

'It's All Greek to Me'

The derivation of that popular phrase is rooted in William Shakespeare's tragedy *Julius Caesar*. The phrase alludes to the fact that something is out of the realm of the speaker's understanding. But in the case of *READ*'s special electronic issue, we expect the opposite will prove true for your students—their understanding of Greek mythology will be enhanced!

In this e-issue, we introduce your students to a bit of background on Greek lore and mythology while also providing insight into some popular cultural references and icons. Use these pages to get a sense of the features on the site. Enjoy! And may the Greeks be with you!



The Greeks Speak: Mythology's Greatest Hits

Greek mythology is a world unto itself, populated with scores of gods and heroes, mortals and monsters. Here we present six characters whose stories are as rich as any you will find on Mount Olympus. We have chosen myths that are particularly resonant touchstones in our own culture. And these characters introduce themselves in the first person. Meet Icarus, Medusa, Narcissus, Pandora, Sisyphus, and Zeus!

Further Study: Invite each of your students to choose another Greek myth and write it in the first person, from the main character's point of view.

Art History: Each myth is illustrated with a work by a great artist. The Greek stories have inspired centuries of not only writers but also artists, because they focus on the universal human experience.

Hip-Hop Takes Center Stage: *The Odyssey*

Treat your class to an animated musical sensation! The classic tale of Odysseus and his crew is told through this energetic and fun hip-hop song. This feature serves as an introduction to our readers' theater version of Homer's classic *The Odyssey*. After your class has viewed the music video, assign parts and have your students read the play aloud in class. You can either download and copy the play PDF or project the play on your whiteboard.

Teaching Tip: *The Odyssey* is an epic poem that has captivated and challenged students for centuries. Although the hip-hop song covers the entire poem, it does so in a much abbreviated way. The Center Stage play concerns only the beginning part. We've made this version of *The Odyssey* appropriate and engaging for most middle-school readers.

30 Ways to Go Greek

Pick a number, any number! This interactive feature is made up of 30 entries that inform students about Greek life, mythology, customs, and culture. There are many aspects of our society that can be traced back to Greek civilization. Each of these entries varies in content, appealing to different learning styles. Explore this grid-like feature with your class to learn about everything from Apollo to Yanni.

Teaching Tip: Have each student choose a number from 1 to 30 out of a hat (or some such). The numbers will correspond to the entries presented in the grid. Ask your students to prepare short presentations on the topics they have chosen.

Write Your Own Myth

This myth generator will randomly pick three components that students will use to write their own myths. Included are settings, extraordinary powers, and special objects.

Extension Activity: Produce your own class mythology book project, a compilation of tales starring each student as a god, goddess, hero, mortal, nymph, or monster (students get to choose). Have each student write one about himself or herself, identifying the lesson inherent in the story. (You can use the myths of Pandora, Narcissus, or Icarus to discuss how they often caution against certain kinds of behavior.) When the stories have been written and revised, compile them into a book and illustrate with student artwork.