

## Apollo's Oracle at Delphi

The ancient Greeks believed that it was not wise to anger the gods. They built temples all over ancient Greece. Each temple, no matter how elaborate, honored only one god. The major gods had more than one temple built in their honor.

Nearly everyone was fond of Apollo. He was the god of music, reason, and light. Apollo's chariot brought up the sun each day.

Apollo had other powers. One was a very special skill - Apollo could see the future. He had the gift of prophecy. Many people in ancient Greece brought gifts to Apollo, and asked for advice in exchange. Apollo liked the attention and the gifts. It was all very nice, but it was also exhausting.

One day, Apollo decided that what he needed was an oracle, a wise woman to speak for him. In ancient Greece, an oracle was a person who could predict and interpret the future.

Apollo used some magic and established his oracle in a temple at Delphi. There were many oracles, or fortune tellers, in ancient Greece. Apollo's oracle at Delphi was the most famous.

The predictions made by other oracles were rather vague. A normal oracle might answer, "Yes, the frost will be gone, and spring will come, if the gods decree it." Such an answer was not much help if your question was, "Should I plant my garden tomorrow?"

People in ancient Greece had heard that Apollo had shared his special power with the oracle at Delphi - the power of prophecy.

He did give her the power of prophecy. But Apollo had put a limit on her power.

Apollo's oracle had to tell people the truth, but she could not answer yes or no. The oracle could only make a truthful statement. It was up to you, the listener, to figure out what she meant by it. Sometimes people misunderstood what she was telling them. That was the trouble with oracles, even the best of them.

For example, legend says .... Once upon a time, a long time ago, a king traveled to Delphi to ask the oracle, "Who will win the battle tomorrow?"

The oracle smiled at him, and answered, "A great king."

The king was very happy to hear this. He left many gifts for the oracle, and went quickly away, quite pleased that he had come.

What he had overlooked in his haste is that more than one king would lead his men to battle in the morning. An oracle's smile meant nothing.

## Pandora's Box

Zeus ordered Hephaestus (Aphrodite's husband) to make him a daughter. It was the first woman made out of clay. Hephaestus made a beautiful woman and named her Pandora.

Zeus sent his new daughter, Pandora, down to earth so that she could marry Epimetheus, who was a gentle but lonely man. Zeus was not being kind. He was getting even. Epimetheus and Prometheus were brothers. Zeus was mad at one of the brothers, Prometheus, for giving people fire without asking Zeus first.

That was a very wrong thing to do. Fire was huge! Zeus had not planned to reward people with fire for a very long time yet. Zeus did not even get the credit for the invention of fire. That went to Prometheus. Zeus was furious. If the brothers wanted credit for new inventions, Zeus would be glad to help them get the credit they deserved.

Zeus gave Pandora a little box with a big heavy lock on it. He made her promise never to open the box. He gave the key to Pandora's husband and told him to never open the box. Zeus was sure that Epimetheus' curiosity would get the better of him, and that either Epimetheus or his brother would open the box.

Pandora was very curious. She wanted to see what was inside the box, but Epimetheus said no. Better not. "You know your father," Epimetheus sighed, referring to Zeus. "He's a tricky one."

One day, when Epimetheus lay sleeping, Pandora stole the key and opened the box.

Out flew every kind of disease and sickness, hate and envy, and all the bad things that people had never experienced before. Pandora slammed the lid closed, but it was too late. All the bad things were already out of the box. They flew away, out into the world.

Epimetheus woke up at the sound of her sobbing. "I opened the box and all these ugly things flew out," she cried. "I tried to catch them, but they all got out." Pandora opened the box to show him how empty it was. But the box was not quite empty. One tiny bug flew quickly out before Pandora could slam the lid shut again.

"Hello, Pandora," said the bug, hovering just out of reach. "My name is Hope." With a nod of thanks for being set free, Hope flew out into the world, a world that now held Envy, Crime, Hate, and Disease – and Hope.

### **King Midas**

King Midas was a very wealthy king. Collecting gold was his hobby, his joy and his life. One day as he sat counting his wealth he saw an old man asleep under a tree. He saw that it was Silenus from the court of Dionysus, God of wine. Midas was cunning and treated Silenus like a king for ten days before taking him back to Dionysus. Dionysus was grateful for the care lavished on his old servant and told King Midas that he would grant any wish that he made. Midas asked that anything he touched would be turned to gold. Dionysus granted his wish but warned him about his greed. Midas was very happy. He touched a tree and it turned to gold. He touched the walls of his palace and it turned to gold. He touched his horse, then his servant, his food and finally his children. Everything turned to gold.

