

Greek Mythology

Brief #3

Focus

Ancient Greek myths and legends are still popular today.

The ancient Greeks were polytheistic. **Polytheism means that you worship more than one god.** The ancient Greeks had many, many gods. They believed that their gods were immortal. **If something is immortal, that means that it can live forever.** The ancient Greeks also believed that their gods lived on Mount Olympus. Mount Olympus is a real place located in northern Greece.

Ancient Greek myths, like most myths, were stories that people told that helped to explain some of the mysteries of life and the natural world. Greek myths explain how life began, how the seasons came to be, and what happens to people after death.



Major Greek Gods

- **Zeus** is the king of the gods. He rules the thunder, rain, and lightning, among other things.
- **Hera** is the wife and sister of Zeus. She has a jealous streak and can be quite vengeful.
- **Poseidon** is the god of the seas and the brother of Zeus. He lives at the bottom of the ocean and rules the waves.
- **Demeter** is the goddess of agriculture.
- **Athena** is the goddess of wisdom. She is the daughter of Zeus. Athens is named for this goddess.
- **Hestia** is the goddess of the home.
- **Aphrodite** is the goddess of beauty and love. She was born from the foam of the sea.
- **Apollo** is the god of light and truth. He is also young and handsome.
- **Ares** is the god of war. He is the son of Hera.
- **Artemis** is the goddess of the hunters and animals. She is the twin sister of Apollo.
- **Hephaestus** is the god of fire and volcanoes. He was born deformed. He is also a skilled blacksmith.
- **Hermes** is the messenger of the gods. He also watches over travelers and shepherds. He likes to play practical jokes.

Vocabulary

1. Polytheism
2. immortal
3. Mount Olympus
4. Trojan War

Greek Mythology

Brief #3 (cont.)



Heroes and Legends

Greek Mythology is full of stories about the lives of heroes and legendary events and people. One of these events is the Trojan War. **The Trojan War is a legendary war that was fought between the ancient Greeks and the people of Troy in the 12th or 13th century B.C.** According to Greek legend, the gods took sides in the conflict and helped mortals on both sides. The most famous books about the Trojan War are epic poems written by Homer in about the 8th or 9th century B.C. These books are called the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*.

- **The Trojan Horse**

One of the most well-known episodes of the Trojan War concerns something called the Trojan Horse. According to the legend, the Greeks were trying to find a way to get inside of the walled city of Troy. They built a huge horse made of wood. The inside of the horse was hollowed out. Greek soldiers hid inside of the horse. Other Greek soldiers sailed away on ships. When the Trojans saw the Greeks vessels leaving, they thought that they were out of harm's way. They didn't know that there were other Greek soldiers hiding within the horse. The Trojans brought the horse into the city of Troy. Once inside, the Greek soldiers sprang from the horse and attacked the city.

Fast Fact

The Olympics began as a way for ancient Greeks to honor their gods.

- **Persephone**

Persephone is the daughter of Demeter, the goddess of the harvest. One day, while Persephone played outdoors in the sunshine, she was kidnapped by Hades, the god of the underworld in the land of the dead. Hades took Persephone to his underground world because he wanted Persephone to be his wife. Persephone grew sadder and sadder every day that Hades kept her in the underworld. She refused to eat or drink anything.

The whole time that Persephone was in the underworld, her mother had no idea where she was. She frantically looked for her everywhere, but couldn't find her. Finally, Demeter asked her brother Zeus for some help. Zeus knew that Persephone was with Hades and ordered him to return her to the land of the living. Hades refused. Finally, Hades agreed to return Persephone only if she had not eaten or drunk anything from the underworld. Although Persephone didn't eat much, she did have six pomegranate seeds.

An agreement was made that because Persephone had eaten six pomegranate seeds that she would spend six months out of the year with him and six months out of the year with her mother. For the six months that Persephone spends with Demeter the crops grow in warm sunshine. But when Persephone has to go back to the underworld, Demeter grows sad, and her sadness brings winter and the death of the crops.