



Hercules the Hero: Understanding the Myth

Curriculum Unit 98.02.06
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American children are avid watchers of television and movies. They get a great deal of information and misinformation from these sources. It is incumbent upon parents and educators to see that the information received is factual and truthful and that the messages conveyed are accurate. Walt Disney has long had influence over our children, retelling tales from history, folklore and mythology. Recently, that studio has released a number of old stories, recounted in the most expedient way. This often means that there is a great deal of poetic, or cinematic license at work.. Unfortunately, this is the case with one of Disney's most recent productions, Hercules. It is fraught with such inaccuracies and embellishments so as to be barely recognizable as the same story. Almost from the beginning of the film there is a confrontation with some foe or other with barely any introduction to the character or lineage of this hero. Without prior knowledge of the myth of Hercules, the story never makes any real sense. It is simply another cartoon filled with gratuitous violence without any sense of who the villains are or what has brought on such monumental challenges. Other portrayals of this hero can be found in the popular live action television series starring Kevin Sarbo where he seems to spend an inordinate amount of time battling angry Amazons. As if this were not bad enough, there is also an animated tale which teams Kevin Sarbo's Hercules with Zena, the Warrior Princess., an entirely fictional character. Together they face all sorts of dangers and battle assorted foes, but they have nothing to do with the hero of myth, his labors to achieve immortality, or his regal heritage.

The story told by the Disney version is confusing at best and does not really make it clear why Hercules must face great difficulties or what he must do to overcome them. Instead, we are introduced to his story by five singing muses who are supposed to serve as a chorus of sorts, to explain what has occurred in the life of Hercules. This is the movie's first flaw and source of misinformation. There seems to be no rhyme nor reason for presenting only five muses instead of the traditional nine. This unit of study will endeavor to correct some of the inaccuracies generated by Hollywood's many versions of the story as well as to help students learn some Greek mythology. The Disney animation of the life of Hercules makes a good starting point to correct these errors.

The next inaccuracy in this animated version is the implication that Hercules was the son of Zeus and Hera and that his gravest enemy was Hades, god of the underworld. In fact, Hercules, (or Herakles as he is known in Greek Mythology,) was the son of Zeus and Alcmene [Alk-ME-ne]. Zeus disguised himself to look like Alcmene's husband, Amphitryon [Am-FIT-ri-on] and tricked her into an amorous tryst. She realized that she had been deceived when her husband returned home on the day after this liaison. Alcmene bore a second son at the time of Hercules' birth. His name was Iphicles and he was the son of Amphitryon. He accompanied his

brother on several of his adventures, but was killed during one of Hercules labors. In an attempt to dispel the wrath of Zeus wife, Alcmene named her first son Herakles (which means glorious gift of Hera in Greek) in her honor. Unfortunately, this only served to further infuriate Hera.

The greatest dangers to Hercules came from Hera's wrath, not from Hades as the Disney version implies. She was jealous of her husband's many infidelities with mortals and immortals, alike. She was particularly vengeful toward this handsome son of her husband, perhaps because of his strength, prowess and good looks. She tried throughout his life to do away with him. In his infancy, she sent two snakes to strangle him in his cradle. The baby Hercules was able to take the two snakes and squeeze them to death. In his youth, he learned to sing and play the lyre. When his teacher, Linus, scolded him for playing out of tune, Hercules hit him on the head with the lyre and killed him. His family realized that he was too strong to live at the palace so he was sent to the mountains to serve as a shepherd. While tending his flocks, he killed all of the lions and wolves that menaced the area. As a reward, the King of Thebes gave his daughter Megara in marriage to Hercules. Together, they had several children and settled in for a peaceful life.

This good fortune further infuriated the goddess Hera and she sought vengeance by making him mad. In his insanity, he killed his wife, Megara, as well as their children, swatting them down as though they were wild animals. When he recovered his sanity and realized what he had done, he was filled with remorse. He went to Delphi and asked the oracle there how he could atone for his sins. He was told to serve his cousin Eurystheus [You-RISS-theus], King of Mycenae and perform ten labors for him. Hera was pleased with this penance, for Eurystheus was a weak man who was jealous of Hercules great strength and noble birth. Hera knew that he would choose only the most difficult tasks he could devise.

