

Classroom Connections

Before the performance...



Journey Game

The story of the Golden Fleece, from the original flight of Helle and Phrixus through the return of Jason to Iolcus, covers most of the Greek world. Referring to maps of the modern Mediterranean and Aegean Seas, have students create their own map of the Fleece's journey. How far do other characters travel to join the quest? Where is the Sacred Grove of Dodona, or Mount Olympus? Once the students have created their map, assign each of them a character from the story. Place markers on the floor to represent locations in the story such as Iolcus. Then ask the students to stand in the room where their character originated in relation to Iolcus and walk through their journey.



God and Man

Mythology was the way ancient Greeks explained, interpreted and understood their world and their lives. As he undertook his journey to retrieve the Golden Fleece and recover his throne, Jason traveled with demigods, battled monsters and was both assisted and opposed by gods. The gods and monsters whose elaborate stories make up the mythological world had human personalities, weaknesses and desires. Have students research Greek mythology, and find a God, hero or monster with whom they identify. Research that supernatural being and create a poster display to present their subject. How has that god been represented? Who did that hero battle with? How was that monster overcome? Trace the connections between different students' choices.



It's Greek to Me

Although we are the product of many cultures, Greek civilization formed the roots of many aspects of modern American life: politics, justice, icons and architecture. In many ways we have improved upon aspects of Greek culture—from Spartan emphasis on war to the inferior status of women in Athens. Ask students to examine one aspect of Greek culture, then compare and contrast our modern beliefs with the ancient ways. How do the ideas and ideals of the Greeks still resonate through our medicine, law, theatre, politics, courts, religion, philosophy and art? How are they different? Divide students into two groups: ask one group to represent the modern way of life and the other to represent the classical ideals. Invite the principal or other teachers to serve as judges.



The Hero's Journey

As Joseph Campbell suggested, there are common threads in the hero story across cultures and time. Heroes are called to act, join helpful companions, acquire the tools or skills that they will need, and are tested repeatedly until they confront their final obstacle even then the journey home is usually difficult. Brainstorm a list of other heroes from literature, movies, television, or video games follow the same path. With students, outline the basic steps of the journey, and discuss how Jason handles those steps on his path. Ask students to select another hero from the brainstormed list and compare his/her journey with Jason and the Argonauts'. How far must the hero travel, what must be overcome and who will help? Write a short essay about how Jason's journey compares to the other hero's.



(Re)Telling Stories

By the time Apollonius of Rhodes told his version of the Argonauts' story, it was a well-known part of Greek storytelling. No one has ever tried to tell the entire story of every character in the *Argonautika*; writers from Apollonius through Mary Zimmerman have looked at the enormous story of Jason and the Fleece and selected those pieces of the story that appealed to them. Divide students into groups (of no more than four), and ask them to select those parts of the story that appeal to them. Ask students to imagine that their version of the *Argonautika* will be made into a movie, a comic book or a pop-up book. Based on the scenes they have selected, do they feel the *Argonautika* is a story about love and redemption, monsters and battles or magic and goddesses? Which scenes are the most visually striking—how would they represent them for a modern audience? Which story elements do the students want to emphasize? From this written outline, students then create visuals for their movie, comic book or pop-up book.

Classroom Connections

...After the performance



What is the purpose of myth?

All cultures create mythologies—metaphors that help explore, explain and describe the world around them. It is difficult to read mythological stories and completely understand what they meant to the original audience: why do King Arthur and Harry Potter both chase a goblet, why do Hobbits and the Nibelung seek a ring and why does Jason chase a fleece? What is so important in these stories that they continue to be told and retold, surviving for thousands of years? Ask students to consider their favorite myth—from any culture as represented in literature, film or popular culture—and list the elements of the myth. They should give each element of symbol a meaning and describe the reason for the myth—it celebrates the harvest or fertility. Ask students to describe why they are drawn to that myth. What does the myth teach us, or what ideal does it promise?



Love and Loss

Throughout Greek mythology, gods are constantly interacting with humans and guiding their fates. Although humans are often destined to fulfill prophecies or the schemes of fickle deities, humans also have a choice about whether they will live up to their destiny and take power over how they will live their lives. One example of this tension is the love between Jason and Medea. Would Jason have succeeded without the help of Medea? Having read the play and/or seen the play, ask students what they think of this relationship. Does Medea fall in love with Jason simply because the gods prompt her to do so? Or is their love real? Ask students to write a letter either from Medea's or Jason's perspective.



The Golden Fleece

Many scholars have suggested that the Fleece, like the Holy Grail in the Arthurian stories, is a metaphor for another idea. It could be a symbol for royal power, gold brought from the east, or the literal fleece of a magical ram. What else could the Fleece represent? Why do characters want to take it, and why do other characters want to keep it? Have students think about what the Fleece might symbolize, and what in their own lives is important enough to undertake a quest for. Have students write an essay, poem or the lyrics to a song describing their own Golden Fleece.



Imagining the World

The stage designers translate the imaginary world of the script into the real world of the performance, creating the music and sound, lights and set, costumes and props for the play. Working with the actors, director and the playwright to make the imaginary come to life on stage, designers transform the essence of the story into real elements that affect the mood, meaning and magic for the audience. What choices did the designers for this production make? How did they represent the characters, the gods, the places and the many beasts of the *Argonautika*? Ask students to consider the work the designers did. Was it different than what the students imagined? What would students have done differently? In groups of four or five, ask students to prepare a design concept for their own version of the Jason and the Argonauts myth.



Choosing Words Carefully

The basic building blocks of stories are words, and how writers, playwrights, singers and poets put them together affects how we respond to the story. Flaccus rewrote his version in a complicated form that was later admired and copied by Roman poets, while Mary Zimmerman has chosen her own unique way of writing the story. Ask students to pick one scene or episode in the play and look at how two different writers told that story. One version of Apollonius' text is at <http://omacl.org/Argonautica/>, and Flaccus' is at <http://www.theoi.com/Text/ValeriusFlaccus1.html>. Which version works better for you, and why? Which version is more complete, more vivid, explains more or resonates more strongly? Once students have examined the scene from two angles, ask them to rewrite it in their own way. Will it be a poem? Song? Which words will they use to tell the story? Ask students to share their new version for the class.