

Persephone and Demeter

A Greek Myth retold by Ingri and Edgar Parin d'Aulaire

Build Background

Cultural Context As long as nine thousand years ago, civilizations existed in the lands around the Aegean Sea, in present-day Greece and Turkey. Architecture and arts such as sculpture, pottery, and music flourished in these societies. The literature of that time was passed on by word of mouth, and many stories were told about the Greek pantheon of gods and goddesses.

Reader's Context Think about your own relationships. What friend or family member cheers you up? What qualities make that person so special?

Set Purpose

Preview the vocabulary words and footnotes. Then skim for other unfamiliar words and look them up.

Analyze Literature

Myth A traditional story that usually presents supernatural events involving gods and heroes is called a **myth**. There are many different kinds of myths. An *origin myth*, like "Persephone and Demeter," is a story that explains the existence of things or events in the natural world. As you read "Persephone and Demeter," determine what real-world phenomena it explains.



Meet the Authors

Authors and illustrators **Ingri d'Aulaire** (1904–1980) and **Edgar Parin d'Aulaire** (1898–1986) met in Germany. Ingri was from a large Norwegian family. Edgar, the son of two artists, grew up in Switzerland.

The couple moved to the United States in 1929 and collaborated on their first children's book two years later. The collections of Greek and Norse myths that they published in the 1960s remain popular today.

Apply the Model

BEFORE READING

DURING READING

AFTER READING

Use Reading Skills Monitor Comprehension

One good method for monitoring your comprehension is to pose questions about the text. As you read, ask yourself: What have I learned about Greek myth? To what characters, events, settings, and ideas have I been introduced? Use a K-W-L chart to record your ideas.

What I Know	What I Want to Know	What I Learned
Persephone and Demeter were Greek goddesses.		

GUIDED READING

Preview Vocabulary

yawn•ing (yô' nîŋ) *adj.*, wide open

root (rüt) *v.*, dig in the ground

cleft (kleft) *n.*, space made when something breaks open

a•veng•ing (ə venj' îŋ) *adj.*, taking revenge or punishing someone for something

bar•ren (ber' ən) *adj.*, unable to reproduce or bear fruit; desolate

ra•di•ant (rā' dē ənt) *adj.*, shining bright

Apply the Model

BEFORE READING

DURING READING

AFTER READING

Persephone and Demeter



The Rape of Persephone by Hades - 19th century, English School. Bibliothèque des Arts et Métiers, Paris.

A Greek Myth retold by Ingri and Edgar Parin d'Aulaire

At the reins stood grim Hades.

Persephone grew up on Olympus¹ and her gay laughter rang through the brilliant halls. She was the daughter of Demeter, goddess of the harvest, and her mother loved her so dearly she could not bear to have her out of her sight. When Demeter sat on her golden throne her daughter was always on her lap; when she went down to earth to look after her trees and fields, she took Persephone. Wherever Persephone danced on her light feet, flowers sprang up. She was so lovely and full of grace that even Hades,² who saw so little, noticed her and fell in love with her. He wanted her for his queen, but he knew that her mother would never consent to part with her, so he decided to carry her off.

One day as Persephone ran about in the meadow gathering flowers, she strayed away from her mother and the attending nymphs.³ Suddenly, the ground split open and up from the yawning crevice came a dark chariot drawn by black horses. At the reins stood grim Hades. He seized the terrified girl, turned his horses, and plunged back into the ground. A herd of pigs rooting in the meadow tumbled into the cleft, and Persephone's cries for help died out as the ground closed again as suddenly as it had opened. Up in the field, a little swineherd⁴ stood and wept over the pigs he had lost, while Demeter rushed wildly about in the meadow, looking in vain for her daughter, who had vanished without leaving a trace.

With the frightened girl in his arms, Hades raced his snorting horses down away from the sunlit world. Down and down they sped on the dark path to his dismal underground palace. He led weeping Persephone in, seated her beside him on a throne of black marble, and decked her with gold and precious stones. But the jewels brought her no joy. She wanted no cold stones. She longed for warm sunshine and flowers and her golden-tressed⁵ mother.

Dead souls crowded out from cracks and crevices to look at their new queen, while ever more souls came across the Styx⁶ and Persephone watched them drink from a spring under dark poplars. It was the spring of Lethe,⁷ and those who drank from its waters forgot who they were and what they had done on earth.

1. **Olympus.** Mountain in what is now Thessaly, Greece, where the ancient Greeks believed most gods lived
2. **Hades.** God of the underworld; sometimes the name *Hades* is used for the underworld itself
3. **nymphs.** Minor female goddesses who live in natural spots like forests or trees, rivers, and streams
4. **swineherd.** Person who keeps or tends pigs
5. **golden-tressed.** Having golden hair (tresses); blond
6. **Styx.** Main river of the underworld, which surrounds it and separates it from the world of the living
7. **Lethe.** River of forgetfulness

DURING READING

Use Reading Skills Monitor Comprehension

Why does Hades decide to kidnap Persephone?

yawn • ing (yô´ nîŋ) *adj.*,
wide open

root (rüt) *v.*, dig in the
ground

cleft (kleft) *n.*, space made
when something breaks open

DURING READING

Make Connections

How does Persephone feel about Hades's riches? How would you feel if you were in her place?

a • veng • ing (ə venj ɪŋ)
adj., taking revenge or
punishing someone for
something

Rhadamanthus, a judge of the dead, dealt out punishment to the souls of great sinners. They were sentenced to suffer forever under the whips of the avenging Erinyes.⁸ Heroes were led to the Elysian fields,⁹ where they lived happily forever in never-failing light.