There is no mention of his marriage and his madness in the Disney version, nor of his remorse and search for redemption. Instead, the focus is on a fabricated tale of Hades desire to overthrow Zeus. The premise is that Hercules can prevent Hades from achieving his quest and so must be eliminated. Alcmene and Amphytrion are portrayed as his foster parents who take in a baby they find abandoned along a road. Disney also gives their animated hero Pegasus as a pal. Nowhere in any version of the myths does Hercules develop a friendship with this winged horse.

Disney also introduces a character named Philoctetes [fill-LOC-tee-teez], as an older and wiser friend and mentor. In the myth of Hercules, there is a Philoctetes, but he is not mentioned in the tales until the end of Hercules life. It was he who built and set afire the funeral pyre on which the hero died. In exchange for this and the promise to keep secret the burial location, Hercules gave to Philoctetes his bow and the arrows which had been dipped in the poisonous blood of the Lernaean Hydra.

Hercules did have a companion who accompanied him on some of his adventures. It was most probably his nephew Iolaus, the son of his brother, Iphicles. It was Iolaus who seared the severed limbs of the Hydra so that they would not sprout new heads.

As a way to help the children understand the life and labors of Hercules, we will create a mural depicting the various events of his labors and journey toward immortality. This will help the children to learn the events in depth and will provide a vehicle for sharing our new-found knowledge with others in our school. We will also create replicas of the ancient vases and urns which have survived the ages to tell the stories.

There are many versions of the story of Hercules from Apollodorus to DAulaires Book of Greek Myths. Some of those versions are very difficult to comprehend because of the intricate interrelationships and prior knowledge needed. There is even an extensive internet site which shows examples of ancient pottery and maps and

retells the stories. As a part of this unit, I will retell the stories of his life and the labors in such a way so as to make them full enough for students to understand their richness, yet simple enough so as to not be confusing. This understanding will also allow them to create their interpretive artwork which they will share with others in the school.

In addition to the watching the video, listening to the stories and creating the mural and reproduction pottery, students will learn to pronounce and spell the names of the main characters in this study. We may include some background information on what preceded the era of Hercules, including a discussion of the nine muses, for it is from the muses that these stories were conveyed to the world.

It will not be necessary to tell all of the stories of Hercules life, but it is important to tell of his birth and early life. It is also important to tell the stories of his twelve labors and finally of his attainment of immortality. The myth of his birth and early life has already been told in this paper. We will spend the majority of time reading and understanding the labors as the knowledge gained from these stories will be used to create our mural and pottery. We will also trace Hercules journeys on either a student-created or classroom map.

The First Labor: the Nemean Lion

The oracle of Delphi told Hercules that to atone for murdering his family, he must go to Tiryns, a city in Argolis on the Greek Peloponnese to serve King Eurystheus, performing ten labors. There was a lion in nearby Nemea which was ravaging the lands in that area. No one had been able to kill it for its hide was impenetrable. The first labor of Hercules was to kill this beast and bring its hide to Eurystheus. The lion lived in a cave which had two entrances. When Hercules found the lion, he tried to shoot it with his bow and arrow, but its hide was so tough that the arrow bounced off and fell to the ground. He tried to kill it with his sword, but that bent upon contact with the lion. Finally, the hero took his club made of olive wood and swung a smashing blow to the lion's head. It was stunned, but not dead, and it retreated to its lair. Hercules blocked one entrance to the den so that the lion could only come out one way. He then charged the lion, grabbed it around its neck and squeezed with all of his might. He was finally able to crush the life out of it and then skinned it, using one of its claws as a knife. He carried the pelt back to Eurystheus on his back with the gaping jaws serving as a helmet. On the pottery which has been preserved from antiquity, Hercules is often portrayed wearing this pelt as it must have served as great protection from other dangers.

