry and Hermione barely escape with their lives.

The literal underworld into which Harry descends is the Ministry of Magic—the kids go into the phone booth which takes them down, *“blackness closed over their heads, and with a dull grinding noise they sank down into the depths of the Ministry of Magic.”* Similar to the first two books, Harry is with Hermione and Ron, only this time he also has members of Dumbledore’s Army with him. They are also joined eventually by members of the Order of the Phoenix, and a battle rages between the forces of good and the forces of evil. However, as in the first two books, the final meeting with Voldemort happens when Harry is alone.

In The Half Blood Prince the “underworld” is the cave where Harry and Dumbledore find the locket Horcrux. Caves are symbolic of going into an unknown world—dark, closed in, dangerous places that may or may not offer an escape route, *“the greenish glow and the light from the two wands were the only thing that broke the otherwise velvety blackness...”* (HBP, 560). Harry

certainly has no idea what is in store for him—he does not know what to expect in the cave, or of the locket, or any of the magic he encounters. This is why he must make this particular journey with Dumbledore who has much more knowledge about what will happen. It is a good thing too, because the magic of the cave is beyond Harry's capabilities: the cave can only be opened by blood; the boat to get across the lake is hidden by magic; the locket is protected by magic; and one touch of the water will bring the Inferi after Harry.

Mythology Connection! In the old mythological stories the hero often needed a guide in the underworld—Sibyl accompanied Aeneas and Tiresias accompanied Odysseus. These mentors had more knowledge than the hero and so could help him navigate the underworld. This is exactly what Dumbledore does with Harry.

The cave is one of the most demanding underworlds that Harry has encountered up to this point. Once he and Dumbledore find the locket, Dumbledore must drink the potion in which the locket is held. This has a terrible effect on Dumbledore and nearly kills him. Harry must force Dumbledore to drink the potion that is killing him and driving him mad. Harry touches the water in the lake and raises the Inferi, but he does not know how to fight them and they nearly kill him. They both escape only to find more danger awaiting them at Hogwarts. Harry does not meet Voldemort in the underworld in *The Half Blood Prince*, but he does deal with one of Voldemort's Horcruxes, same as in *The Chamber of Secrets*. The monsters Harry must fight

in *The Half Blood Prince* are the Death Eaters, especially Professor Snape, who Harry thinks murdered Dumbledore.

In The Deathly Hallows the underworld is when Harry goes to King's Cross station and meets with Dumbledore. Harry and Dumbledore are both *dead* at this point. This meeting with Dumbledore in a place of the dead is very similar to ancient mythological stories. The hero meets with a wise person who tells the hero how to keep going on his journey. It is very similar to Aeneas meeting with his father. Harry meets with Dumbledore who gives Harry information and advice on what to do. He tells Harry about the Deathly Hallows, and from this conversation Harry determines how he can defeat Voldemort. As opposed to the other underground places Harry went in the previous books, the "underworld" place of the dead in *The Deathly Hallows* is not very scary. In fact, it is clean and sterile, and completely unlike all the other underworlds through which he has traveled, "*A wide-open space, bright and clean, a hall larger by far than the Great Hall, with that clear, domed glass ceiling.*" (DH, 706). In this way we can see how Harry has grown. The underworld holds no more fear for him. He can now go back into the world, defeat the evil lord, and complete his journey.

Light and Dark—in the first six books, Harry descends into an underworld that is dark. Notice the wording—thick black trees, pitch black, slimy dark slide, dark and overgrown, blocked out all light, velvety blackness, blackness closed over their heads. The description of King's Cross station is very different, bright mist, bright and clean, wide-open space. This place is light bright, white, and clean. It seems more like a hospital than a scary underworld. The change from dark to light is an important one for Harry. It shows that everything has been exposed. There is nothing left hiding in the darkness. He knows what to do.

Heroes Who Use Disguises

Harry and his friends use disguises much like the heroes of mythology. Heroes in ancient mythology change form magically, usually with the aid of a god or goddess. Harry, Ron, and Hermione do not have a god or goddess to help them but they do use the Polyjuice Potion in order to disguise themselves and find out information. This is their magic. Harry and Ron transform into Crabbe and Goyle in order to discover something about the Heir of Slytherin in *The Chamber of Secrets*. They use the Polyjuice Potion again in *The Deathly Hallows* to take the forms of three Ministry of Magic workers. They use Polyjuice Potion once again to disguise themselves when they are in Godric's Hollow looking for Harry's parents' graves and for information about the sword of Gryffindor.