Midas began to feel very unhappy. He could not eat, sleep, drink or touch anything because everything turned to gold. He missed his children dreadfully.

Finally Midas went back to find Dionysus and told him that he wanted to get rid of his golden touch. Dionysus laughed when he saw the change in the king. Eventually he decided to take pity on him and told him to go and bath in the river Pactolus. King Midas went to the river. He was afraid to get into the water in case it turned to gold and killed him. He got a jug and washed himself down. Little by little the gold washed away. King Midas was so relieved. He took jug after jug of water back to his palace to wash his children, his servants, his horse and the whole palace. He did not stop work until he had restored everything to its normal state.

### **Jason and the Golden Fleece**

This story starts a long time ago in the country called Thessaly. A king lived with his two beautiful children: Phrixus and Helle. The children's wicked stepmother didn't like them and plotted against them. Their special friends: The Messenger of the gods, Hermes tried to protect them.

In that part of the world they had had no rain for a very long time. The children's stepmother made a plan, she asked the King to send to the Oracle at Delphi for advice. He did so, but she intercepted the messengers on the way back and told

them what to say. The messengers told the King that in order for the rains to return an offering must be made to the gods: Phrixus and Helle must be sacrificed. The king was very upset but said that it must be done.

The King led his children to the altar but just before they got there the golden ram which was a gift from Hermes flew to them, told them to get on his back and flew away with them. He was trying to get them to safety in a land far away. He flew and flew with the children on his back. The children got very tired and the ram told them to hang on. Phrixus held on but his sister was overcome with tiredness and fell asleep, losing the wool and falling into the sea at a place which is still called Hellespont today.

Eventually they landed near the Black sea with only Phrixus alive to tell the story. The poor ram died as soon as he landed. The people of Colchis were so proud of what the ram had done they stripped the golden fleece off it and hung that in a tree with a dragon to protect it. There it stayed for many years until a boy called Jason went to fetch it back home.

Jason was a boy who should have been King but his Uncle took his throne. Jason was sent away for his own protection.

As he grew into a man he decided to go back and face his uncle. Jason started the journey and when he got to the river he found an old woman on the bank. She asked him for help and he gladly carried her across.

When he set the woman down on the other side he found that she was the goddess Hera who was testing Jason. She decided that from this time onwards the gods would protect him.

The uncle was a very cunning man and said that Jason could only have his throne back when the golden fleece was restored to the country. He was sure that he was sending Jason to his death.

People heard of Jason's task and many young men went to join him. He called this group of men the Argonauts and the ship which they had built the Argo. The men set sail.

Shortly they put into an island to get supplies. They found an old blind king, Phineus living in fear of dreadful harpies who ate all of his food and terrorized him. The argonauts prepared a surprise for the harpies. A banquet was prepared and when the harpies came to pinch all of the food the argonauts met them with a hail of arrows. They were killed and Phineus was saved from the misery.

To repay their kindness he told Jason the secret of the clashing rocks. He told them to let a white dove go just before they tried to pass between the rocks, if the rocks let the bird through then they would let the ship through. If not then they would all perish.

As they approached the crashing rocks the men got frightened and pleaded with Jason to turn back. Jason told them to have faith in the old king and reminded them about the dove. They let the dove go and watched as it flew towards the crashing rocks. The rocks crashed together and the men looked away. Suddenly there was a shout and the men looked up. The rocks had opened and let the dove through. Hastily the ship pushed through and they got safely to the other side.

After an adventurous journey they arrived at Colchis. King Aetes asked them what they wanted and he was very angry because he did not want Jason to take the golden fleece away. He set Jason another challenge that he thought he could not do. He told him to yoke the fire breathing bulls and sow the sacred field of Ares with dragon's teeth then kill the guardian serpent. Jason accepted King Aetes' challenge. The King thought that he had sent the young Jason to his death but he had not realized that his daughter Medea had fallen in love with him. Medea had given him special oil to rub on his body which would protect him from the fire breathing bulls. She warned him that when he had planted the dragon's teeth he must throw a stone into the middle of the field.

The next morning the people from Colchis and the Greeks met to watch. Jason walked towards the bulls. They were convinced that he would die. As the flames licked around his body his soothing words calmed the bulls. They let Jason yoke them and plough the field.

Next Jason took his bag of dragon's teeth and started to sow them. As he sowed the lines a crop started to grow, it was not a green crop but an army, armed and ready to fight that was growing. They started to be threatening and Jason started to get frightened. Suddenly he remembered the stone. He picked up a big pebble and threw it to the middle of the field. It hit a soldier who thought that it was another soldier so threw a stone at him. Presently there was a full scale battle in the field and Jason was left unharmed when they had killed each other.