The Second Labor: the Lernaen Hydra

In the swamps of the town of Lerna, to the south of Tiryns, there lived a Hydra, a nine-headed monster which terrorized the inhabitants of the area. It is said that this creature was raised by Hera in order to intimidate Hercules. This beast was so deadly that his breath could kill. Athena, the goddess of wisdom and war, came to Hercules and advised him as to how to defeat the Hydra. She told Hercules that he must force the Hydra out of its lair by shooting flaming arrows into it and setting it afire. This way he would be able to keep the Hydra within his sights. She told him that the center-most of the nine heads was immortal.

Hercules was accompanied to this labor by his nephew Iolaus, the son of Iphicles. He was a charioteer and often accompanied his uncle on his journeys. Iolaus also helped by lighting on fire the arrows which went into

the Hydras den. As the Hydra came out, Hercules surprised it and lopped off one of its heads. To his surprise, two more grew in its place. He lopped off several others only to find the same result. Hercules then asked Iolaus to sear or burn the place where the cut-off head had been to prevent two more from growing in that spot. The trick was successful until only the center head remained. By some accounts, Hercules used a golden sword to cut off that immortal head. When he removed the final one, he buried it under a heavy rock while Iolaus seared the neck. Hercules then dipped his arrows into the Hydra's gall which rendered them deadly poisonous. When he returned to Tiryns, Eurystheus told Hercules that this labor did not count as one of the ten he was obliged to fulfill because he had the help of Iolaus in accomplishing it. He still had nine labors to complete.

At some point during the discussion of this particular story, it would be important for the children to find out what a hydra is and where it is found in the world today. This incorporates some science facts and inquiry (are hydras poisonous?) into a humanities based unit. Similarly, the other labors which involve animals can be expanded to include some research into the creatures which Hercules encounters. There are no lions in present day Greece, yet our hero battled many of them in this ancient tale. Is it possible that there were once lions in Greece and, if so, was it the climate or civilization which drove them out?

The Third Labor: the Cerynean Hind

Hercules next labor was to capture the Cerynean [Sair-EE-nee-an] Hind, which was a swift-footed and elusive deer with golden horns. It belonged to Artemis, the goddess of the hunt and of the moon. As a child, Artemis had captured four hinds, but this one had eluded her and escaped from northern Greece to the Cerynean hills not far from Tiryns. Because this deer belonged to an Olympic deity, Hercules did not want to harm it in any way. He chased it for an entire year to the ends of the earth and back again to its home in the Cerynean hills. When it collapsed from exhaustion, Hercules tied it up and put it across his back to bring back to Eurystheus. Along the way, Artemis stopped him and asked him why he had stolen her deer. When he related the story of his labors, she allowed him to proceed, providing no harm came to the animal. He conveyed this message to Eurystheus upon his return home. The king demanded that the hind be released so as not to incur the wrath of the goddess of the hunt.

It would be appropriate at this point to have the students explore whether any animals today are known as hinds. They can look at the different kinds of deer and where they are found in various parts of the world. Similarly, students can do some in depth studies of the various kinds of animals which our hero encounters in his various labors. This will bring an element of science and geography into this project.

The Fourth Labor: the Erymanthian Boar

He next labor of Hercules was to capture the Erymanthian [Er-i-MAN-thi-an] boar [at the beginning of this section we will establish what a boar is by defining the word and searching in available classroom and library resources for a comprehensive understanding] which lived on the slopes of Mount in Erymanthus. The mountain was named after the son of Apollo whom the goddess of love, Aphrodite [Af-ro-DI-tee] had blinded after he saw her bathing. In turn, Apollo sent the boar to kill her beloved Adonis. The boar told Aphrodite that

he hadn't meant to kill Adonis, but simply to embrace him. It was only his clumsiness that caused him to scratch Adonis. Aphrodite spared his life but condemned him to roam and ravage those hills for the rest of his life.

On his way to capture the boar, Hercules met a centaur named Pholus. A centaur was a creature which had the body of a man from the waist and the body of a horse from the waist down. Pholus invited Hercules to dine with him and roasted meat for him in his cave. During the meal, he also opened a jar of wine which had been left for just such an occasion. The smell of the wine attracted all sorts of wild animals which proceeded to attack Hercules. He was forced to defend himself against these assaults and in the course of his retaliation several of the creatures were killed. In the course of his defense, a kindly old centaur was wounded by one of Hercules poisonous arrows. Pholus was astonished that such a minor wound could cause death and while examining the arrow, he dropped it and scratched his foot. The poison (from the hydras gall) was so venomous that he died within minutes. The certain death frightened away the other animals.