In Greek mythology there are two popular heroes who either use disguises or are disguised in order to get what they want.

Achilles—Achilles was the son of Peleus, a mortal man, and Thetis (THEE-tis) a sea nymph. When the hostilities of the Trojan War broke out, Thetis, who knew that her son would be killed in battle, did not want Achilles to fight in the war. She disguised him as a young maiden and sent him to live with King Lycomedes (ly-KO-meh-deez).

Achilles was the only man remaining of the brave Greeks who did not answer the summons to go to war, so Odysseus was dispatched to find him. Odysseus *disguised himself* as a peddler and showed up at the court of Lycomedes with wares to sell. He had jewelry and other trinkets designed for women and also some armor and swords. While the real women flocked to the jewelry, the disguised Achilles looked at the weaponry. Odysseus knew then that he had found Achilles and convinced him to join the Greek army.

Odysseus—as we have already seen Odysseus disguised himself as a peddler to find Achilles. He also disguised himself when he finally returned home after being gone from Ithaca for 20 years.

When Odysseus returned home, the goddess Athena came to him and told him what had been happening in his land since he left. Hundreds of suitors had hounded his wife, tried to kill his son (who was now away), and destroyed his land. Athena turned Odysseus into a beggar so he could travel around his land and discover who was still loyal to him and who was not. She told him to stay with a swineherd, a man who remained loyal and good. At the same time

Athena had summoned Telemachus home and told him to go straight to the swineherd when he returned home, and he did so. Athena changed Odysseus from a beggar to himself and father and son were reunited. They decided to kill the suitors who had been ravaging their land and harassing Penelope.

Odysseus, disguised as the beggar, went to his house when all the suitors were there feasting and partying. One of the suitors abused the beggar Odysseus and this upset Penelope, because it was considered rude to deny a stranger hospitality. Later she asked a maid to wash Odysseus's feet and this maid recognized a scar on his foot, but Odysseus asked her not to tell. He and Telemachus had a plan. Penelope found the bow and arrows that had belonged to Odysseus before he left for Troy and told the suitors that whichever man could shoot an arrow with that bow through twelve rings, she would take as a husband. They all tried but no one could do it. Odysseus, as the beggar, went for his turn. He shot the first arrow through the ring, but then he shot an arrow and killed one of the suitors.

Mythology Connection! Much like the British story of King Arthur and the sword in the stone or the Norse story of Sigurd and the sword in the tree, Odysseus is the only man who can wield the bow and arrows. It's a hero thing. Only the true hero can use the special weapon.

Earlier Telemachus and Odysseus had asked the swineherd and the maid to lock all the doors so the suitors could not escape. Odysseus proceeded to kill all of the suitors, with help from Athena who protected him.

Athena changed him back into the form of Odysseus, and he and Penelope and Telemachus were reunited.

Harry Potter Connection! Harry is disguised by Hermione in The Deathly Hallows. Just before being captured by the Snatchers, Hermione disfigures Harry's face so he is not immediately recognizable. It is enough to make the Death Eaters question whether he is Harry Potter or not. It is fitting that Hermione would be the one to give Harry the disguise. She is wise and clever, just like Athena, the Greek goddess of wisdom.

One Last Note About Disguises...

In addition to the heroes who were disguised there are many instances in which the gods and goddess used disguises in order to hide their true identities. Hermes, the sneaky and crafty god, is regularly dressed in disguise in stories.

Transformations in Greek Mythology

In the Harry Potter world, many witches and wizards can transform themselves into animals: Sirius transforms into the big black dog, McGonagall turns into a tabby cat, James Potter could transform into a stag, and Peter Pettigrew transformed into the rat Scabbers.

Although there are no humans who can turn themselves into animals in Greek mythology, there are many instances of the Greek gods and goddesses transforming. Here are just a few:

Proteus—one of the old gods, called "the old man of the sea." Proteus changes into many animals. In *The Odyssey*, Odysseus's son Telemachus wanted to find out which of the gods he had offended and so he went to ask Proteus. Telemachus found Proteus and held him down while Proteus changed into a lion, a serpent, a pig, and other forms.

