

# The story of Demeter and Persephone

READING

LEVEL  
Intermediate

NUMBER  
B2\_3013R\_EN

LANGUAGE  
English

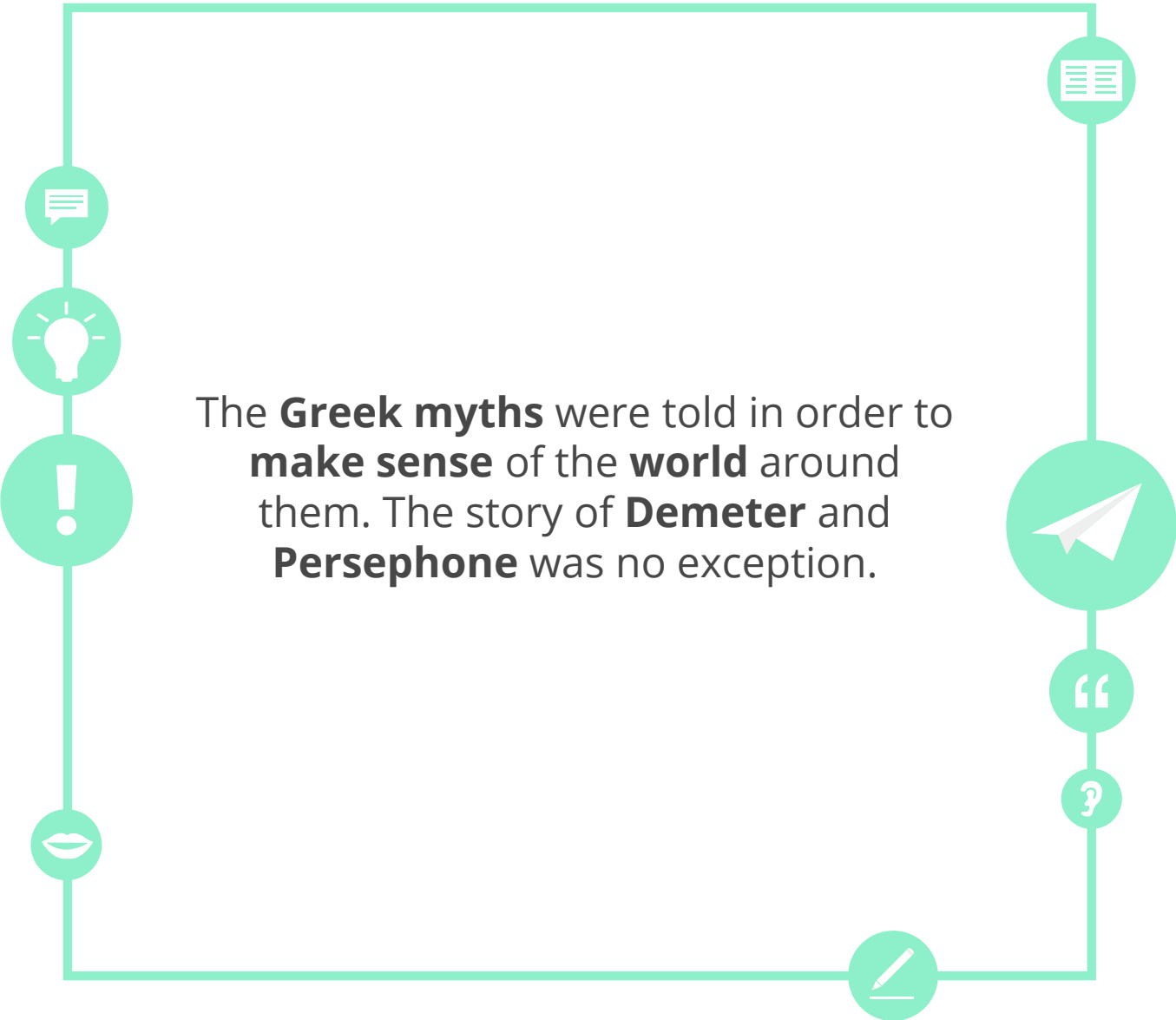




## Goals

- Can read and understand the main points in a text about Greek mythology.
- Can read about myths and clearly express my opinion about their meaning.





The **Greek myths** were told in order to **make sense** of the **world** around them. The story of **Demeter** and **Persephone** was no exception.



## Vocabulary

naive

abduct

chasm

miserable

grieve

wither

doomed

sorrow





## Vocabulary



Young children are often very **naive**.

**Abducting** someone means taking them  
by force.



Earthquakes often create a **chasm** in  
the earth.

We are **miserable** when we feel very,  
very sad.





## Vocabulary



After someone dies, we **grieve** for them.

