

## Arachne the Weaver

### By ReadWorks

It may seem difficult to take Greek myths seriously. After all, they tell of angry gods, dueling goddesses, snake-haired women, and beasts consisting of both animal and human parts. But mythology was a significant influencing factor in the day-to-day lives of the people of ancient Greece. They didn't have televisions or the Internet. There was no Google then, no encyclopedias, and no way to look some piece of information up quickly and learn it. Instead, the ancient Greeks turned to stories and legends to understand how the world around them operated. They used myths to explain the things they didn't understand, like thunder and earthquakes. And they used myths to make scary things seem less frightening. Over time, myths changed, and their events and details varied from one telling to the next, but their narrative outcomes remained largely the same.

Mythology, in the time of ancient Greece, was used not only to explain various phenomena that we now understand via scientific truths, but to account for the origins of humankind. It answered questions like, "What happens after death?" and, "Why does humanity exist at all?" Myths were also often entertaining, and sometimes humorous and intriguing; remember that there weren't TV episodes or movies in ancient Greece, so people had to entertain themselves in other ways. But more than that, myths told people how to live, and how to tell right from wrong. These stories included morals intended to teach valuable life lessons and instill ethics in their readers.

Take, for instance, the story of Arachne. Arachne was a young girl famed in her region for her spinning and weaving. Her cloth was said to be the softest and fairest of any in the land—so fine that some believed it to be spun from gold. Because of her skills, Arachne was prideful. She thought herself the best spinner and weaver in the world, and she was certain that no one could match her talents and gifts.

One day, an old woman walked past Arachne weaving on her loom and asked her, "Who taught you to weave so well?"

Arachne replied that she had taught herself, and that she was the best spinner and weaver in the world.

"But perhaps Athena, the goddess of craft and weaving, taught you to spin and weave without your knowing it?"

Arachne, in her vanity, replied, “No, not even Athena is as good as I am.”

The old woman then tore away her disguise and revealed herself as Athena. She was enraged that a mortal could be boastful and would dare to compare herself to a goddess. And so, Athena challenged Arachne to a spinning and weaving contest. The rules of the contest were simple: each woman would weave a tapestry, and Zeus, king of the gods, would act as the judge. If Arachne won, Athena would never weave again. And if Athena won, Arachne would never spin or touch a loom for the rest of her life.

Hundreds gathered to watch the two women weave. Arachne wove a cloth from the finest silk. It was said that the cloth was so fine it could barely be felt, but that it had the strength to hold a hundred men. On the cloth, Arachne depicted the failings of the gods, portraits of the gods acting immorally and foolishly.

Athena, on the other hand, is said to have spun with sunbeams, the sky, the fields, and the clouds. She wove a tapestry that showed the gods in all their strength and glory, praising them for their splendor.

It was obvious that Athena’s cloth was more spectacular than Arachne’s. Even Arachne, upon seeing Athena’s tapestry, hid her face in her hands in shame.

In one version of the myth, Athena shredded Arachne’s cloth into pieces when she saw how the girl had insulted the gods. But both women knew who the victor was, and Arachne realized that she would never be able to touch a loom again.

Ashamed and devastated at her loss, Arachne attempted to kill herself. Athena, taking pity on Arachne, stopped her. Athena insisted that Arachne remain true to her word and never again spin or touch a loom. Athena then transformed her into a spider so that she could continue to spin and weave beautiful tapestries. All spiders, in Greek mythology, are said to be the children of Arachne.

This particular Greek myth served to warn against the dangers of pride and vanity, as well as caution those seeking to compete against or humiliate the gods.

**Name:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

1. What did the ancient Greeks turn to in order to understand how the world operated?

- A) books and encyclopedias
- B) gods and goddesses
- C) stories and legends
- D) rulers and laws

2. What does the author describe in the article?

- A) the role of mythology in ancient Greece
- B) the importance of theater in ancient Greece
- C) the origins of humankind according to Greek mythology
- D) how ancient Greek myths changed over time

3. "[M]ythology was a significant influencing factor in the day-to-day lives of the people of ancient Greece."

What evidence from the text supports this statement?

- A) "Myths were [...] sometimes humorous and intriguing[.]"
- B) "[M]yths told people how to live, and how to tell right from wrong."
- C) "[The ancient Greeks] didn't have televisions or the Internet."
- D) "Over time, myths changed, and their events and details varied[...]"

4. Based on the story, how can Arachne be described?

- A) Humble and kind
- B) Clever and generous
- C) Talented and insecure
- D) Vain and disrespectful

5. What is a main message of the story of Arachne?

- A) The gods are immoral and foolish.
- B) People should keep their talents secret.
- C) People should not be vain or prideful.
- D) Gods and humans are equally talented.

6. Read these sentences from the text.

"On the cloth, Arachne **depicted** the failings of the gods, portraits of the gods acting immorally and foolishly.

"Athena, on the other hand, is said to have spun with sunbeams, the sky, the fields, and the clouds. She wove a tapestry that showed the gods in all their strength and glory, praising them for their splendor."

As used in this sentence, what does "**depicted**" mean?

- A) praised
- B) showed
- C) prayed to
- D) warned about

7. Choose the answer that best completes the sentence.

Athena challenged Arachne to a spinning and weaving contest \_\_\_\_\_ she was enraged that Arachne dared to compare herself to a goddess.

- A) however
- B) although
- C) because
- D) therefore

8. What did Athena do to Arachne at the end of the story?

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9. The text says that the myth of Arachne "served to warn against the dangers of pride and vanity[.]" How does the story of Arachne demonstrate the dangers of pride and vanity? Use details from the story to support your answer.

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10. Based on the myth of Arachne, how were the ancient Greeks supposed to live their lives? Use evidence from the text to support your answer.

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