Nereus—another early sea god who also changes shape and for the same reason. He did not want heroes to be able to get information from him so he changed shape when they came asking questions.

Athena—the goddess of wisdom and war shape-shifted in *The Odyssey* on several occasions: she appeared to Telemachus as Mentor to help him; she transformed herself into a girl; into the herald of King Alcinous; a young herdsman; and changed from a young man into a tall woman.

Zeus—the ruler of the Greek gods appeared to women in multiple forms: a shower of gold; a swan; a bull; an eagle; and as one woman's husband. He turned his lover Io into a cow to protect her from Hera.

There are many instances in Greek mythology where a human is transformed into an animal or some other form. Usually the god or goddess does this out of anger at the human, but sometimes they do it out of pity.

Here are a few examples:

- Circe, the witch Odysseus meets on his travels, turned the men who landed on her island into swine.
- Athena turned Arachne (ah-RAK-nee) into a spider.
- Artemis, the goddess of the hunt and forest, turned Actaeon into a stag. Actaeon was a skilled hunter and one day while out hunting he came across Artemis bathing. She was so upset that he'd seen her that she turned him into a stag.
- Pygmalion was a mortal artist who sculpted a statue of a beautiful woman. He fell deeply in love with it. The goddess of love, Aphrodite, took pity on him and turned the statue into a real woman.
- Hecuba, wife of the king of Troy when it was overrun by the Greeks, was transformed into a dog so she could escape.
- Alcmena was the mother of Heracles and cursed by Hera to stay in labor for too long; Hera posted goddesses who sat with their legs folded together outside of Alcmena's room. Alcmena's maid, Galenthias, tricked these goddesses by telling them that Heracles had been born. They unfolded their legs, the curse was broken, and Heracles could be truly born. It was bad form to trick the gods so Hera cursed Galenthias and turned her into a weasel. However, Hecate took pity on Galenthias and made the weasel her sacred animal.

Harry Potter Connection! In *The Goblet of Fire*, Mad Eye Moody turns Draco Malfoy into a ferret, much to the delight of Harry and his friends!

Dragons in Greek Mythology

There are many dragons in Greek mythology. They often guarded sacred springs, groves, or treasure. Some stories are of dragons terrorizing villages, eating people and livestock. The only thing that appeased the dragon or sea serpent was to sacrifice a young girl. The ancient Greeks also believed that dragons inhabited the far reaches of the world—those unknown places that their sailors could not reach. As in our more modern stories, hero's often kill these dragons.

Interesting Tidbit! There are maps from the middle ages that have pictures of dragons in the water at the edge of the sea with the warning, “Here Be Dragons!”

Heroes and Dragons...

The hero Perseus rescued the princess Andromeda from a sea serpent (the Greeks thought of these serpents and dragons as the same thing). The hero Heracles also rescued a princess from a sea serpent. Both girls were about to be sacrificed. The kings, their fathers, believed the only way to appease the sea monster was to sacrifice their daughters to the creatures.

Greek Dragons

- **Drakon Gigantios**—enormous serpent thrown at the goddess Athena by a giant. She grabbed it and threw it up to the heavens where it became the constellation *Draco*.
- **Colchian Dragon**—guarded the Golden Fleece. The hero Jason stole the fleece.
- **Demeter's Dragons**—two winged dragons that pulled Demeter's chariot.
- **Hesperian Dragon**—the hundred-headed dragon that guarded the golden apples of Hesperides. Heracles killed it as one of his twelve labors.
- **Hydra**—nine-headed dragon. The Hydra was particularly fierce; when one of its heads was cut off, another would grow in its place. Heracles killed it, with the help of his nephew.
- **Medea's Dragons**—two flying dragons who pulled Medea's chariot. They were born out of the blood of Titans.
- **Trojan Dragons**—two sea serpents sent by Athena to kill the Trojan prophet Laocoon. Laocoon warned the Trojans that the Greeks' Wooden Horse was a trick, but they didn't believe him. He threw a spear at the horse, so Athena, who supported the Greeks, called up the two serpents to kill Laocoon and his two sons.

- **Chimera**—the chimera was also considered a dragon. It had three heads, the front of a lion, the end of a goat, the tail of a serpent, and it breathed fire.