If plants do not get enough water, they **wither** and eventually die.



In books, some characters seem **doomed** from the beginning.

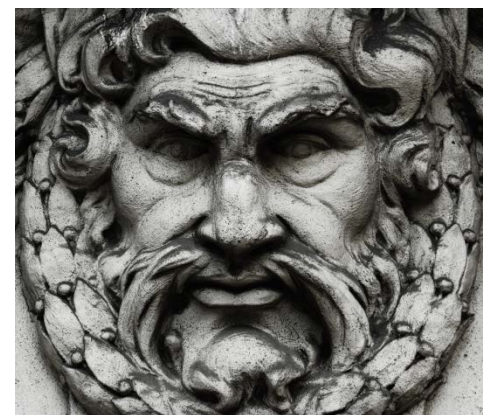
We feel great **sorrow** at the death of someone we love.





## The story of Demeter and Persephone

Zeus, King of the Gods, had two brothers and three sisters, all of whom had important roles to play in Greek society. Demeter was one of Zeus's sisters and she was the Goddess of the **harvest**, and of the **fertility** of the earth. As such, all **mortals relied on** Demeter for their food, and prayed to her for good **harvests**. Demeter in turn was a kind and caring goddess. She had one daughter, Persephone, who was a sweet, **naive** girl, who enjoyed the protection of her mother and her father, Zeus.







## The story of Demeter and Persephone

Persephone's beauty attracted the attention of many of the Gods, but none more so than her Uncle Hades, the God of the underworld. Hades had seen Persephone playing with his dog, Cerberus, and was **charmed by** her nature. Demeter, **fiercely** protective of her daughter, kept all the gods away from her and **rejected** their offers of marriage. Hades took it upon himself to go to Zeus to ask for permission to marry Persephone, and was quietly **granted** that **permission**. However, knowing that Demeter would never agree, Hades decided to **abduct** Persephone and take her to the underworld. One day, when the girl was picking flowers a **chasm** opened in the earth, Hades came out and **kidnapped** her, and took her back with him.





## Fill in the gaps

Fill in the gaps with the words in bold from the text.

1. Hades had to ask Zeus to \_\_\_\_\_ him \_\_\_\_\_ to marry Persephone.
2. Persephone was not aware what was happening to her when she was \_\_\_\_\_ by Hades.
3. Persephone's mother, Demeter, was the Goddess of the \_\_\_\_\_.
4. Hades came out of a \_\_\_\_\_ in the earth to abduct Persephone.
5. Persephone was described as sweet and \_\_\_\_\_.





## Characters

**What impressions do you get of the characters in the story so far?  
Have you heard about these characters before?**

Zeus

Demeter

Persephone

Hades



## Demeter and Persephone

**Has anything  
in the story  
shocked or  
surprised  
you so far?**





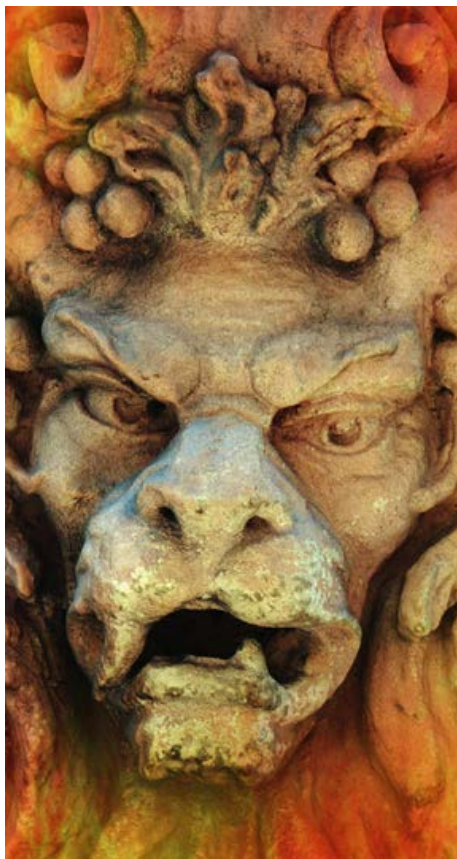
## Personification

**How are the fertility of the earth and the underworld personified in Greek mythology? Why do you think the Greeks personified intangible things? How important do you think the harvest and the underworld were to the Greeks?**





## The story of Demeter and Persephone



Demeter had no idea where Persephone had gone. She searched the earth for her, growing increasingly **miserable** with **despair**, until finally she went to Helios, the Sun God, for help with locating her beloved Persephone. Helios had seen Hades take Persephone on his daily journey across the sky and, **taking pity on** Demeter, he told her that her daughter was with Hades in the underworld. He **counselled** her to come to terms with that fact, stating that Hades was in fact not a bad match for her daughter. Married to the King of the underworld, Persephone would become its queen.



