Week 3 Theseus’s Adventures (Myth) by H.A Guerber

In Greek mythology, Theseus is a great hero, credited with unifying the communities of Attica into the Athenian city-state. It is said that Theseus’s father was King Aegeus of Athens. Theseus spent his childhood with his mother, Aethra, in the Peloponnese city of Trozean. When he came of age, Theseus set out for Athens to take his place as heir to his father’s kingdom. During his journey, he experienced many adventures, two of which are described in this extract.

Questions to ask before reading the text:
What is a Greek myth?
1) Do you know anything about the Ancient Greeks?
2) Look at the glossary - what are the key words and what do they mean?

Section 1:
1a) Look at the summary. What is Troezen?
1b) What does the word ‘yielding’ mean? Use the glossary to help you.
1c) Look at the events below. Write them in order of when it appears in the text:
   Theseus drew his sword.
   A robber called Sciron guarded the pathway.
   Theseus eluded the danger.
   Theseus continued his journey in peace.
1d) Why was Sinis called ‘The Pine-bender’?
1e) Fill in the gap in the sentence below.
   The myth is written by _______________.

Section 2:
2a) How did Theseus conquer Sinis?
2b) What three things does Sciron do to a traveller?
2c) Why were people travelling to the Isthmus of Corinth unable to avoid Sciron?
2d) Why do you think the tortoise was pleased when Sciron was thrown in the sea?
2e) Which word means trick? Use the glossary to help you.

Section 3:
3a) In the third paragraph, which verb does the writer use that means ‘to eat’?
3b) What do you think the word ‘eluded’ (line 10) means? You can use a dictionary.
3c) How did Sciron feel when he was forced to wash Theseus’s feet?
3d) Find and copy a phrase to show how he was feeling.
3e) Why do you think he felt this way?
3f) Why was Sinis called ‘The Pine-bender’?
3g) Identify one feature of the text that suggests it is a myth.
3h) Do you think Theseus survived the journey to Athens? Explain your answer.
Extension activities:
- Identify all of the adjectives in this extract. Think of as many synonyms as possible for each adjective.
- Identify and discuss the features of myths. What is the purpose of each one?

Answers

Section 1:
1a) The birthplace of Theseus
1b) giving in
1c) Theseus continued his journey in peace. Theseus eluded the danger. A robber called Sciron guarded the pathway. Theseus drew his sword.
1d) As he used to bend pine until its top touched the ground.
1e) The myth is written by H.A Guerber.

Section 2:
2a) E.g. He used a huge pine tree to throw Sinis into the air so that he would smash into the mountain side.
2b) raise his foot, kick him over the side and hurl him down into the sea.
2c) E.g. Because the Isthmus was very narrow, and Sciron guarded the only possible path.
2d) E.g. As it was someone else it could eat, as it was man-eating.
2e) stratagem

Section 3:
3a) to devour
3b) E.g. escaped; avoided; evaded
3c) He felt afraid.
3d) Any appropriate phrase. E.g. Sciron dared not refuse, and obeyed in fear and trembling.
3e) E.g. He was afraid that Theseus was going to kill him in the same way.
3f) As he used to bend pine until its top touched the ground.
3g) Any answers from: It includes a giant; it included a huge, man-eating tortoise; it includes a hero who must complete some difficult task
3h) Any appropriate answer. E.g. Yes, because he easily managed to defeat the Sinis and Sciron, so I think he would also have been able to survive the other dangers that he might have faced on the way to Athens.
Theseus's Adventures

Theseus was a great hero in Greek mythology. As a young man, he set out on the difficult and dangerous journey from his birthplace, Troezen, to the Greek capital, Athens. He experienced many adventures during his journey. This extract describes two of those adventures.

Theseus continued his journey in peace, until he came to the Isthmus of Corinth, where two adventures awaited him. The first was with a cruel giant named Sinis, nicknamed The Pine-bender, whose usual practice was to bend some huge pine until its top touched the ground, and call to any unsuspecting passer-by to seize it and lend him a helping hand for a moment. Then, as soon as the innocent stranger had complied with his request, he would suddenly let go the pine, which, freed from his gigantic grasp, sprang back to its upright position, and hurled the unfortunate traveler way up in the air, to be dashed to pieces against the rocky mountain side.

Theseus, who had already heard of the giant's stratagem*, skillfully eluded the danger, and finally caused Sinis to perish by the same cruel death which he had dealt out to so many others.

In one place the Isthmus of Corinth was exceedingly narrow, and the only practicable pathway led along a rocky ledge, guarded by a robber named Sciron, who forced all who tried to pass him to wash his feet. While the traveler was thus engaged, and knelt in the narrow pathway to do his bidding, he would suddenly raise his foot, kick him over the side, and hurl him down into the sea below, where a huge tortoise was ever waiting with gaping jaws to devour the victims.

Instead of yielding* to Sciron's exactions*, Theseus drew his sword, and by his determined bearing so terrified the robber, that he offered him a free passage. This offer, however, did not satisfy Theseus, who said he would sheathe his sword only on condition that Sciron performed for him the menial office* he had imposed upon so many others. Sciron dared not refuse, and obeyed in fear and trembling; but he was doomed never to molest* any one again, for Theseus kicked him over the precipice*, into the breakers, where the tortoise feasted upon his remains with as keen a relish as upon former victims.

An abridged extract from *Myths of Greece and Rome* by H.A. Guerber.

Glossary

- *stratagem* — trick
- *exactions* — demands
- *yielding* — giving in
- *menial office* — lowly task
- *molest* — attack
- *precipice* — steep cliff
**Week 4 Comprehension** The Oak and the Linden Tree (Myth) by Ovid

Ovid is widely seen as one of the most important poets in Latin literature. His best-known work, the 15 book poem *Metamorphoses* is a key source of Ancient Greek and Roman mythology. The Oak and the Linden Tree comes from book 8 of the *Metamorphoses*. The story ends with Jupiter destroying Phrygia in a great flood. Only Philemon and Baucis are spared, and their humble hut becomes a beautiful temple. When the couple eventually die, they are turned into an oak tree and a linden tree, standing together where Phrygia used to be.