In Harry Potter Harry mostly encounters dragons that are guarding some treasure. He has to get by the Hungarian Horntail, which is guarding its eggs, during the Tri-Wizard Tournament. He also encounters the dragon guarding the treasure down in the depths of the Gringott's vault. The difference between Harry and the Greek heroes is that Harry does not kill the dragons he encounters. Instead, he diverts the Hungarian Horntail away from her egg by flying on his broomstick, and he frees the Gringott's dragon.

Harry, Ron, and Hermione also encounter dragons within the fiendfyre that engulfs the Room of Requirement when they try to find the diadem Horcrux, *“now the fire was mutating, forming a gigantic pack of fiery beasts: Flaming serpents, chimaeras, and dragons rose and fell and rose again...”* (DH, 632).

Famous Witches in Greek mythology

The wizarding world of Harry Potter had many famous witches and wizards. People like Dumbledore, Morgan le Fay, Ptolemy, and Circe (sir-see) were immortalized on the Chocolate Frog trading cards. The ancient world of the Greeks had their famous witches as well. The Greeks immortalized their witches in stories. Unfortunately for some, like Medea, it was not such a good thing to be a witch.

Circe—Circe is a beautiful and powerful witch who lives on an island.

Hecate (HEK-ah-tee)—goddess of witchcraft, necromancy, ghosts, and magic. She is the daughter of two Titans, Asteria and Perses.

- Hecate was the companion of Persephone, the goddess of the Underworld and it was Hecate who aided Artemis in her search for Persephone when she went missing.
- Hecate leads the ghosts from the Underworld up into the world at night. Dogs follow her up out of the Underworld, and that is why dogs were said to bray at night.
- She is often depicted as a triple goddess with the heads of animals such as a dog, lion, or horse.
- She is the goddess of crossroads—there were statues of her wherever roads crossed.
- Hecate taught Medea magic.
- When the Roman hero Aeneas went down to the Underworld to talk to his ancestors, it was Hecate who came up and allowed him in after he made the proper sacrifice.

Medea (meh-DEE-ah)—Medea was a powerful sorceress. Her story is intimately linked to the hero Jason of the famous Jason and the Argonauts story.

Medea, Jason, and the Golden Fleece

The task set before Jason was to bring the Golden Fleece back to his land. Medea's father was King Aetes (AY-tes) of Colchis (KOLE-kis) and he possessed the Golden Fleece. When Jason arrived at Colchis, Medea fell in love with him immediately. She had been shot by an arrow from Aphrodite's son Eros (the god of love) and so had no choice but to fall madly in love with Jason. Jason informed King Aetes that he was there to take the Golden Fleece and return it to Greece where it rightfully belonged. King Aetes had no intention of giving away the Golden Fleece, because he believed that it brought him good fortune. He had also been told by an oracle that if he lost the fleece he would lose his kingdom. So, King Aetes told Jason he could have the Golden Fleece if he performed several tasks. From our studies of other heroes, we should know by now that if a hero is asked to perform some tasks, they will be daunting and very dangerous!

- First Jason was told to yoke two bulls. Sounds easy enough, but these bulls had feet made of bronze and breathed fire.
- Second, he had to plow a field with these bulls and then take dragon's teeth and sow the fields.
- Instead of crops growing armed men would sprout up! Jason had to kill them as they attacked him.

Harry Potter Connection! The Greek heroes were not the only ones who had to perform dangerous tasks to reach a goal or capture a magical item. In *The Sorcerer's Stone*, Harry had to make it through all of the protections guarding the stone, like the giant chess set and the potion riddle. In *The Goblet of Fire*, he had to make it through the trials of the Tri-Wizard Tournament. In *The Half Blood Prince* and *The Deathly Hallows*, he had to find and destroy the Horcruxes, surely tasks every bit and daunting and dangerous as what Jason, Heracles, or Psyche had to do!

These tasks were impossible and surely designed to kill Jason. This is where Medea comes into the story. Since she was in love with Jason, and a sorceress with many tricks at her disposal, she decided to help him. She offered to help Jason if he would marry her. He agreed.

This is how Medea helped Jason:

- She gave him a magical potion that would make Jason invincible for a day. He put this all over his body and it protected him from the fire breathing bulls and from the armed men.
- She told him to throw a rock in the midst of the armed men and then they would attack each other instead of him.

Jason did as she told him and was able to finish the tasks.