## The story of Demeter and Persephone

Demeter ignored the advice of Helios and continued to **grieve** over the loss of her daughter. **Neglecting** her duties as the Goddess of the Harvest, no crops grew on the earth for a whole year, plants **withered** and died, and a **famine gripped** the mortals. Meanwhile, in the underworld, Persephone cried and was deeply depressed in that dark place. Hades tried every day to bring her out of herself, to show her the underworld, and eventually he succeeded in leading her out and showing her his kingdom. Persephone found that there were many souls in the underworld who needed her kindness and comfort. At the same time, she was warming to Hades who had shown great **persistence** in **wooing** her.



Do you know these words from the text?

despair

take pity on  
someone

counsel

neglect

famine

woo someone





## Complete the sentences

**Complete the sentences with your own ideas.**

1. Hades would/would not be a good husband for Persephone because...
2. If I were Demeter, I would/would not take Helios's advice because...
3. I do/do not have sympathy for Demeter and the famine she caused because...
4. It is/is not surprising that Persephone started to like the underworld...



## Themes in the story

One of the main **themes** in the story is that of the **love** a **parent** has for their **child**. How is this shown in the story? Which other famous stories explore this theme?





## The story of Demeter and Persephone

As the **famine intensified** in the mortal world, Zeus became worried and decided to send his son, Hermes, to negotiate with Hades to give Persephone back to her mother. It was at that time that Persephone was finally **persuaded** to eat something, having refused all food up until that point. She ate 6 pomegranate seeds offered to her by Hades. When Hermes saw this, he realised that he was too late to save the girl completely: anyone who eats a product of the underworld is **doomed** to always be pulled back there. He used all of his negotiating powers and managed to persuade Hades to allow the girl to return to her mother for six months of the year, and to return to the underworld as its queen for the other six.





## The story of Demeter and Persephone



In the spring, Demeter makes sure that all of the flowers **bloom** and the crops grow in order to welcome her daughter back from the underworld. In the autumn, when Persephone **willingly** returns to Hades, Demeter cries and in her **sorrow** the leaves fall to the ground and the soil becomes **barren** for six months.



## Writing

**Write your answers to these questions about the text.**

Why and by whom was Hermes sent to the underworld?

Why was Persephone doomed to always want to return to the underworld?

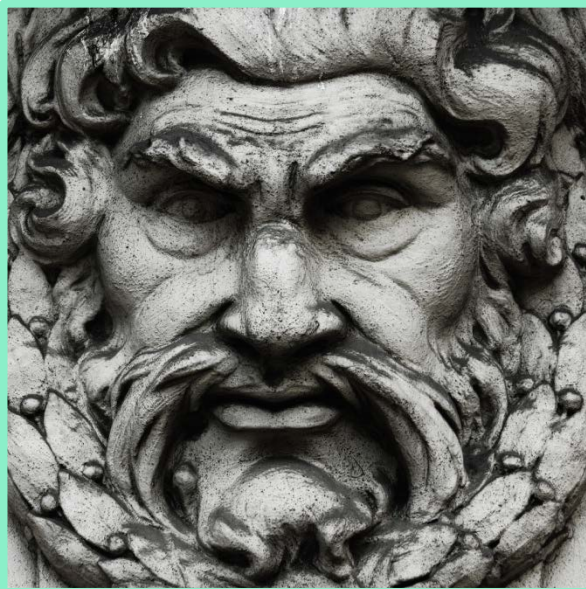
What happens in the spring and the autumn, according to the myth?

A spiral-bound notebook with lined pages, showing a blank page for writing answers.



## The Gods

**What might people find surprising about the actions of the Gods in this story? Why do you think Greek Gods are portrayed as doing bad as well as good, and having flaws?**





## Seasons

**How does the story explain the seasons of the earth?  
Why was it important to the Ancient Greeks to explain the seasons?**







## The seasons

**How do you feel in spring when everything blooms and in contrast in autumn and winter when the world is barren?**





## Greek myths

**Make a list of other Ancient Greek myths that you know.  
Share your list with your classmates and teacher – are there any you  
would all like to read?**





## Reflect on the goals

Go back to the second slide of the lesson and check if you have achieved all the goals of the lesson.

yes

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no

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## Reflect on this lesson

Think about everything you have seen in this lesson.  
What were the most difficult activities or words? The easiest?



