

## Greek myths and legends

A very important part of Greek culture was linked to their beliefs about their gods. Many of these myths and legends are well known today. They are fascinating stories which are still good to read about.

### *Pandora's box*

At one time the only mortals on the earth were men. Prometheus had made them, Athene had breathed life into them. The chief god Zeus did not like them.



One day Prometheus was trying to solve a quarrel that was raging between the gods and the men. At a festival the men were going to sacrifice a bull for the first time. They asked him which parts of the bull should be offered to the gods and which should be eaten by men. Prometheus decided to play a trick on Zeus. He killed the bull, skinned it and butchered it. He split it into two portions, in one he put the best, lean meat. In the second he put bones followed by a thick layer of fat. Prometheus offered both to Zeus to take his choice. Zeus looked at both portions, one looked good but was rather on the small side, the other was much larger and covered in a layer of fat which Zeus felt must cover the best, tastiest portion of meat. He chose that one. When Zeus realised that he had been tricked he was furious. He took fire away from man so that they could never cook their meat or feel warm again.

Prometheus reacted immediately flying to the Isle of Lemnos where he knew the smith Hephaestus had fire. He carried a burning torch back to man. Zeus was enraged. He swore vengeance and started making an evil plan.



Zeus, set Hephaestus the task of creating a clay woman with a human voice. Hephaestus worked and worked and created a masterpiece. Athene, goddess of wisdom and Zeus' daughter liked the clay figure and she breathed life into it. She taught the woman how to weave and clothed her. Aphrodite the goddess of love made her beautiful. The god Hermes taught her to charm and deceive.

Zeus was pleased with what he saw, but he had made her as a trap. He named the woman Pandora and sent her as a gift to Epimetheus. Epimetheus had been warned by his brother Prometheus that he should never accept gifts from Zeus because there would always be a catch. Epimetheus ignored his brother's warning, fell in love with Pandora and married her. Zeus, pleased that his trap was working gave Pandora a wedding gift of a beautiful box. There was one condition however...that was that she never opened the box.

For a while they were very happy. Pandora often wondered what was in the box but she was never left alone so she never opened it. Gradually over a while she began to wonder more and more what was in the box. She could not understand why someone would send her a box if she could not see what was in it. It got very important to find out what was hidden there.

Finally she could stand it no longer. One day when everyone was out she crept up to the box, took the huge key, fitted it carefully into the lock and turned it. She lifted the lid to peep in but before she realised it the room was filled with terrible things: disease, despair, malice, greed, old age, death, hatred, violence, cruelty and war. She slammed the lid down and turned the key again...keeping only the spirit of hope inside.

### *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.



## *Daedalus and Icarus*

Daedalus was trying to escape punishment after killing his nephew Talos. He escaped from the king of Athens and travelled to Crete where King Minos welcomed him. He built wonderful buildings for King Minos and created a labyrinth below the city. King Minos was pleased with the labyrinth but he did not want anyone to know the way in or out. He decided that he would imprison Daedalus and Icarus to protect his secret.

They soon got fed up and decided to try and escape again. Daedalus made frames and fastened feathers to them. They learned to fly and prepared to escape. Daedalus told Icarus not to go high, to keep right away from the sun. They climbed up onto the windowsill, leapt into the air, started to fly and soared away into the clouds. They went up and down, twisted and turned. Icarus got so excited that he left his father. he went higher and higher. His father shouted for him to come down.

The sun saw Icarus getting close. He turned his rays onto Icarus. Icarus tried to get back down, but too late. The sun melted the wax that held the feathers in place and Icarus' wings fell apart. He fell to the ground and died.



Here are some more Greek myths. Write your own account of the story and find some pictures to illustrate it.

- The labours of Hercules
- The Trojan horse
- Theseus and the minotaur