Harry Potter Connection! Harry also had help. Hermione and Ron helped him get through the Sorcerer's Stone protections. Dumbledore, Ron, and Hermione aided him with the Horcruxes, and he had help from many people to get through the tasks set before him during the Tri-Wizard Tournament.

Medea then discovered that her father, King Aetes had no intention of giving the Golden Fleece to Jason. In fact, he intended to kill Jason and his men. Medea warned Jason and told him to take the fleece and flee Colchis. A dragon guarded the fleece, but Medea knew how to get around it—sing to it. In some stories she sang and lulled the dragon to sleep. In other stories it was one of Jason's men, Orpheus, who played music and lulled the dragon. Either way, the dragon was put to sleep, the fleece taken, and the Argonauts escaped Colchis, Medea with them.

Sound Familiar? Monsters in mythology often fall asleep when someone plays them music. Cerberus was lulled to sleep by Orpheus on his trip into the Underworld to retrieve his wife. In another Greek story, the god Hermes lulled the 100-eyed giant Argus to sleep with his music and singing.

Medea and Jason in Greece

When Jason, Medea, and the Argonauts finally returned to Greece they found that terrible things had happened there as well. Jason's father and mother had both died at the hand of Jason's evil uncle Pelias, the unlawful King who sent Jason on his quest.

Sound Familiar? The evil brother who seizes a kingdom is a common thread in the Greek hero stories. We see it with the story of Perseus—an evil brother takes over the island on which Perseus and his mother live. It is the evil brother who unlawfully takes over in the story of Aeneas. Aeneas's mother was sent off because her evil uncle seized control of her father's kingdom. This is a common thread in fairy tales as well.

Jason again needed Medea's magical help to get revenge on Pelias. Pelias was an old and frail man, so Medea told Pelias's daughters that she had a potion that could return an old man to his youth. She proved it by killing an old ram, putting the pieces in a pot, and then reciting a charm. The ram popped out of the pot rejuvenated and young again. She told the girls she could do the same with Pelias. Medea tricked the girls into killing their father. However, Medea did not say the charm and Pelias remained dead. Jason was avenged.

Jason's Betrayal of Medea

Jason and Medea then traveled to Corinth where they were happy and had two children. However, Medea's happiness did not last. The King of Corinth asked Jason to marry his daughter, and being a good match, Jason agreed, completely rejecting Medea. But she had one last magical trick up her sleeve. Medea gave Jason's new bride a gift of a beautiful robe on which Medea had rubbed a poison. She asked Jason's bride to wear the robe immediately as a token that it was received. Once she put on the robe she was engulfed by fire and killed. The King of Corinth was killed as well when he tried to put out the magical fire.

Medea after Jason

There are many endings to Medea's story. In the end, though, she wound up back in her home country of Colchis or in a place that eventually called itself Medea. There is no account of Medea's death. Jason was eventually killed by wreckage from one of his ships falling on him.

Medea's story is ultimately a very sad one and shows that in ancient Greece there was considerable fear of women with extraordinary powers. That fear

turned the women into evil sorceresses who trick and hurt the men and children around them.

GREEK MYTHOLOGY CREATION STORIES

A mythology of a people is not just the stories they tell about their gods and goddesses and their heroes. They also have stories about how the world was created, how humans were created, and why certain things, like the seasons, came to be.

Creation of the World

In the beginning there was Chaos—a void, a vast emptiness, nothingness. Chaos gave birth to Gaia, the earth. Gaia was the earth goddess, the embodiment of the earth. In our modern world we might think of her as “Mother Earth.” Gaia then gave birth to Uranus and he became ruler of the sky. Since he surrounded Gaia, as the sky surrounds the earth, he became her equal as well as her offspring.

Birth of the Titans

Uranus and Gaia had many children. Their first children were the Hecatonchires, monsters with 50 heads and one hundred hands. Uranus hated his “children” and was afraid that they would overthrow him so he pushed them back into Gaia's womb.

Then she gave birth to the Cyclopes, monsters who each had a single eye in the middle of their foreheads. They were master craftsmen and made thunder and lightning for Gaia. However, Uranus was afraid of them too and threw them into Tartarus, a deep place beneath the earth.