Hercules was now free to find and capture the boar which was ferocious and quite elusive. Hercules drove it from his hiding place and chased it into a snow drift where the boar sank from his own weight. Our hero captured the boar, bound it in chains and carried it back to Tiryns and Eurystheus. When the king saw the fearsome beast, he hid in a large bronze pot. Hercules took the boar and released it into the sea where it swam to the west toward Italy.

The Fifth Labor: the Augean Stables

For his fifth labor, Eurystheus commanded that Hercules clean the filthy cattle stables of King Augeas [O-gee-as] in one day. This was a monumental task as the stables had not been cleaned in ages and they housed the largest animal herd in all of Greece. Hercules made an agreement with Augeas whereby the king would give the hero one tenth of his cattle if he was able to clean out the stables in one day. He did not tell the king of his arrangement with Eurystheus.

Augeas sent his son Phyleus to witness the work as he had witnessed their agreement. Hercules set about his enormous mission by punching a hole in the wall at one end of the stable and then another in the wall at the other end. He then dug two trenches which diverted the course of two different rivers. These diversions brought their waters rushing through the stables, cleaning out the years of muck and mire. He completed the task by repairing the holes in the stables and returning the rivers to their original course.

Augeas reneged on his promise to give one tenth of his cattle to Hercules, even though the job was accomplished on a single day. A judge was called in to settle the dispute. Phyleus testified to the agreement and the judge granted Hercules his due reward. Upon his return to Tiryns, he learned that Eurystheus would not accept this labor because he was paid for it. Instead of six more labors, Hercules was still faced with seven more.

The Sixth Labor: the Stymphalian Birds

Eurystheus continued to find increasingly difficult tasks for Hercules to face. The next was to remove a hoard of ferocious birds which had bronze beaks, claws and feathers. The beaks could penetrate a mans breastplate and a feather falling from the air could kill a man. They lived in a dense swamp known as the Stymphalian [stim-FAIL-ee-an] Marsh which was surrounded by a thick forest. It was nearly impenetrable. Hercules attempted to shoot at the birds with his bow and arrow, but couldn't permeate the thick vegetation. The goddess Athena once again came to his assistance and gave him a pair of bronze krotala, or castanets, which were forged by Hephaistos [heh-FAIS-tos], the god of the forge. Hercules climbed a nearby mountain and clapped the krotala together. Their noise and its echo so disturbed the birds that they flew up out of the hiding place and off to the Isle of Ares in the Black Sea. Hercules was able to shoot down a few with his bow and arrow. He gathered them up to take back to Eurystheus to prove that the deed had been done. It was not the last that Hercules was to see of these fierce and savage birds. He would meet them again later in his life when he sailed with the Argonauts.

The Seventh Labor: the Cretan Bull

For the seventh labor, Eurystheus ordered Hercules to cross the Mediterranean Sea to the island of Crete to capture a bull which was wreaking havoc over the lands around the capitol of Knossos. This bull had been given to Minos, the king of Crete, by Poseidon [po-SI-don], to be offered as a sacrifice. King Minos thought the bull too beautiful to kill, so he substituted another bull for sacrifice. When he learned of the exchange, Poseidon was incensed and sent the bull on his rampage. He also caused Minos wife Pasiphae [pa-SI-fa-e] to fall in love with the bull and give birth to the Minotaur which lived in the Labyrinth of Daedalus. Hercules arrived at Knossos on the island of Crete and easily wrestled the bull into submission. He brought the beast back to Tiryns while Eurystheus hid in his bronze pot. The bull was released to roam the countryside. He crossed the Isthmus of Corinth, settled in the vicinity of Marathon and killed any one who crossed his path. According to some sources, one of the first unfortunates to meet the Minotaur was the son of Minos, who had been visiting Athens.