King Aetes pretended to be pleased with Jason and told him that he could have the fleece the next day. In the night Medea told Jason that it was another trick. Jason told his men to get ready to sail, he and Medea went to get the fleece. They got to the tree and the dragon watched them warily. Medea used some of her magic, sprinkled some herbs and said a spell and the dragon went to sleep.

They snatched the fleece and hurried away from Colchis to return home and claim the throne.

### **The Face In The Pool The Story of Echo and Narcissus**

When Zeus came to the mountains, the wood nymphs rushed to embrace the jovial god. They played with him in icy waterfalls and laughed with him in lush green glades.

Zeus' wife, Hera, was very jealous, and often she searched the mountainside, trying to catch her husband with the nymphs. But whenever Hera came close to finding Zeus, a charming nymph named Echo stepped across her path. Echo chatted with Hera in a lively fashion and did whatever she could to stall the goddess until Zeus and the other nymphs had escaped.

Eventually Hera discovered that Echo had been tricking her, and she flew into a rage. "Your tongue has made a fool of me!" she shouted at Echo. "Henceforth, your voice will be more brief, my dear! You will always have the last word - but never the first.

From that day on, poor Echo could only repeat the last words of what others said.

One day Echo spied a golden-haired youth hunting deer in the woods. The boy's name was Narcissus, and he was the most beautiful young man in the forest. All who looked upon Narcissus fell in love with him immediately. But he would have nothing to do with anyone, for he was very conceited.

When Echo first laid eyes upon Narcissus, her heart burned like the flame of a torch. She secretly followed him through the woods, loving him more with each step. She got closer and closer until finally Narcissus heard the leaves rustling. He whirled around and cried out, "Who's here?"

From behind a tree, Echo repeated his last word, "Here!"

Narcissus looked about in wonder, "Who are you? Come to me!" he said.

Narcissus searched the woods, but could not find the nymph. "Stop hiding! Let us meet!" he shouted.

"Let us meet!" Echo cried. Then she stepped from behind the tree and rushed to embrace Narcissus.

But the youth panicked when the nymph flung her arms around his neck. He pushed her away and shouted, "Leave me alone! I'd rather die than let you love me!"

"Love me!" was all poor Echo could say as she watched Narcissus run from her through the woods. "Love me! Love me! Love me!"

Humiliated and filled with sorrow, Echo wandered the mountains until she found a lonely cave to live in.

Meanwhile Narcissus hunted in the woods, tending only to himself, until one day he discovered a hidden pool of water. The pool had a silvery-smooth surface. No shepherds ever disturbed its waters - no goats or cattle, no birds or fallen leaves. Only the sun danced upon the still pond.

Tired from hunting and eager to quench his thirst, Narcissus lay on his stomach and leaned over the water. But when he looked at the glassy surface, he saw someone staring back at him.

Narcissus was spellbound. Gazing up at him from the pool were eyes like twin stars, framed by hair as golden as Apollo's and cheeks as smooth as ivory. But when he leaned down and tried to kiss the perfect lips, he kissed only spring water. When he reached out and tried to embrace this vision of beauty, he found no one there.

"What love could be more cruel than this?" he cried. "When my lips kiss the beloved, they touch only water! When I reach for my beloved, I hold only water!"

Narcissus began to weep. When he wiped away his tears, the person in the water also wiped away tears. "Oh, no," sobbed Narcissus. "I see the truth now; It is myself I weep for! I yearn for my own reflection!"

As Narcissus cried harder, the tears broke the glassy surface of the pool and caused his reflection to disappear. "Come back! Where did you go?" the youth cried. "I love you so much! At least stay and let me look upon you!"

Day after day, Narcissus stared at the water, in love with his own reflection. He began to waste away from grief, until one sad morning, he felt himself dying. "Good-bye, my love!" he shouted to his reflection.

"Good-bye, my love!" Echo cried to Narcissus from her cave deep in the woods.

Then Narcissus took his last breath.

After he died, the water nymphs and wood nymphs searched for his body. But all they found was a magnificently beautiful flower beside the hidden pool where the youth had once yearned for his own reflection. The flower had white petals and a yellow center, and from that time on, it was called Narcissus.

And alas, poor Echo, desolate after Narcissus's death, did not eat or sleep. AS she lay forlornly in her cave, all her beauty faded away, and she became very thin until her voice was all that was left. Thereafter, the lonely voice of Echo was heard in the mountains, repeating the last words anyone said.