Around the palace of Hades there was a garden where whispering poplars and weeping willows grew. They had no flowers and bore no fruit and no birds sang in their branches. There was only one tree in the whole realm of Hades that bore fruit. That was a little pomegranate¹⁰ tree. The gardener of the underworld offered the tempting pomegranates to the queen, but Persephone refused to touch the food of the dead.

Wordlessly she walked through the garden at silent Hades' side and slowly her heart turned to ice.

Above, on earth, Demeter ran about searching for her lost daughter, and all nature grieved with her. Flowers wilted, trees lost their leaves, and the fields grew barren and cold. In vain did the plow cut through the icy ground; nothing could sprout and nothing could grow while the goddess of the harvest wept. People and animals starved and the gods begged Demeter again to bless the earth. But she refused to let anything grow until she had found her daughter.

Bent with grief, Demeter turned into a gray old woman. She returned to the meadow where Persephone had vanished and asked the sun if he had seen what had happened, but he said no, dark clouds had hidden his face that day. She wandered around the meadow and after a while she met a youth whose name was Triptolemus. He told her that his brother, a swineherd, had seen his pigs disappear into the ground and had heard the frightened screams of a girl.

Demeter now understood that Hades had kidnapped her daughter, and her grief turned to anger. She called to Zeus¹¹ and said that she would never again make the earth green if he did not command Hades to return Persephone. Zeus could not let the world

8. Erinyes. Three spirits of punishment

9. Elysian fields. Paradise

10. pomegranate. Round, red fruit with a hard rind

11. Zeus. King of the Greek gods

bar • ren (ber ˈ ɛ n) *adj.*,
unable to reproduce or bear
fruit; desolate

DURING READING

Use Reading Skills
Monitor Comprehension Why
does Demeter's grief have an
effect on nature?

DURING READING

Use Reading Skills
Monitor Comprehension
How does Demeter find out
what happened to Persephone?

perish and he sent Hermes¹² down to Hades, bidding him to let Persephone go. Even Hades had to obey the orders of Zeus, and sadly he said farewell to his queen.

Joyfully, Persephone leaped to her feet, but as she was leaving with Hermes, a hooting laugh came from the garden. There stood the gardener of Hades, grinning. He pointed to a pomegranate from which a few of the kernels were missing. Persephone, lost in thought, had eaten the seeds, he said.

Then dark Hades smiled. He watched Hermes lead Persephone up to the bright world above. He knew that she must return to him, for she had tasted the food of the dead.

When Persephone again appeared on earth, Demeter sprang to her feet with a cry of joy and rushed to greet her daughter. No longer was she a sad old woman, but a radiant goddess. Again she blessed her fields and the flowers bloomed anew and the grain ripened.

"Dear child," she said, "never again shall we be parted. Together we shall make all nature bloom." But joy soon was changed to sadness, for Persephone had to admit that she had tasted the food of the dead and must return to Hades. However, Zeus decided that mother and daughter should not be parted forever. He ruled that Persephone had to return to Hades and spend one month in the underworld for each seed she had eaten.

Every year, when Persephone left her, Demeter grieved, nothing grew, and there was winter on earth. But as soon as her daughter's light footsteps were heard, the whole earth burst into bloom. Spring had come. As long as mother and daughter were together, the earth was warm and bore fruit.

Demeter was a kind goddess. She did not want mankind to starve during the cold months of winter when Persephone was away. She lent her chariot, laden with grain, to Triptolemus, the youth who had helped her to find her lost daughter. She told him to scatter her golden grain over the world and teach men how to sow it in spring and reap it in fall and store it away for the long months when again the earth was barren and cold. ❖

ra • di • ant (rā' dē ənt)
adj., shining bright

DURING READING

Analyze Literature

Myth What is one natural phenomenon this myth attempts to explain?

12. **Hermes.** Messenger god



When have you, like Demeter, experienced an emotion that changed your outlook on life? Was the emotion positive or negative? In what ways can emotions be both destructive and constructive?

Name: _____

Date: _____

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Mythology Connection

Identify the following people and places from Greek mythology. Preview the vocabulary and footnotes that appear with the story "Persephone and Demeter." Read the description and then fill in each blank with one letter to provide the correct answer.

Demeter	Elysian fields	Erinyes	Hades	Hermes
Lethe	Olympus	Persephone	Styx	Zeus

1. God of the underworld _____
2. Main river of the underworld, which surrounds it and separates it from the world of the living

3. Daughter of Demeter _____
4. Three spirits of punishment _____
5. King of the Greek gods _____
6. Messenger god _____
7. Goddess of the harvest _____
8. Paradise _____
9. Mountain where the ancient Greeks believed most gods lived _____
10. River of forgetfulness _____

Name: _____

Date: _____

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Selection Quiz

Fill in the Blank

Fill in the blank with the word from the box that best completes each sentence.