The Eighth Labor: the Horses of Diomedes

To the north of Greece in the land of Thrace, there was a king by the name of Diomedes, leader of a tribe called the Bistones. He owned a team of man-eating mares which he kept tied up with iron chains and fed human flesh, which came from unsuspecting visitors to his kingdom. Hercules was ordered by Eurystheus to capture those horses, tame them and bring them back to Tiryns. He sailed to Thrace with companions and upon arrival, found the horses and the grooms. He overpowered the grooms, stole the horses and drove them toward the sea so as to put them aboard his ship. Diomedes and his people followed Hercules to try to recapture the mares. Hercules turned the horses over to his friend Abderus to guard while he fought off his foes. Poor Abderus was no match for the mares as they turned on him and devoured him. In the meantime, Hercules was able to fend off and turn back his pursuers, but not before stunning Diomedes with his club and dragging him back for the horses to consume. With their appetites sated, the mares became more compliant and Hercules was able to bring them back to Eurystheus who set them free. According to some versions of this tale, the mares found their way to Mount Olympus and were eaten by wild animals. Other versions have said

the horses wandered around Greece, continuing to be the strongest horses around. Further, it is said that several of their descendants were used in the war against Troy.

The Ninth Labor: Hippolytes Belt

For his ninth labor, Hercules was sent to capture the belt belonging to and worn by Hippolyte [hi-POL-i-ta], the queen of the Amazon women who lived along the coast of the Black Sea. These women were a tribe of fierce warriors who defeated every tribe they fought. They had little use for men except to serve as servants and slaves. Their helmets, clothes and belts were made from the skins of wild beasts. The Amazons worshipped Artemis, goddess of the moon and the hunt. She was the twin sister of Apollo and decided to never marry. Like their goddess, these women also did not marry. To perpetuate their race, young Amazons would meet every spring with a specific tribe of men for the sole purpose of procreation. Hercules set sail from the Peloponnesus for the Bosphorus with a band of his friends and compatriots. When he arrived at the mouth of the Thermodon river, he anchored his ship and was visited by Hippolyte herself. She was quite enamored of him and gave him her belt, or girdle as a token of her affection. Hera, in the meantime, was once more at work to try to destroy her husband's son. She disguised herself as an Amazon and spread a rumor that Hercules had come to kidnap their leader. Angry warrior-women attacked the men on the ship and in the battle, Hippolyte was killed. In addition to her belt, he took her battle axe and other weapons.

During his return to Mycenae, Hercules made numerous stops along the way, including one at Troy. He faced many challenges along this journey, but finally managed to arrive back at his home. He gave the belt to Eurystheus who gave it to his daughter Admete. The king wasted no time in devising still another labor for our hero.

The Tenth Labor: the Cattle of Geryon

To fulfill his next labor, Hercules had to travel to one end of the known earth. He was ordered by Eurystheus to steal the cattle which belonged to the monster Geryon [GER-i-on] who had three bodies joined together at the waist. The creature lived on an island called Erythia where he kept his red cattle. They were guarded by a two-headed dog named Orthrus [OR-thrus], brother of Cerberus, the guardian of the underworld. The cattle were also tended by the shepherd Eurytion [u-RIT-i-on] Hercules traveled overland from the Peloponnesus of Greece through Italy, France and Spain to the area which we now call Gibraltar. There he erected two pillars, one in Europe and the other in Africa to commemorate his tremendous journey. Helios, the Titan who drove the sun across the sky, gave Hercules a golden water-lily to use as a boat to reach Geryon's island. Upon his arrival, he faced the ferocious Orthrus which he struck down with his club. Next, he dispatched with Eurytion in a similar manner. He rounded up the cattle and began driving them to the golden boat. Geryon learned of this treachery and came to rescue the livestock. Hercules was able to shoot a single arrow through all three bodies of the monster and escape from the island. His mission now was to drive the cattle back to Tiryns and Eurystheus. Along the way he encountered many dangers, including more trickery from the vengeful Hera, but true to his nature, he was able to deliver the cattle to Eurystheus who sacrificed them to Hera. At last Hercules had completed ten labors as was demanded of him and he thought that he would be released from his

obligation. Alas, he was reminded that neither the slaying of the Hydra nor the cleaning of the Augean stables were accepted because he had assistance during those labors. He still had two more labors to perform.