Gaia finally gave birth to the Titans. There were twelve of them, six gods and six goddesses. This set of children were not monsters, but instead had human characteristics. Once again, though, Uranus was afraid of his children and pushed them back into Gaia's womb. As you can imagine, Gaia grew tired of this so she talked to them in her womb and her youngest Titan, Chronus, said he would kill Uranus. Finally, when Uranus came to visit Gaia, Chronus attacked him with a flint sickle that Gaia had given him. How Gaia was able to give a sickle to a child in her womb, I don't know!

All of the children came out. Chronus put the Hecatonchires in Tartarus with the Cyclopes and then became the king of the Titans, and Rhea, his sister, became his wife. They lived in peace for a while. But, Chronus could never truly be at peace because both Gaia and Uranus had predicted that one of Chronus' children would overthrow him. So, the bizarre cycle continued.

Birth of the Olympian Gods

When Rhea gave birth to her first five children Chronus swallowed them whole (the five children: Poseidon, Hades, Hestia, Hera, and Demeter). Rhea was upset and so when she was about to have her sixth child she tricked Chronus. She wrapped a stone up in a blanket and gave that to Chronus to swallow. He had no idea he had been tricked and believed the stone to be his child. Rhea then fled to the island of Crete and gave birth to her baby, who she named Zeus. She knew that Chronus could not know about Zeus so she left him on the island with the nymphs, and there a she-goat nursed him.

Zeus survived and thrived on the island and when he became a young man Rhea brought him to live with them. Chronus did not know that this young man was his son. Zeus waited on Chronus and gave him a potion that made him throw up all of the children he had swallowed. They all came out fully grown! These “children” of Chronus fled with Zeus to Mount Olympus where they started a war with the Titans. They got the name of the “Olympian” gods because their home base during the war was Mt. Olympus, and ever after in the stories their home is on that mountain.

Battle Between Titans and Olympians

This war between the Titans and the Olympians lasted for ten years. During the war Zeus freed the Cyclopes from Tartarus. The Cyclopes were master craftsmen and made weapons for the gods. They made:

- Zeus's thunderbolts
- Poseidon's trident
- Hades' cap of invisibility
- Artemis's silver bow and quiver of arrows

These are the weapons that these gods and goddess came to be associated with when depicted in art.

Mythology Connection! In Norse mythology the dwarves are master craftsmen and create weapons for the gods.

It was a long and terrible battle. Zeus not only brought back the Cyclopes but the hundred handed giants to fight on his side as well. Also, some of the Titans switched sides and joined the Olympians. Eventually the Olympians won the battle and the Titans were thrown into Tartarus with the hundred handed giants guarding them. Atlas was forced to hold the world on his back as punishment because he was the leader of the Titans in battle and fought the most fiercely against the Olympians.

Zeus, Poseidon, and Hades had to draw lots to determine who would rule which part of the world. Zeus drew the sky, Poseidon the seas and water on

earth, and Hades the dead and the Underworld. Because the sky is over all of the things, Zeus became the king of the gods.

The Olympian Gods and Goddesses

Zeus and Hera “married” and became the king and queen of the gods, although Zeus was the most powerful of them all. Zeus had loads of children. Some of them became the other Olympian gods and goddess, some became famous heroes, some became entities like the Muses, and others were unimportant in the myths and stories.

Zeus was the father of (among others): Aphrodite, Athena, Ares, Hephaestus, Hermes, Apollo and Artemis, Dionysus, Hebe, the Muses, the Fates, Persephone, Heracles, Perseus, and Helen of Troy.

Creation of Humans

Prometheus and Epimetheus were two Titans who fought on the Olympian side and so were not sent down to Tartarus after the Olympian victory. Instead, Zeus gave them the task of creating humans. In one story Prometheus created man out of clay and then Athena breathed life into them. Another story was that Prometheus made man and then held them up so the wind could breathe life into them. Zeus gave Epimetheus, Prometheus’s brother, the job of giving the animals and humans gifts, which was a strange choice since Epimetheus was not very smart. His name means “afterthought” and

true to his name, he did not think ahead—he gave the animals all the good qualities, like fangs and claws and speed and fur. So Prometheus had to step in and help the poor humans out. Prometheus gave humans the ability to walk upright, to think, speak, and to reason. Some of the other gods and goddesses chipped in and helped the humans too. Humans were given information about what to eat and how to hunt and all the other things we do.