Demeter

Olympus

Persephone

pomegranate

Zeus

1. The story takes place on Mt. _____.
2. _____ is the goddess of the harvest.
3. _____, the leader of the gods, intervened to help Demeter retrieve Persephone.
4. Persephone ate a few _____ seeds, which is considered food of the dead.
5. _____ is forced to spend six months in Hades and six months on earth.

Multiple Choice

Write the letter of the correct answer on the line.

- _____ 6. "Persephone and Demeter" is a
A. folk tale.
B. Greek myth.
C. Roman myth.
D. fable.
- _____ 7. "Persephone and Demeter" explains
A. why father's are important in the lives of young girls.
B. why it's important to plant seeds in the fall.
C. the origin of seasons.
D. what it's like in the underworld.
- _____ 8. Why does Hades kidnap Persephone?
A. Hades fell in love with her and knew that her mother would never part with her.
B. Hades was looking for revenge because Demeter was mean to him.
C. Hades was in financial trouble and hoped for a large ransom.
D. Hades wanted to play a joke on her mother.
- _____ 9. Why does Demeter's mood have an effect on nature?
A. She is the goddess of the harvest and follows Zeus's prescribed weather schedule.
B. All gardeners in the world must report to her and obey her orders.
C. The sun and the moon fear her and follow her commands.
D. She is the goddess of the harvest and her moods predict the conditions of plant life.
- _____ 10. How did Demeter finally discover what had happened to Persephone?
A. A boy named Triptolemus heard what had happened from his brother.
B. She read about it in the newspaper.
C. Zeus used his x-ray vision to locate her.
D. An old man witnessed the kidnapping.

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Lesson Test

Multiple Choice

Identify the choice that best completes the statement or answers the question.

for Persephone and Demeter

- _____ 1. Pomegranates are the only fruit that grows
 - A. in winter.
 - B. without water.
 - C. in the River Styx.
 - D. in Zeus's garden.
 - E. in the underworld.

- _____ 2. What happened when Hades saw Persephone?
 - A. He fell in love with her.
 - B. He wanted to destroy her beauty.
 - C. He offered to let her ride his horses.
 - D. He asked Demeter if he could marry her.
 - E. He ordered the dead souls in the underworld to capture her.

- _____ 3. To help humans make it through the winter, Demeter arranges for them to have
 - A. fire.
 - B. fruit.
 - C. grain.
 - D. bread.
 - E. chariots.

- _____ 4. Which of the following is a synonym for the word *radiant*, as used in the phrase "a radiant goddess"?
 - A. kind
 - B. popular
 - C. glowing
 - D. difficult
 - E. unhappy

- _____ 5. Demeter's outward appearance reflects her
 - A. past.
 - B. ambitions.
 - C. state of mind.
 - D. moral weakness.
 - E. status among the gods.

- _____ 6. Which of the following words best describes Hades in this story?
- A. loyal
 - B. selfish
 - C. patient
 - D. unfeeling
 - E. misunderstood
- _____ 7. Demeter's reaction to her daughter's kidnapping causes suffering among which innocent group?
- A. humans
 - B. the Erinyes
 - C. other gods and goddesses
 - D. heroes in the Elysian Fields
 - E. all inhabitants of the underworld
- _____ 8. Zeus's ruling for Persephone involves
- A. deceit.
 - B. revenge.
 - C. cruelty.
 - D. competition.
 - E. compromise.
- _____ 9. This story describes a
- A. mother who refuses to let her daughter grow up.
 - B. willful child who must be rescued by a loving parent.
 - C. mother who feels a very strong bond with her daughter.
 - D. woman who has difficulty fulfilling her role as a parent.
 - E. daughter who cannot escape from her overprotective mother.

Read the following passage. Then answer the question(s) below.

With the frightened girl in his arms, Hades raced his snorting horses down away from the sunlit world. Down and down they sped on the dark path to his dismal underground palace. He led weeping Persephone in, seated her beside him on a throne of black marble, and decked her with gold and precious stones. But the jewels brought her no joy. She wanted no cold stones. She longed for warm sunshine and flowers and her golden-tressed mother.

- _____ 10. This passage indicates that Hades and Persephone
- A. are unhappy.
 - B. share certain fears.
 - C. both desire freedom.
 - D. value different things.
 - E. want to improve the underworld.

Matching

for Persephone and Demeter

Choose the best description for each of the following.

- | | |
|-----------------|--|
| A. Lethe | _____ 11. King of the Greek gods |
| B. Hermes | _____ 12. three spirits of punishment |
| C. Zeus | _____ 13. judge of the dead |
| D. Olympus | _____ 14. messenger god |
| E. Triptolemus | _____ 15. the youth who knows where Persephone was taken |
| F. Rhadamanthus | _____ 16. river of forgetfulness |
| G. Erinyes | _____ 17. where the ancient gods live |