The Eleventh Labor: the Golden Apples of the Hesperides

Eurystheus ordered Hercules to go out once again and bring him the golden apples of the Hesperides [hes-
PER-i-des]. This labor was one of the most difficult because our hero did not know where to find them. The apple trees belonged to Hera who had received them as a wedding gift. For safekeeping, she gave them to the daughters of Atlas, the titan who held up the earth and sky. Also guarding them was a hundred-headed dragon by the name of Ladon.

Hercules set about on his venture by heading first to the coast of Africa where he thought he might find the apples. Then he headed in a northerly direction where he encountered enemies who tried to stop him. He headed toward Asia when he came to the Caucasus Mountains. There he encountered Prometheus who had been bound in chains to a rock by Zeus for the crime of stealing fire from the heavens. In addition to being bound, Prometheus was visited daily by an eagle who pecked at him and ate his liver. The liver grew back every night so that the eagle could come again and continue his torture.

Hercules had been told that Prometheus would be able to tell him how to find the Garden of the Hesperides. Hercules agreed to release Prometheus in exchange for this information. Prometheus cautioned him not to pick the apples by himself but to ask Atlas to do the deed for him and gave instructions on how to reach the elusive gardens which were located in the northern reaches of the world.

When the request was posed to Atlas, the titan was only too happy to get the apples in exchange for being relieved of the burden of holding up the earth and sky. Hercules agreed to the deal. Atlas asked him first to kill Ladon, the monster guarding the apples. Then he took the weight of the earth and sky upon his shoulders while Atlas went to secure the favored fruit. When the deed was done, Atlas returned and told Hercules that he would deliver the apples to Eurystheus himself. He didn't want to resume his former position and was pleased to be free.

Hercules knew that every man must bear his own burden and Eurystheus would never accept the apples from anyone else. He tricked Atlas into taking back the earth while he ostensibly found a more comfortable position. The titan put the apples down on the ground and took back his formidable load. Hercules picked up the apples and hastened to return to Tiryns. He presented the apples to his king who returned them immediately as it was unlawful to possess any of Hera's property. Hercules presented the apples to Athena who returned them to their garden and their guardians.

The Twelfth Labor: the Capture of Cerberus

Hercules had one final labor to perform before his obligation to Eurystheus was fulfilled. Never satisfied, Hera devised the most difficult of all tasks for her husband's son. The king of Tiryns asked the hero to bring Cerberus, the three-headed hound which guarded the gates, from the underworld where it was believed all mortal souls were sent before settling into a final resting place. It was easy to enter the underworld, but

impossible to get out. It was Hercules mission to go there, capture the monster and bring it out of that place and back to Eurystheus. To reach the underworld which was ruled by the Olympian Hades, Hercules sought the help of his longtime protector, Athena. She enlisted the assistance of her brother Hermes whose mission it was to conduct the souls of the dead to the Realm of Hades. Together they guided them to a place near Sparta into the depths of the earth. They left him by the river Styx where he was ferried across by the boatman Charon. When he finally reached Hades and his wife Persephone, he was given permission to take Cerberus alive. Also, he was not allowed to use any weapons in his capture.

While the monster Cerberus was fierce indeed, it was really no match for Hercules. He covered himself with his lion-skin cape and grabbed Cerberus around the necks of its three heads. The heads were covered with snakes which tried unsuccessfully to loosen the grip. The monster struck at the hero with its dragon tail and injured him, but not enough to set it free. Hercules finally subdued the beast and dragged it up from the Realm of Hades and finally back to Tiryns and Eurystheus.

True to his nature, the cowardly Eurystheus hid from the ferocious Cerberus and made Hercules take him away. The hero was more than happy to comply with this request and returned the beast to the gates of Hades. Thus having completed his ten acceptable labors, Hercules was released from his obligation to the king and at long last allowed to pursue his own happiness. He still had many adventures ahead of him in his quest for immortality and many obstacles to overcome, but he had served his penance and was free from his bondage. Eventually he did achieve an eternal life and took his place on Mount Olympus with the other gods of Ancient Greece.

