

MYTHS & LEGENDS



For centuries, artists have turned to the myths of ancient Greece and Rome for inspiration. Take a literary look at some of the stories shown in works throughout the museum.

The name of this painting is *The Sirens*. The title refers to mythological sea nymphs who lured sailors to their deaths by singing enchanting melodies. In the *Odyssey*, the Greek hero Odysseus manages to evade the Sirens by plugging his crew's ears and tying himself to the mast of his ship.

The story of the Sirens from the *Odyssey* is thousands of years old, but this painting was made in 1891.



Why would the subject matter be relevant during the time in which this painting was made? How might it still be relevant to us today?



In this painting we see the Greek goddess Thetis dipping her son Achilles into the River Styx in an attempt to make the child immortal.

Take a look at the setting that is shown in this image. What details does the artist include to let you know that the scene takes place in the underworld?

Images (this page): Sir Edward Burne-Jones, *The Sirens (Les femmes chasseresses)*, British, c. 1891/1898, oil on canvas. Bequest of John Ringling, 1936, SN422.
Image (opposite page): Giovanni Paolo Pannini, *Circe Entertaining Odysseus at a Banquet*, Italian, c. 1718-1720, oil on canvas. Bequest of John Ringling, 1936, SN172.



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This work shows a scene from Homer's famous epic, the *Odyssey*. This ancient Greek poem tells the tale of Odysseus, a hero of the Trojan War, and the adventures that befell him on his homeward voyage.

See if you can spot Odysseus in this scene. Describe his appearance and his character, based on your knowledge of the *Odyssey*.

What character traits do we value in heroes today? Why might they differ from those of ancient Greece?



Transformation is an important element in literature. In the detail to the left, you'll notice that some of the men in the painting have been physically transformed into animals. What other types of transformation can characters undergo in a story?

Many paintings depict individual scenes from larger, more complex stories. Choose a painting in the Museum that seems to show part of a story. Sketch it in the center box below. Then, create two more sketches – one showing what happened before this scene, and one showing what happens after.

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