Prometheus Tricks Zeus

Zeus decided that humans had to sacrifice an animal to the gods and that Prometheus should choose which part of the animal was to be sacrificed and which the humans could eat. Prometheus had become fond of his new humans and wanted them to have the best part of the sacrificial animal, so he tricked Zeus. Prometheus wrapped up two piles of meat that he'd taken from an animal. In one pile he put the good meat, wrapped it up to hide it, and then put it under entrails. He hoped the entrails would be so gross and unappetizing that Zeus would not pick that pile. In the other pile he put bones, but then put the fat on top, hoping Zeus would choose the nice fat. True to Prometheus's plan, Zeus picked the pile with the fat. The humans got the pile with the entrails on top but the good meat underneath. Humans got the win. Zeus was not happy.

Prometheus also went up to Olympus and took fire for the humans so they wouldn't be cold and they could cook their food. Taking fire from Olympus was forbidden and for this and for the other trick Zeus punished Prometheus. He chained Prometheus to a rock and everyday an eagle came and pecked out his liver, which would then grow back each and every night. This happened until the hero Heracles killed the eagle and freed Prometheus.

Another story about Humans, the Titans, and Zeus...

This is the story of Pandora (Pandora means "the gift of all"). Zeus was angry at Prometheus for tricking him, and even though he had punished Prometheus, he wanted to punish the humans as well. At this point, there were only men on earth. Zeus went to Hephaestus, who was a very talented craftsman and metalworker, and asked him to make a beautiful woman. He created a woman as beautiful as a goddess—Pandora. The other gods gave her gifts of clothes and jewelry and fragrances. She was also given a box covered with jewels and carvings and decorations, but it came with a condition: she could not open it. Pandora agreed, and she went to live with other humans. Eventually Pandora gave in to temptation and opened the box. Inside were sorrow, hunger, anger, disease, madness, and all the other horrible things we know as humans. Pandora became frightened and shut the lid. One thing remained in the box—hope. From that moment on the humans recognized that the gods were supremely powerful and so did what they could to appease them. But humans always have hope.

The Story of Persephone in the Underworld and How the Seasons Came About

Persephone was the daughter of Zeus and Demeter, and Demeter loved her daughter very much.

One day Persephone wandered off while out picking flowers with her friends. She wanted to pick a narcissus flower, but the roots were so deep that she

couldn't get it out of the ground. Finally, she tugged hard, a hole opened up out of the ground, and Hades raced out of the chasm in his chariot drawn by black horses. He grabbed her by the wrist and pulled her into the chariot and raced back down to the Underworld. Persephone cried out. Demeter heard her daughter's cries, but when she looked for Persephone she could not find her. She searched for nine days and nine nights. She met up with Hecate who offered to help Demeter find Persephone. They finally came upon the sun (Helios) who told them that Persephone was in the Underworld, because she had been abducted by Hades.

Demeter also found out from Helios that Zeus gave Hades permission to abduct Persephone, even though she was his own daughter! Demeter was so distraught when she found out what had happened to her beloved daughter, and that Zeus himself took part in it, that she shunned her life as a goddess. She wandered the earth disguised as a mortal. While she wandered, the earth became barren and the fields grew fallow and the crops failed. She looked like a sad and weak old woman. While she pined for her lost daughter no crops grew and the people became hungry. Every living thing was in danger of starving.

Zeus finally had to get involved. He had all of the gods go down to earth and talk to Demeter, but she wouldn't budge. She wouldn't return life to the earth while her daughter was in the Underworld. Zeus realized that Hades would have to give Persephone back, and he sent Hermes to the Underworld to tell Hades. When Hermes arrived in the Underworld he saw Hades and Persephone on their thrones, and she looked miserable. When Hermes told her Zeus wanted her to return she was happy, but Hades was not. However, he knew he couldn't disobey Zeus and would have to give her up. But before she left he offered her some pomegranate seeds. He knew that if she ate

anything in the Underworld she'd have to come back. Persephone didn't know this rule, and so she ate four pomegranate seeds.

Hermes took Persephone to Demeter, and they were very happy to be reunited, but when Demeter found out that Persephone had eaten in the Underworld she grew concerned and went to Zeus to see what could be done. Unfortunately for Demeter and Persephone, the rule was unbreakable; she ate food in the Underworld and would have to stay there. But Zeus came up with a compromise. Persephone had to go back, but only for four months out of the year, one month for every pomegranate seed she ate. Demeter agreed and she allowed the crops to grow again. From that time on Demeter and Persephone spent most of the year together. During their time together the earth was fertile and the crops grew—spring and summer. When Persephone went to the Underworld for her four months the world became cold and sterile—autumn and winter.