WHAT THE LABORS MEAN

This unit is designed to be used with upper elementary school students and focuses on teaching them about the twelve labors and life of Hercules. It was also developed to correct the misinformation proffered by the Disney version of the myth and to that end, we will attempt to teach the students to be more critical of what they watch on television and in movies. This study can also be used to examine the meaning of those labors as they might be understood by eight to twelve year olds. An important part of this discussion would be the children's interpretation of the myth and how it might relate to their lives. It would be appropriate to open a discussion with the students with a definition of what it is to be a hero. We would create a list of the fitting characteristics and then ask the children to name some people they might consider heroes. The next exercise would be to determine whether or not these people fit the listed characteristics. The rationale for this exercise is to give the children a realistic idea of what a hero is; that they should look to folks such as Martin Luther King, Jr., Rosa Parks, Christa McAuliffe, and U.S Capitol policemen Jacob J. Chestnut and John Gibson as heroes rather than at sports superstars such as Michael Jordan or the wrestler Sting. During this discussion, we can determine what it is about them that makes them heroes.

In the most simple form, the story of Hercules life can be interpreted as the story of every-man. Our hero was the son of the most significant figures in Greek mythology, yet he was made to struggle through incredible difficulties in order to fulfill the purpose of his life. He can be compared to any of the children who participate in this study by showing that it does not matter who or what your parents are or where you are from, you can and must make something of your life. As the son of an immortal, it was Hercules desire to attain that same immortality, but since he is also the son of a mortal, he had to face mortal challenges. Perhaps to neutralize the advantage of being the son of Zeus, the obstacles he faced were exacerbated by Hera's jealousy and need

for vengeance.

Comparisons might be made with the kinds of struggles and dangers that the children face in their own lives. There are the drugs and gangs and the allure of the money they involve. These challenges seem to grow increasingly difficult as the children grow older, especially in the inner-city,. Even as Hercules faced ever greater labors which took him farther and farther from the safety of his home, so must our students deal with unsavory influences and conflicts as they grow older, and away from the comforts of childhood.

LESSON PLANS

Lesson Plan Number One

The following names and words would be learned by the students so as to acquaint them with the names connected with the stories as well as the unusual terms which have come from the myths. This list can be expanded as necessary, adding words and names that the students find troublesome. They will not become spelling words, per se, but rather words with which the students become familiar. The students will use the names on the mural they will create as well as for the signs describing the pottery we will create. Glossary and pronunciation guide

Alcmene [Alk-ME-ne]

Amazons - a tribe of fierce women warriors who worshipped Artemis, goddess of the moon and the hunt. She was the twin sister of Apollo and decided to never marry.

Aphrodite [Af-ro-DI-tee]

EAugeas [O-gee-as]

Cerberus, the three-headed hound which guarded the gates to the underworld

Cerynean [Sair-EE-nee-an]

Charon

Erymanthian [Er-i-MAN-thi-an]

Eurystheus [You-RISS-theus]

Eurytion [u-RIT-i-on]

Geryon [GER-i-on]

Hades

Hephaistos [heh-FAIS-tos]

Hera

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Heracles

Hermes

Hesperides [hes-PER-i-des]

Hippolyte [hi-POL-i-ta]

krotola

labyrinth

mare

Orthrus [OR-thrus], brother of Cerberus

Pasiphae [pa-SI-fa-e]

Persephone

Philoctetes [fill-LOC-tee-teez]

Poseidon [po-SI-don]

Stymphalian [stim-FAIL-ee-an]

Styx

Zeus

Lesson Plan Number Two

A Mural of the Travels of Hercules

The students will create a wall-sized map of Europe and Asia Minor. In the appropriate locations, they will add depictions of the twelve labors of Hercules. This mural will be shared with other students in the school either in small group discussions or as a whole school presentation. In addition, each student will create his own scrapbook with drawings and descriptions of each of the events in the life of Hercules.

Lesson Plan Number Three

Pottery from Ancient Greece

Students will study examples of ancient Greek pottery in museums, in books and on the internet to see how these stories have been kept alive throughout the ages. They will bring in discarded bottles, plates and containers which will be used as the base for creating the depictions of the stories of Hercules. When possible, we will make the dishes, urns and pitchers from clay with the assistance of the art teacher. They will use them as examples of the art of storytelling as it has existed through the ages.

