

## Topic A: Myths & Stories

### Student Pack 2: Myths of Change

Myths of Change – fact file



**What is a myth?** A myth is a traditional story belonging to a culture. It often aims to communicate a message about human nature or the natural world.

One of the best sources we have about myth in the Ancient Greek and Roman worlds comes a Roman poem called

### The Metamorphoses

Ancient Greek word for 'transformations'

**Author:** Publius Ovidius Naso (Ovid)

**Style:** poetry - 11,995 lines of it!

**Date published:** 8 CE

**Subject:** 250+ stories of change, from the creation of the world to Roman times

**Featured myths:**

Persephone in the Underworld

Theseus & the Minotaur

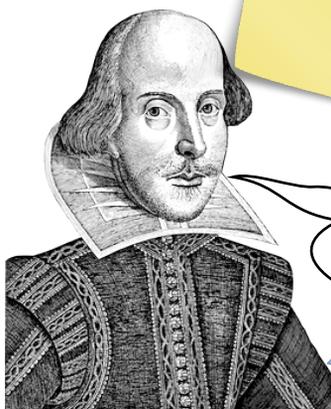
Orpheus & Euridice

Arachne

Hercules

King Midas

Daedalus & Icarus



*Ovid's Metamorphoses influenced my writing greatly.*

William Shakespeare

# Some stories from the Metamorphoses

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#### King Midas

Midas was a king of great fortune with everything a king could wish for including a beautiful daughter. However, his great fault was his love of riches, wealth and gold. He was obsessed.

One day, Dionysus, the god of wine and merriment, passed through Midas' kingdom. One of his companions, a satyr named Silenus, got tired and took a snooze in the gardens surrounding the palace of King Midas. Midas found Silenus and offered him his best hospitality. In return, Dionysus promised to grant Midas one wish. Midas did not hesitate. "I hope that everything I touch becomes gold!" "Very well," Dionysus agreed reluctantly, understanding the true nature of this wish.

The next day, Midas, woke up eager to see if his wish would become true. He extended his arm touching a small table that immediately turned into gold. Midas jumped with happiness! He then touched a chair, the carpet, the door, his bathtub, a table... all gold! He sat at the table to have breakfast and took a rose between his hands to smell its fragrance. When he touched it, the rose became gold. Without even thinking, he tried to eat a grape but it too turned into gold. The same happened with a slice of bread and a glass of water. Suddenly, he started to understand that his wish was also a curse. At this point, his beloved daughter entered the room and threw her arms around her father. Immediately, she turned into a golden statue.

#### Icarus

Once upon a time, the great inventor Daedalus and his son Icarus lived on the island of Crete. King Minos kept them prisoners there, as he prized Daedalus' skills as the world's greatest inventor. But Daedalus wanted to escape with his son, so he came up with a cunning plan. Using all his skills as an inventor, he made a set of wings for both himself and his son so they could fly off the island to freedom.

The day came for the great escape. "Icarus," Daedalus warned his son, "Don't fly too close to the sea or too near to the sun. If you do, the heat will melt the wax holding the feathers on your wings." Icarus promised he would heed his father's wise words and fly neither too close to the sun nor too close to the sea. But, oh dear, Icarus was so enthralled with his new-found ability to fly that he got carried away. Up, up he soared toward the sun... and then down, down he plummeted as his wings melted. He fell into the sea, never to be seen again. The sea to this day is called the Icarian Sea in honour of the boy who fell there.



# Some stories from the Metamorphoses

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#### Arachne

There was once a very beautiful and talented girl called Arachne, who was amazingly skilled at weaving – perhaps the greatest weaver who had ever lived. Unfortunately, Arachne knew she was good, and she wasn't afraid to let people know it. She even foolishly bragged that she was a better weaver than Athena, the goddess of technology. Athena heard the girl's boast, grew very angry and decided that the girl must be punished. Athena challenged Arachne to a weaving contest, and Arachne accepted the challenge. Both stood by their looms and, at a given signal, both began to weave. Arachne unwisely chose to weave a picture of the bad behaviour of the gods, Athena's family – hardly tactful! The goddess worked with supernatural speed and grace and created a cloth fine enough even for Aphrodite, goddess of beauty, to wear. Not to be outdone, Arachne used all her skill and produced a cloth like none other seen before in the mortal world.

Realising that Arachne's skill rivalled her own, Athena grew terribly, terribly angry. Picking up her spear, she struck Arachne on the forehead, and in an instant the girl was dead. She then suspended her by a thread from her loom so that others would know not to dare offend a goddess. But just as she was about to leave, Athene began to feel pity in her heart. As the goddess in charge of technology, perhaps she ought to have been proud of Arachne. Smiling sadly at the foolish girl, she brought her back to life as a spider, forever weaving her silky web.



#### Narcissus & Echo

Once upon a time, there was a young man by the name of Narcissus. He was the most handsome person alive and as a result many people fell desperately, uncontrollably in love with him. But he never, ever returned any of their love.

One of the poor souls was Echo, a nymph or mountain spirit. She had previously been punished by the goddess Hera for being too talkative, so now she could only repeat the last few words that were spoken to her. Therefore, she couldn't declare her love to Narcissus, but instead followed him around in secret, admiring his beauty.

One day, Narcissus though he noticed someone following him. "Who is here?" he demanded. "Here...here..." Echo replied plaintively. She emerged from the shadows and stepped forward to embrace her beloved Narcissus. The young man stepped away in horror, rejecting Echo's love. She was so devastated that she ran and hid in a cave and wasted away until there was nothing left of her but her echoing voice.

The goddess of revenge, Nemesis, could not let such behaviour stand. She cursed Narcissus to fall in love with himself. When Narcissus next caught a glimpse of his reflection in a pond, he immediately fell in love with this handsome young man in the water. So great was Narcissus' love that he never again moved from the side of the pond. Upon his death, a flower sprang up where his body had been. Today we call that flower a narcissus.

## More research



**A Child's Introduction to Greek Mythology: The Stories of the Gods, Goddesses, Heroes, Monsters, and Other Mythical Creatures**  
by Heather Alexander & Meredith Hamilton

**The Orchard Book of Greek Myths** by Geraldine McCaughrean

**Demeter & Persephone: Spring Held Hostage, a Greek Myth** by Justine Fontes, Ron Fontes, Steve Kurth

**Greek Myths** by Marcia Williams

**Legend: The Labors of Heracles** (Campfire Graphic Novels) by Ryan Foley



**BBC School Radio** <https://www.bbc.co.uk/teach/school-radio/ks2-ancient-greece/zk73nrd>

**Cambridge Schools Classics Project: Metamorphoses**  
<https://classictales.co.uk/metamorphoses>

**Greek Myth Comix: Myth Comix**  
<https://greekmythcomix.com/myth-comix/>



## Ideas for projects

A cake inspired by the myth of King Midas!



- Can we think of some interview questions for King Midas exploring his views on what's important in life? Can we make this into an interesting newspaper article?
- Can we compose and record a poem or song about our favourite myth of change?
- Can we turn a shoe box into a diorama depicting our favourite myth?
- How could we use stop-motion animation to depict the story of Arachne?
- If we were to design and make a replica of Pandora's Box, what would it look like?