MYTHOLOGICAL CREATURES

Some works of art that we are featuring for today's Homeschool Third Thursday include creatures like the sea monster. Many of these mythological creatures consist of various human and animal parts combined into a single creature— for example, a centaur has the body of a horse and the torso of a man. Other times the creatures come entirely from the imagination, like the sea monster shown above. Some of these creatures also have supernatural powers, some good and some evil.

Detail of Copy after Arpino’s Perseus and Andromeda

Workshop of Giuseppe Cesari (Italian), 1602-03. Oil on canvas. Bequest of John Ringling, 1936.

Creature Creation

Today, we challenge you to create your own mythological creature out of Crayola’s Model Magic!

Open your packet of Model Magic and begin creating. If you need inspiration, take a look at the back of this sheet.

Try to incorporate basic features of animals – eyes, mouths, legs, etc. – while also combining part of different creatures.

Once you’ve finished sculpting, come up with a unique name for your creature. Does your creature have any special powers or abilities?
Mythological Creatures: Continued

Greco-Roman mythology features many types of mythological creatures. Here are some ideas to get your project started!

**Sphinxes** are wise, riddle-loving creatures with bodies of lions and heads of women.

Greek hero Perseus rides a flying horse named **Pegasus**.

**Centaurs** are Greco-Roman mythological creatures with torsos of men and legs of horses.

**Satyrs** are creatures with the torsos of men and the legs of goats.

The gorgon **Medusa** is a woman with hair made out of snakes, who is so terrifying that anyone who looks directly at her is turned into stone.
The story of Apollo and Daphne is a story of love gone wrong. It begins with Apollo, the sun god, who bragged to Cupid that he had the bigger bow and was more capable of using weapons. This angered Cupid, who shot Apollo with a golden arrow that made him fall in love with the first person he saw. Cupid then shot Daphne with a lead arrow, making her immune to love and afraid of the first person she saw. At that moment, Apollo and Daphne laid eyes on each other. Apollo immediately fell deeply in love, but Daphne was afraid and ran away from him. Apollo began to pursue her through the forest. Daphne became more and more afraid as Apollo drew nearer and nearer. Finally, Daphne called out to her father, who was a river god, for help and he immediately transformed her into a laurel tree to protect her. When Apollo finally reached her, there was only a tree where she had been standing.

The image of Apollo and Daphne that we looked at today is painted on the inside lid of a harpsichord. A harpsichord is similar to a piano in that it is a played using a keyboard that plucks a string inside the instrument. Although the keyboard to our harpsichord is missing, its casing and decorations are still intact. When you get home, look up videos of harpsichord music online. The harpsichord was widely used in Renaissance and Baroque music and its distinctive sound inspired composers like Bach, Haydn, and Mozart.
Learning Extension: Transformation

In the myth of Apollo and Daphne, Daphne is transformed into a laurel tree.

**Discuss:** how is the human body compared to a tree? If you were a tree, what part of you would be the trunk? Branches? Leaves? Roots? What do you think the transformation would have felt like physically for Daphne? How do you think she was feeling as the transformation took place?

Learning Extension: Debate

Even after the transformation, Apollo was still enamored with Daphne and mourned her loss. The following quote from Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* describes Apollo’s reaction:

> Fairest of maidens, you are lost to me. But at least you shall be my tree. With your leaves my victors shall wreath their brows. You shall have your part in all my triumphs. Apollo and his laurel shall be joined together wherever songs are sung and stories told.

This excerpt explains why laurel is a symbol of Apollo and why winners of competitions in sports, music, and poetry were crowned with laurel leaves in ancient Greece.

**Discuss:** Do you support Apollo’s choice in taking the laurel as his symbol? How do you think Daphne would have felt about this?

**Set up a debate** in which one student defends Apollo’s choice and another advocates for Daphne.
APOLLO AND MARSYAS

In Greek mythology, Marsyas was a satyr – a mythological creature with the torso of a man but the legs and horns of a goat. He was also a skilled musician and prided himself (perhaps excessively) on that fact.

He was so confident in his musical skill that he challenged the god of music, Apollo, to a musical contest under the condition that the winner could treat the loser however he wanted. Apollo won the competition and this painting depicts his treatment of Marsyas afterwards.