ROMAN MYTHOLOGY

The ancient Romans rose to power as the Greeks' star was waning. The Romans had some old household and countryside gods and goddesses that were their own, but did not possess a grand mythology like the Greeks or the Egyptians. The Romans ended up borrowing the Greeks gods and using them and the stories for themselves. One difference is that the Romans worshiped Mars, the god of war, more than Jupiter the king of the gods, because the Romans were warriors and they believed he could aid their conquests.

The Romans also had a great hero story of their own—the creation of the city of Rome. Romans took great pride in the city of Rome, the Roman people, and the Roman Empire. They created a story in which the ancestor of all the Roman people (those actually from Rome) was a great hero from the Trojan War—Aeneas.

Roman Gods and Goddesses

Here are the names of the Roman gods and goddesses with the Greek equivalent in parentheses. Unless changed, their attributes and their depictions are the same as the Greeks. You'll also recognize many of the names as those of our planets.

- **Saturn** (Chronos)
- **Jupiter, Jove** (Zeus)
- **Juno** (Hera)
- **Mars** (Ares)—not only the god of war, but also the god of agriculture.
- **Vesta** (Hestia)—she became the patron goddess of Rome. She was adopted as guardian of the holy fire in Rome. There were no statues of Vesta because she was represented as the fire. Her temple and the temple fire were tended by the Vestal Virgins.
- **Ceres (sir-eez)** (Demeter)—our word “cereal” comes from this goddess's name.
- **Minerva** (Athena)—also the goddess of commerce.

- **Neptune** (Poseidon)
- **Pluto** (Hades)
- **Mercury** (Hermes)
- **Venus** (Aphrodite)
- **Vulcan** (Hephaestos)—our word “volcano” comes from this name.
- **Diana** (Artemis)
- **Apollo**
- **Bacchus (bah-kus)** (Dionysus)
- **Cupid** (Eros)

Other Roman Gods

- **Janus**—the god of beginnings, doorways, and public gates; also of departures and returns. Statues of Janus had two faces, one looked toward the rising sun and one towards the setting sun. Janus was often invoked when there was talk of change. We get our word January from the god Janus.

The Romans also had personal, family, and state gods. Each Roman family had its own special gods as did each town or city. Families had personal shrines to these gods set up in their houses and the Roman state had a temple and a sacred fire burning for the goddess Vesta. The fire was always kept burning.

- **Lares (lah-reez)**—gods of the family. Lares were protective ancestral spirits who continued to look after their family. The family had a small shrine in the house and would pray each day to their Lares, offering them small gifts. Other Lares lived outside of the house in the surrounding fields.
- **Penates (peh-nah-teez)**—gods of the family. They were guardians of the hearth and storerooms. They would ensure a family's welfare. There were also public Penates that would ensure the welfare of the Roman state. The Penates are associated with Vesta.

The Romans, like the Greeks, had gods and goddesses of the forest:

- **Sylvanus**—god of the forest. He watches over wild forests but also over the fields and the men who tend them. He protects the flocks and scares off wolves.
- **Faunus**—god of the forest. He is also a god of agriculture and cattle. He is a horned god very similar to the Greek god Pan.
- **Flora**—goddess of flowers, fruits, and springtime. She wears a crown of flowers.

Roman Gods and Goddess from Other Cultures

The Romans also imported gods and goddesses from other cultures as well. The Roman Empire spread far and wide so it is no surprise that the people of Rome would be influenced and take up the worship of other gods and

goddesses. These were called “cults” because they were not the religion of the state but they were popular among the people. The two biggest cults:

- **Isis**—Isis is a goddess from Egypt. In the Roman world Isis was a favorite with women because her story involved unfailing loyalty to her husband, Osiris, who had been killed. She is also the mother of the god Horus. Isis became equated in Rome with the goddess Ceres.
- **Mithras**—Mithras is a god from Persia. In the Roman world Mithras was a favorite of men, especially soldiers because in the Persian mythology he battled demons and sorcerers. Not much is known about the “cult” of Mithras other than he was born from a rock and he killed a great bull. People who worshiped Mithras did so in underground caverns.