


Pandora's BOX

Retold by Louis Untermeyer

 Prometheus had thought about mankind with such sympathy that he had dared to steal the needed fire from Olympus,¹ and for this he was grievously punished by Zeus.² But the lord of Olympus did not think this cruelty was enough. Prometheus had a brother, Epimetheus, and though he was harmless and slow-witted, Zeus extended his displeasure to him. He did not punish Epimetheus as brutally as he had done his brother; he had a more **subtle** plan. It was a scheme which would not only affect Epimetheus but also the whole race of human beings whom Prometheus had dared to help and who were living happily and untroubled. **A**

¹⁰ Zeus ordered Hephaestus, the smith and artisan of the gods, to make a woman out of the materials of earth. Hephaestus took some river clay that had flakes of gold in it and began to make a lovely girl. In with the clay he mixed the fragrance of a river rose, the sweetness of Hymettus³ honey, the smoothness of a silver dolphin, the voices of larks and lake-water, the color of sunrise on snow, the warmth of a sunny morning in May. Then he summoned

Analyze Visuals ►

Based on the woman's expression and body language, what can you **infer** about her attitude toward the box?

subtle (sŭt'ĭ) *adj.* slight; difficult to detect

A READING A MYTH

What human characteristics does Zeus have? Add this information to your chart.

1. **Olympus** (ə-lĭm'pəs): home of the mythical Greek gods.

2. **Zeus** (zōōs): father of the Greek gods; ruler of the heavens. **Prometheus**, a lesser god, gave humans fire against Zeus's will. Furious, Zeus condemned Prometheus to be chained to a rock for eternity.

3. **Hymettus** (hĭ-mĕt'əs): a mountain ridge near Athens, Greece.

the Four Winds to breathe life into the new creation. Finally he called upon the goddesses to complete the work and grant the glowing figure a touch of their own powers.

“Hephaestus has given her beauty,” said Aphrodite,⁴ “but I shall make her more beautiful by adding the spark of love. It will shine in her eyes, and everyone that looks on her will be enchanted.”

“I shall make her wise,” said Athene.⁵ “She shall be able to choose between false and true, between what men value and what she must know is worthless.”

“I shall make her a woman, a puzzle to every man,” said Hera, the wife of Zeus. “I shall make her a real woman, for I shall give her the gift of curiosity.” **B**

Smiling, the goddesses **adorned** her, and when Zeus beheld her grace, her garland of gold, and the glory of her endowments, he was as charmed as though he had been a mortal. “We will call her Pandora,” he said, “Pandora, the All-Gifted. She shall become the bride of Epimetheus. But she shall not go empty-handed. She shall bring with her a casket, a box of magic as her dowry.⁶ And Hermes, my messenger, shall conduct her to earth.”

Epimetheus could not understand why the gods had become concerned about him. He was dazzled by Hermes, and it was some time before he could believe that the exquisite creature brought by the messenger god was meant for him. Even after Hermes departed in a flashing cloud and Pandora stood blushing beside him, he was perturbed. He remembered how often his brother Prometheus had warned him, “Do not trust the gods. And beware especially of Zeus and anything he may send you.” However, when Pandora looked in his eyes and smiled, he was, as Aphrodite had predicted, enchanted and **ensnared**. Yet, even as he took her in his arms, he cautioned her.

“We have reason to fear the gods,” said Epimetheus, “and also their gifts,” he added, pointing to the casket.

“But this is my dowry,” murmured Pandora. “Zeus himself filled it with magic as a present for us. See how beautifully it is carved and painted. Look at the silver hinges and the great gold clasp that fastens it.” **C**

“Keep it well fastened,” said Epimetheus, “otherwise I shall never rest easy. I do not know what the casket may contain, and I do not want to know. Promise me one thing. Never open the box. It is, I grant, a beautiful thing, too beautiful to destroy, and we will keep it. But hide it. Put it not only out of your sight but out of your mind. Then we shall both be content.”