Hubris

In the story of Marsyas and Apollo, Marsyas is so incredibly proud of his musical talent that he thinks he can perform better than the god of music himself. This type of excessive pride or self-confidence is called hubris. When a character exhibits hubris, it often leads to a major conflict or the character's downfall.

In Greek mythology, hubris often takes the form of a human challenging or defying a god. Perhaps unsurprisingly, this rarely ends well for the humans involved.

The Flaying of Marsyas by Apollo
Attributed to Antonio de Bellis (Italian), ca. 1637-1640. Oil on canvas. Bequest of John Ringling, 1936
Learning Extension: Pan Flutes

Marsyas was a skilled player of the pan flute -- you can actually see his flute tucked behind his arm on the left side of the painting. Pan flutes got their name from the Greek god of nature, Pan, and are instruments consisting of multiple closed tubes of gradually increasing length. At home, you can create your own!

Materials:

8 Smoothie Straws
Masking Tape or Washi Tape
Scissors

Directions:

1) Start by cutting your first straw to 20cm long. Cut the next straw 2cm shorter, to 18cm. Cut each straw 2cm shorter in this way until you have cut them all.
2) Line the straws up from longest to shortest.
3) Tape the straws together
4) Blow across the top of your instrument to create music! The longest straws will create the deepest sound and the shortest straws will be the highest.
This painting shows a prince named Paris, who has been asked by the messenger god Hermes to judge a beauty competition between three goddess. The winner of the competition will win a golden apple inscribed with the words “To the Fairest.”

Each of the three goddesses want to win the competition, and so each offers Paris a gift to try to sway his decision. First Hera, the queen of the gods, offers to make him the ruler of the known world. Athena, the goddess of wisdom and warfare, offers Paris glory and power in battle. Finally Aphrodite, the goddess of love, offers him the love of the most beautiful woman in the world: Helen of Sparta.

Paris chooses Aphrodite and her promise of love, but there was one small problem: Helen was already married. Paris and Helen run away together to his country, Troy, and their actions start the Trojan War.
Gods and Goddesses

This painting features three major goddess and two prominent gods from the Greco-Roman pantheon. Pantheon means the gods of a particular group of people. The phrase Greco-Roman is used to describe these gods and goddess because they were originally worshipped in ancient Greece and were later adopted and renamed by the Romans. Each of the gods and goddesses in this painting have both a Greek name (listed below in bold) and a Roman name (listed below in italics).

**Hera Juno** – the goddess of women, marriage, family and childbirth. Married to Zeus, the king of the gods. Her attributes include crowns, staffs, and peacocks.

**Athena Minerva** – the goddess of wisdom, courage, law, warfare, and the arts. Her attributes include helmets, spears, and owls.

**Aphrodite Venus** – the goddess of love, beauty, and pleasure. Her attributes include her son Eros, seashells, and doves.

**Eros Cupid** – the mischievous god of love, son and constant companion of the goddess Aphrodite. Some of his attributes include his bow, arrows, and torches.

**Hermes Mercury** – the god of herds, trade, and heralds. Some of his attributes include winged sandals, a winged hat, and a traveler’s cloak.

Learning Extension

The Greco-Roman gods were worshipped over a long period of time, and sometimes their associations and attributes changed over time. Draw and complete Venn diagrams like the one below for the associations and attributes of the gods in this painting to compare their Greek and Roman manifestations.
Laocoön was a Trojan priest in Greek mythology who, along with his two sons, was attacked by sea serpents sent by the gods. You can learn more about Laocoön’s story on the back of this handout!

This sculpture is famous for beautifully capturing the anguish the family feels as they struggle to fight off the serpents. The artist showed his skill capturing the agony on Laocoön’s face and his straining body, where nearly every muscle is defined and pulling against his bonds.

This sculpture also shows the artistic principal of hierarchy of scale. Although Laocoön and his sons are all adults, Laocoön is roughly twice as large to show that he is the most important figure in the group.

Tableau Vivant

Tableau vivant, often shortened to simply tableau, is French for the term “living picture.” The term refers to an artistic display in which living actors are dressed up and posed to create a motionless scene. Once the tableau has been created, the actors do not speak or move throughout the duration of display.