Questions to ask before reading the text:
1) What is a myth?
2) How many features of a myth can you remember?
3) What do you want to find out about this story?

### Section 1:
1a) Look at the summary. What did the people of Ancient Rome believe in?
1b) What was Mount Olympus?
1c) Why was there no place for sadness on the great mountain?
1d) Why did Jupiter want to visit the people of Earth?
1e) How do you think Mercury felt to be asked to go to Earth with his father and why?

### Section 2:
2a) What is the purpose of the information in the brackets?
2b) Find and copy a phrase that tells the reader when the story took place.
2c) Why do you think Mercury and Jupiter turned in despair as they went towards Philemon's house?
2d) Why do you think Mercury left his sandals behind when he and Jupiter went to Earth?
2e) What was the name of Philemon's wife?

### Section 3:
3a) Philemon 'beamed' at his visitors (line 31). What does 'beamed' mean? You can use a dictionary.
3b) Are you surprised that Jupiter wanted to leave Mount Olympus? Explain your answer.
3c) Summarise what happened in lines 17-22.
3d) "bowed its straw head" (line 24). This is an example of (choose one):
   - onomatopoeia - a simile - personification - alliteration
3e) Why is it an example of the technique above?
3f) Why did Jupiter want to visit the people of Earth?
3g) Write down two features of this text that show it's a Greek myth.
3h) What do you think will happen in the rest of the myth?
Extension activities:
- Discuss the typical features of myths and explain the purpose of each one.
- Have a discussion about the end of the extract. What do they think is the message of the myth? Are they surprised that Philemon and Baucis let them in?

Answers

Section 1:
1a) They believed in different gods and goddesses.
1b) The home of the gods
1c) The gods had everything they needed.
1d) E.g. He had nothing to do and he wanted to test the people who lived there.
1e) E.g. I think he felt proud as he always wanted to please and impress his father.

Section 2:
2a) E.g. It tells the reader how to pronounce the names in the text.
2b) Many centuries ago
2c) E.g. They had been turned down numerous times and probably thought it’d be the same at the next house.
2d) E.g. To make himself look like a poor traveller.
2e) Baucis

Section 3:
3a) smiled
3b) Any appropriate answer. E.g. Yes, because the text says that Mount Olympus was ‘perfect’ and that the gods had plenty of food, music and stories. If I lived somewhere like that, I’d never want to leave. OR E.g. No, because the text says there is ‘nothing to do’ on Mount Olympus, so I am not surprised that Jupiter got bored and wanted to leave. I wouldn’t want to stay where there was nothing to do either.
3c) E.g. Mercury and Jupiter go to Phrygia in disguise. They knock on doors asking for help, but everyone turns them away.
3d) personification
3e) E.g. As it gives human characteristics to something that is not human
3f) E.g. He had nothing to do and he wanted to test the people who lived there.
3g) E.g. It is about gods and it’s set in ancient times
3h) Any appropriate answer. E.g. I think that Jupiter will punish the people of Phrygia who wouldn’t help them, but he will reward Philemon and Baucis as they were kind to him.
The people of Ancient Rome believed in lots of different gods and goddesses and told many stories about them. This extract is based on a myth by Ovid, a famous poet who lived in Ancient Rome around 2000 years ago. It focuses on Jupiter, king of the gods, and his son, Mercury.

Many centuries ago, in the far distant past, Mount Olympus was the home of the gods. On this great mountain, there was no place for sadness, hunger or thirst. The gods had all they needed, and more. The most delicious feasts satisfied their bodies, while beautiful music fed their souls. And every day, the goddesses would entertain them all with stories of old.

But Jupiter, king of the gods, had grown restless. In this perfect place, there was nothing to do. He decided it was time to descend from Olympus and visit the people of Earth below.

“Mercury,” he boomed. “Mercury, my son! We have an important task to perform.”

Mercury appeared at his father’s side, and his eager eyes searched the wise, old face. Mercury had great respect for his father, and always valued opportunities to please and impress him.

“Where are we going, Father? What shall we do?”

“It’s time we tested the kindness of those on Earth. We shall visit the people of Phrygia [pronounced FRI-gee-a]. If they pass the test, then all shall be well. If they fail the test, then they’ll learn the hard way that unkind behaviour provokes the anger of the gods.”

Mercury nodded and rose at once. He removed his magical winged sandals which let him fly as fast as the wind, and both gods put on old tattered clothes. Jupiter set off with a slow, painful limp, and Mercury, barefooted, followed behind.

Mercury and Jupiter arrived in Phrygia looking like two humble travellers. They started their task, knocking wearily on each door that they found.

“Could you spare us a drink of water, please?” asked Mercury.

“We have no food and nowhere to go,” cried Jupiter.

But the people of Phrygia slammed their doors in the gods’ faces and paid no attention to their pleas for help. At last, Mercury and Jupiter turned in despair to a lonely shack, which cowered and bowed its straw head. It was the smallest house they’d seen so far, and the walls quivered in the gentle breeze. Drawing near, they saw a couple inside. The man, Philemon [fi-lee-mon], and his wife, Baucis [baw-sis], turned their heads at the sound of the knock. Philemon hurried over to answer the door.

“Please, would you let us sit for a while? We are tired and hungry, and have travelled far.”

Philemon’s face broke into a welcoming smile, and he beamed at the visitors. “Why, of course, strangers! Please, enter our home!”

Based on a myth by Ovid.