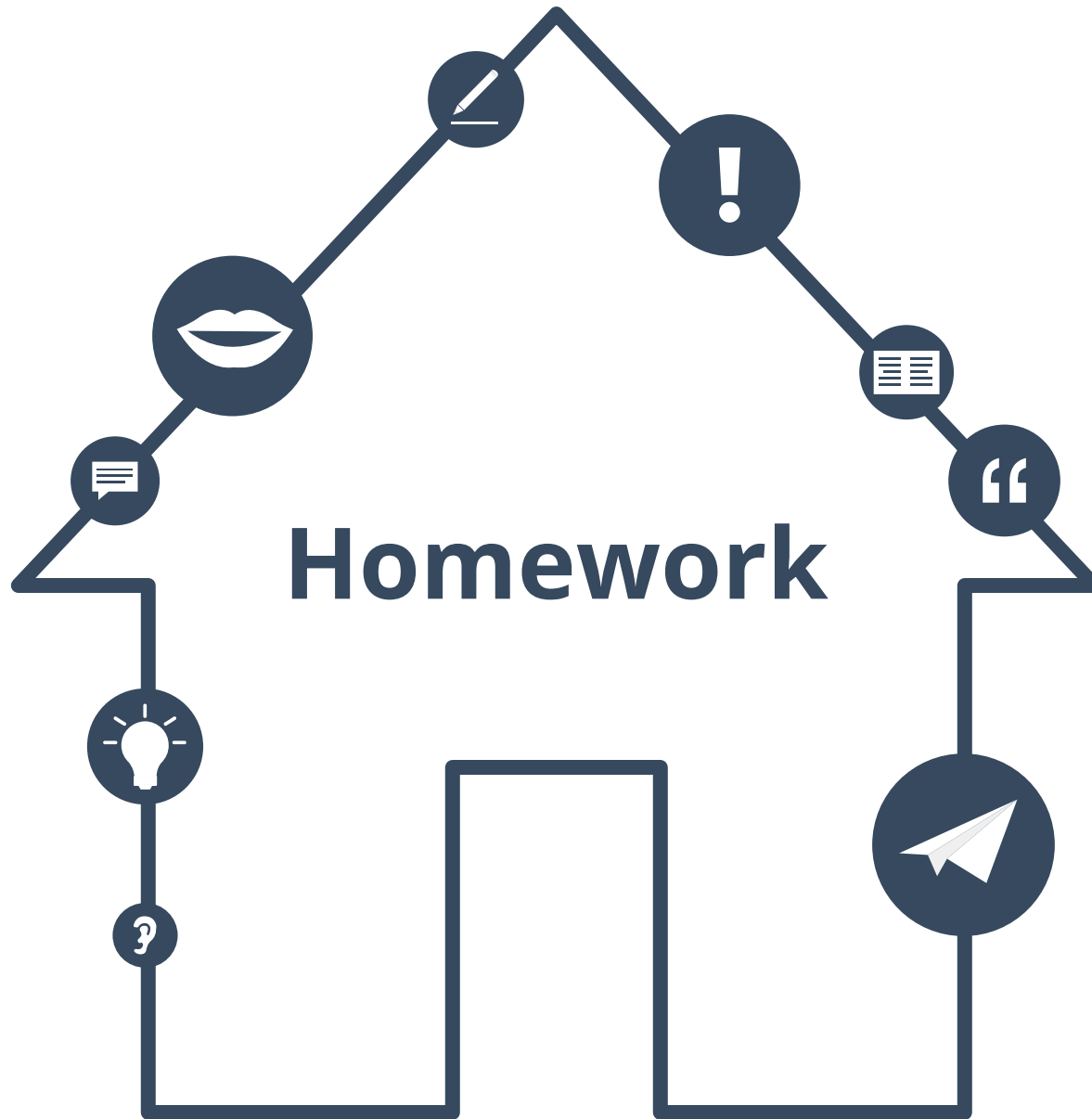
If you have time, go over  
the most difficult slides again



## Answer key

### Activity p.9

1. grant permission, 2. kidnapped/abducted, 3. harvest, 4. chasm, 5. naïve





Fill in the gaps with the words on the right.

1. Persephone was described as \_\_\_\_\_ and sweet.
2. The girl was \_\_\_\_\_ by her Uncle Hades and taken to the \_\_\_\_\_.
3. Demeter roamed the earth and became \_\_\_\_\_ at the loss of her daughter.
4. Persephone was \_\_\_\_\_ to return to the underworld because she ate the seeds of a pomegranate.
5. Persephone's annual return to earth and, then, descent to the underworld explain the \_\_\_\_\_.

**underworld**

**seasons**

**naive**

**miserable**

**abducted**

**doomed**





## Writing

**Write an email to a friend recapping the story of Demeter and Persephone.**

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To:

Subject:

Dear



## Homework answer key

### **Activity p. 29**

1. naive, 2. abducted – underworld, 3. miserable, 4. doomed, 5. seasons



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