Today, we had the chance to try to recreate this sculptural group using tableau. How did you feel when you were posing? Were you able to identify with the figures more when you positioned your body like theirs?
Learning Extension: Laocoön and the Trojan Horse

According to Greek mythology, the Greeks won the Trojan War after ten long years of fighting by tricking the Trojans. The Greeks built a giant wooden horse and hid some of their soldiers inside. The rest of the Greek soldiers then pretended to leave, leaving the horse behind at the Trojan city gates.

The Trojans thought that the horse was a peace offering for the gods and wanted to bring it inside the city. Laocoön had a feeling that things were not so simple and that the horse might be more than it appeared. He urged his fellow Trojans to not bring the horse inside the city and encouraged them to set fire to it outside the gates.

The goddess Athena, who supported the Greeks in the war, heard Laocoön warning his countrymen. She sent two sea serpents to attack Laocoön and his two sons. The Trojans took this to mean that Laocoön was being punished for denying the gift of the horse and they decided to bring the horse into the city.

That night, the Greek soldiers crept out of the horse, opened the city gates, and let the rest of the Greek army into the city of Troy. The Greeks defeated the city’s defenses and won the war.

Further Reading

Check out the books below to learn more about Homer’s *Iliad*, an ancient Greek poem that tells the story of the Trojan War.

*The Iliad/The Odyssey* by Gillian Cross and illustrated by Neil Packer

*The Trojan War* by Olivia Colidge

*The Iliad* by Homer, translated by Robert Fagles with introduction by Barnard Knox
In Greek mythology, Narcissus was the son of a river god and nymph. The young man was known for his beauty and physique, which prompted many people to fall in love with him. But Narcissus was also proud and he spurned any lover who approached him.

The gods were not pleased with this behavior and decided to take action against it. They led Narcissus to a pool, where he caught a glimpse of his reflection. Narcissus instantly fell in love with the beautiful face in the water, not realizing it was his own. Unable to leave the beauty of the reflection, yet also unable to attain the object of his desire, Narcissus lost the will to live and stared into the water until he wasted away. Eventually, the gods took pity on him and transformed him into a flower that could look at its own reflection in the water forever.

NARCISSUS

Narcissism

The myth of Narcissus is the origin of the term narcissism, which means excessive interest in oneself – particularly one's physical appearance.

Narcissus Flower

The Narcissus flower comes in a wide variety of shapes and sizes and is one of the first flowers to bloom in the spring.
Learning Extension: Mirror Meditation

A new trend in the field of meditation and mindfulness is the concept of mirror meditation, which is the practice of looking at your own reflection in the mirror with no goal other than to stay present with yourself. Unlike Narcissus in myth, whose obsession was his own physical appearance, mirror meditation asks you to use the mirror as a tool to reflect your thoughts and feelings so you can develop kinder self-awareness.

Today, we invite you to try this practice in the museum galleries. We set out mirrors around the room and played a soundtrack for some light white noise in the background. We invite you to spend some time looking into the mirrors, breathing deeply, and just being present with yourself.

While looking at your reflection, try to practice these three principles of mindfulness meditation:

- Keep your **attention** in the present moment
- Be attentive to your own thoughts and feelings as well as those of others. This is called **open awareness**
- Try to keep **kind intention** towards yourself. Some examples of kind intention include:
  - Finding balance
  - Opening your mind and heart
  - Staying steady, calm and focused
  - Acting with courage
  - Embracing change
  - Giving and receiving love
  - Allowing yourself to be vulnerable
ODYSEUSS

The episode featured in this painting involving Odysseus and Circe happens in Book X of Homer’s *Odyssey*. Odysseus, Greek hero of the Trojan War, is slowly making his way home by sea after the war’s conclusion. However, he and his fellow Greek warriors are continually waylaid along their route. After narrowly escaping an island of giant cannibals, Odysseus and his remaining men face a new danger: the dangerous and powerful witch Circe.

One of Circe’s abilities is to transform men into animals. This is one of the reasons the artist has chosen to show her home populated by such a wide variety of animals including dogs, lions, and leopards. In the lower left corner of the painting, we can find some of Odysseus’ companions halfway through their transformations from men into swine.

Circe Entertaining Odysseus at a Banquet

Giovanni Paolo Panini (Italian), c. 1718-1720. Oil on canvas. Bequest of John Ringling, 1936

Transformations

On the left side of this painting, in the foreground, there is a group of men actively transforming – their bodies are still those of men, but they have the heads of swine!