Happy that she could keep her dowry, Pandora put it under the bed and turned to her husband with love. And so for a long time nothing disturbed their married life and their continual joy in each other.

But, though Pandora benefited from the goddesses’ gifts of beauty and wisdom, the gift of Hera had not been given in vain. For quite a while,

B READING A MYTH

What supernatural beings were involved in the creation of Pandora?

adorn (ə-dôrn') v. to enhance or decorate

ensnare (ĕn-snâr') v. to take or catch in something

C THEME

What can you **infer** about the contents of the box based on Zeus’ desire for revenge?

4. **Aphrodite** (ăf' rə-dī'tē): Greek goddess of love and beauty.

5. **Athene** (ə-thē'nē): Greek goddess of wisdom; sometimes spelled *Athena*.

6. **dowry** (dou'rē): money or property a bride brings to a marriage.

Pandora **restrained** her curiosity about the wonderful casket. But with the passing of time she could not help wondering what it might contain. After all, it was *her* dowry, and she had a right to see what the greatest of the gods had
60 conferred upon her. Then, ashamed of her weakness, she put the idea from her, and thought only of her delight in her home with Epimetheus.

One day, however, the curiosity, so long stifled, overmastered her. “I shall only lift the lid,” she said to herself, “and snatch a moment’s glimpse of what may be inside. No matter what I see, I won’t touch a thing. Surely there can be no harm in that.” **D**

Anxiously, as though she were being watched, she tiptoed to her room. Gently getting down on her hands and knees, she drew the casket from under the bed. Half fearfully and half eagerly she lifted the lid. It was only a moment and the lid was up only an inch, but in that moment a swarm of horrible
70 things flew out. They were noisome,⁷ abominably colored, and evil-looking, for they were the spirits of all that was evil, sad, and hurtful. They were War and Famine, Crime and Pestilence, Spite and Cruelty, Sickness and Malice, Envy, Woe, Wickedness, and all the other disasters let loose in the world.

Hearing Pandora’s scream, Epimetheus rushed in. But it was too late. He and Pandora were set upon and stung, and the evil spirits flew off to attack the rest of mankind. **E**

“It is all my fault,” cried Pandora. “If I had thought more about your warning and less about my own desires, I could have controlled my curiosity.”

“The fault is mine,” said Epimetheus. “I should have burned the box.” Then
80 he added, for the poison of Malice was already taking effect, “After all, you are what you are—only a woman—and what else could one expect of a woman.”

Disconsolate⁸ that she had brought so harmful a dowry to Epimetheus as well as to all other men and women, Pandora wept. It was hours before she let her husband comfort her. Finally, after she grew quiet, they heard a faint sound inside the box.

“Lift the lid again,” said Epimetheus. “I think you have released the worst. Perhaps something else, something better, is still there.”

He was right. At the bottom of the box was a quivering thing. Its body was small; its wings were frail; but there was a radiance about it. Somehow Pandora
90 knew what it was, and she took it up, touched it carefully, and showed it to Epimetheus. “It is Hope,” she said.

“Do you think it will live?” asked Epimetheus.

“Yes,” answered Pandora. “I am sure it will. Somehow I know that it will outlive War and Sickness and all the other evils. And,” she added, watching the shining thing rise and flutter about the room, “it will never leave us for long. Even if we lose sight of it, it will be there.” **F**

She was no longer downhearted as Hope spread its wings and went out into the world. ☁

restrain (rĭ-strān') v.
to hold back; to control

D READING A MYTH
What prompts Pandora to look inside the box?

COMMON CORE RL 9

E READING A MYTH
Recall that one purpose of a **myth** is to explain how something came to be. A myth might explain a natural occurrence, such as a tidal wave; a physical landmark, such as a mountain or river; or a part of the human condition, such as falling in love. In your chart, note what this myth explains. In which of the above categories does the explanation fit?

F THEME
How does the winged creature relate to the other things in the box?

7. **noisome** (noi'səm): offensive.

8. **disconsolate** (dĭs-kŏn'sə-lĭt): gloomy.