Lesson Plan Number Four

Reviewing Disney's Hercules

The class will view the animated Disney version of the story once again. We will follow this viewing with a critical discussion of the merits of the film. We will look at both the positive and negative aspects of the cartoon. As part of this discussion, we will look at the criteria which make good movies and stories and try to get the children to apply them to their daily television viewing habits.

TEACHER BIBLIOGRAPHY

Apollodorus. *The Library of Greek Mythology*. translated by Robin Hard. Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 1997. A compilation of the early Greek myths from about the first or second century B.C. It one of the earliest records of the stories.

Graves, Robert. *The Greek Myths*. in two volumes. New York: George Braziller, Inc., 1955. A major reference work as it examines Greek mythology as it has been interpreted by the various scholars and poets throughout the ages.

Zimmerman, J. E. *Dictionary of Classical Mythology*. New York: Bantam Books, 1964. A handy reference giving a brief explanation of the characters and events in Greek and Roman mythology.

STUDENT BIBLIOGRAPHY

The Gods and Goddesses of Olympus. New York: Harper Collins, 1994. A pretty introduction to the Alike. major deities from Greek mythology. Hercules is not mentioned, but this can be used to clarify some of the other characters.

Benson, Sally. *Stories of the Gods and Heroes*. New York: Dial Press, 1940, 1968. A retelling of the stories from Greek and Roman mythology written in simple language, appropriate for elementary students.

D' Auliere, Ingri and Edgar Parin. *DAulaires Book of Greek Myths*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co., 1962. A comprehensive collection of the stories from Greek mythology⁸ with enough detail to tell the stories, but also simplified for a younger audience. Good illustrations which have a classical tone.

Evslin, Bernard. *Hercules*. New York; William Morrow & Co., 1984. This 144 page book is devoted to the trials and tribulations of Hercules life. It is suitable for most upper elementary readers. It is written in a easy style and while there is some poetic license taken with the story, it provides another source for independent study.

Fisher, Leonard Everett. *The Olympians: Great Gods and Goddesses of Ancient Greece*. New York: Holiday House, 1984. A simple text offering very basic information about the Olympians. A good title to have for student browsing purposes.

Gods, Men & Monsters from the Greek Myths. New York: Schocken Books, 1982. Another resource for children to explore about the myths. Contains a brief retelling of the story of Hercules as well as some very nice illustrations and a map of Hercules world.

Green, Roger Lancelyn. *Heroes of Greece and Troy*. New York: Henry Z Walck, Inc., 1961. This book give a fairly comprehensive account of all the heroes from Greek mythology. It is helpful in simplifying the stories so that they are suitable for elementary students.

Lum, Peter. *The Stars in our Heaven: myths and fables*. New York: Pantheon, 1948. Contains a brief discussion of the myth of Hercules as well as the identification of the obscure constellation of the same name. This source suggests that the legend comes from the Sumerian and Babylonian hero known as Gilgamesh.

@Ref: *The Usborne Book of Greek and Norse Legends*. London, Eng.: Usborne Publishing, 1987. A compact and handy overview of the major stories and characters from Greek mythology. It includes a who's who section which describes them and another which gives their Roman

counterparts. Also includes a similar overview of Norse mythology.

OTHER RESOURCES

Hercules. Disney Enterprises, [1997]. An animated cartoon very loosely based on the myth of Hercules. Crane, Gregory R. (ed.) The Perseus Project, <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu>, April, 1998. The Perseus Project is a digital library of resources about the ancient world. It includes texts, translations and examples of period pottery. It is a collaborative body of work by scholars at a number of academic institutions. It is maintained by Tufts University, Medford, MA. The material is also available in a CD-ROM version published by Yale University Press. Of particular interest to this study is the following location on the website: <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/Hercules/> It tells the stories of Hercules and includes maps and examples of ancient pottery from museums all over the world which depict various aspects of the myth. There are a variety of other web sites which show some examples of pottery depicting images from Greek mythology, but the above site is the only one so far identified as showing images directly related to Hercules.

The Yale University Art Gallery owns a collection of ancient Greek pottery. A visit there would give the children an idea of what it actually looked like.

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