Today, we have edited this figural group to remove their swine heads and leave it up to you what they are transforming into. If you were Circe, what animal would you turn these men into? There are several other animals in this painting, would you chose one of those or something else entirely?
Learning Extension: Comparison

Compare the story below to the image of the painting. What moment from the story is the painting depicting? Is it one single moment or many put together? How would you chose to show the story differently? Spend some time drawing your own interpretation of the text.

“They had come to Aeaea, the realm of Circe, a most beautiful and most dangerous witch. Every man who approached her she turned into a beast. Only his reason remained as before: he knew what had happened to him. She enticed into her house the party Odysseus dispatched to spy out the land, and there she changed them into swine. She penned them in a sty and gave them acorns to eat. They ate them; they were swine. Yet inside they were men, aware of their vile state, but completely in her power.

Luckily for Odysseus, one of the party had been too cautious to enter the house. He watched what happened and fled in horror back to the ship. The news drove any thought of caution out of Odysseus. He started off, all alone – not one of the crew would go with him – to try to do something, bring some help to his men. On his way Hermes met him....He told Odysseus he knew an herb which could save him from Circe’s deadly art. With it he could taste anything she gave him and suffer no harm. When he had drunk the cup she offered him, Hermes said, he must threaten to run her through with his sword unless she freed his followers.

Odysseus took the herb and went thankfully on his way. All turned out even better than Hermes had predicted. When Circe had used on Odysseus the magic...and to her amazement saw him stand unchanged before her, she so marveled at the man who could resist her enchantment that she loved him. She was ready to do whatever he asked and she turned his companions at once back into men again. She treated them with such kindness, feasting them sumptuously in her house, that for a whole year they stayed happily with her.”

Text excerpt from Mythology: Timeless Tales of Gods and Heroes by Edith Hamilton, Little, Brown and Co., 1942
In classical mythology, sirens were dangerous creatures who lived on a rocky island, singing in beautiful voices in an effort to lure sailors to shipwreck and death. In early Greek art, sirens were shown as scaly-footed birds with human faces. Later, sirens were sometimes shown as women whose beauty matched that of their voices.

In Homer’s Odyssey, the hero Odysseus ordered his crew to plug their ears to escape the Sirens’ fatal song as they sailed by the island. But Odysseus himself asks to be tied to the mast so he can hear the song without being able to harm himself or lead his crew astray.

**The Sirens (Les Femmes Chasseresses).**
Edward Burne-Jones (British) C. 1891/1898. Oil on Canvas. Bequest of John Ringling, 1936

**Chose a Siren Song**

Mythological sirens are known for their song, beautiful enough to lead sailors off course and to their doom. Today, we ask you to judge what that song might sound like!

We will play clips of a few different songs in the gallery and ask you to think about which song best captured the beauty of the siren’s song.

Afterwards, you can vote as a family to decide which song you think sounds the most like the sirens’ song.
Learning Extension: Siren Song

The poem *Siren Song* by Margaret Atwood delivers an interpretation of the story of the sirens and the type of song they might be singing. Read the poem below and then answer the following questions:

1. What kind of voice does the speaker use for the poem? Who is the intended audience?
2. What does this contemporary Siren say to flatter and lure the listener?
3. Do you feel bad for the Siren at any point of the poem? If so, how does the speaker manage to make us feel sympathetic toward her internal conflict?
4. When you think of the myth of the sirens and sailors, who would be the predator and who would be the prey? How does Atwood turn the predator-prey theme on its head by the end of the poem? How does the order of events in the poem create surprise for the reader?
5. What seems to be the major point behind the poem?

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Siren Song
By Margaret Atwood

This is the one song everyone
would like to learn: the song
that is irresistible:

the song that forces men
to leap overboard in squadrons
even though they see the beached skulls

the song nobody knows
because anyone who has heard it
is dead, and the others can't remember.

Shall I tell you the secret
and if I do, will you get me
out of this bird suit?

I don't enjoy it here
squatting on this island
looking picturesque and mythical

with these two feathery maniacs,
I don't enjoy singing
this trio, fatal and valuable.

I will tell the secret to you,
to you, only to you.
Come closer. This song

is a cry for help: Help me!
Only you, only you can,
you are unique

at last. Alas
it is a boring song
but it works every time
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