

# PROMETHEUS AND PANDORA

## Vocabulary Preview

- creatures [KREE cherz]—living things; animals, insects, and birds  
Horses, butterflies, and robins are all *creatures*.
- slyness [SLY nes]—being tricky and sneaky  
The fox is known for its *slyness*.
- stubbornness [STUB ern nes]—having one's mind made up for good; being hard to deal with  
The mule is known for its *stubbornness*.
- timidity [ti MID i tee]—being afraid of things and easily frightened  
The little girl's *timidity* made her afraid of the dark.
- torch [TORCH]—a flaming light used before flashlights were invented  
The Statue of Liberty holds a *torch* in her right hand.



Would you like to have lived with the gods on Mount Olympus?

Today, probably, most of us would just as soon stay right here on earth. Science has given us a world with more magic in it than the Greeks ever dreamed of. But the Greeks would have jumped at the chance to live on Mount Olympus. The life they made up for the gods was life as they would like to have lived it.

Most of the time the gods lived a life of ease. They often gathered happily in Zeus's palace. Here they feasted on ambrosia and nectar, while the god of music played heavenly tunes. Life was one big party without an end.

Life on Mount Olympus was not only comfortable, but it was also exciting and interesting. We know that the gods and goddesses sometimes did not obey Zeus. If they were caught, they were punished. Zeus's punishments could be hard and cruel. Once he threw Vulcan [*VUL kan*], the blacksmith of the gods, off Mount Olympus. Poor Vulcan tumbled through the air for six days. He fell faster and faster. When he finally landed on the earth, he broke the bones in his right foot, and ever afterward he limped.

But Vulcan's punishment was nothing when we think of what Zeus did to Prometheus [*pro MEE thee us*], the god who brought fire to man. Here is that story.

**PROMETHEUS AND PANDORA** Long, long ago, in the days when the earth stayed green all year, human beings were not as they are today. In those times men lived much like animals. Of course, men were smarter than animals. But, since life was so easy, men never had to use their brains. Ceres saw that humans had more than enough to eat. The weather was always sunny and warm. People were not selfish, for they already had everything they wanted. Zeus

had even taken all sickness off the earth. People died only of old age.

Men were unwise and happy, but the gods were wise and bored. They looked down from Mount Olympus and saw nothing interesting on the earth. Humans wandered about happily, eating fruits, berries, and nuts when they were hungry, and sleeping in the cool shade of trees when they were tired.

This kind of life pleased men and women, but it didn't please the gods. One day Zeus decided to make some changes. "It might be a good idea," he told himself, "if the creatures on earth were different. After all, why should a man spend his days like a monkey? Or a monkey like a man?"

Not long afterward, Zeus sent for Epimetheus [*ep i MEE thee us*], a young god who was not busy at the time. Zeus gave Epimetheus two boxes, a large one and a small one.

"I want you to take these boxes down to earth," Zeus ordered. "The big box is full of differences."

"Differences?" Epimetheus repeated.

"Yes," Zeus said, "differences—things to make the creatures of the earth different from each other. I want you to pass them out to the creatures on earth."

Epimetheus scratched his head. "What differences do I give to what creatures?" he asked.

"It doesn't matter," Zeus replied. "Just so you make things interesting."

"Is the little box full of differences, too?" asked Epimetheus.

"Ah!" the king of the gods answered. "That is Zeus's secret. All you need to remember is not to open the little box, unless you hear from me." Then Zeus slapped Epimetheus on the back. "On your way, now. The longer you stand around Mount Olympus, the longer I am bored."

Epimetheus wanted to ask Zeus more questions, but he

didn't dare. One didn't question Zeus's orders. One just obeyed them. The young god put one box on each shoulder and sped off through the gate of clouds.

Soon Epimetheus was on earth, walking along the dirt road that led from Mount Olympus. The boxes seemed to grow heavier and heavier. The god's arms and shoulders ached, for on earth he was no stronger than a man. Finally Epimetheus put the boxes down by the roadside. He sat down on the big box to rest.

A dusty, tired mouse came walking down the center of the road. The little animal didn't seem to notice Epimetheus. It had no enemies to watch for, and the young god looked much like a man.

Epimetheus stood up. "Stop a minute, mouse," he said. "I have a gift for you from the all-knowing Zeus." He opened the big box. The first difference he took out was strength.

"I can't give strength to such a tiny animal," Epimetheus thought. He put strength back in the box and looked for something more mouse-like. Timidity was hiding in a corner. Epimetheus gave timidity to the mouse. Suddenly frightened, the mouse took one look at the god and ran off into the bushes, as fast as its little legs would carry it.

The news spread quickly. Creatures big and little came running and flying to Epimetheus. They made a huge circle around the young god with the boxes. One by one, Epimetheus handed out the differences. He gave strength to the bear, loyalty to the dog, and cleanliness to the cat. Courage went to the lion, wisdom to the owl, and laziness to the pig. The bee got busyness, the fox got slyness, and the mule got stubbornness. Epimetheus went on passing out differences. Finally the box was empty. The animals went away, talking loudly about whose difference was the best.

Epimetheus was left alone by the side of the road. His

job was done, and he was now very tired. The sun was setting, so he decided to spend the night on earth. He could just as well return to Mount Olympus the next day. He found a bed of soft grass. The little box was just the right size for a pillow.

Epimetheus had had a hard day. He lay down and closed his eyes. But just as he was going to sleep, he heard a voice: "What difference did you save for me?"

Epimetheus opened his eyes. He had made a terrible mistake. Man had been given no difference. And man was Zeus's favorite creature!

Epimetheus sat up and looked at the man. Then he looked at the raised lid of the empty box. "I have nothing left," he groaned. "The box is empty."

"What's in the little box?" the man asked.

"Only Zeus knows," answered Epimetheus. He felt very sad. He wanted to open the little box and give the man whatever was inside, but he remembered Zeus's warning. At any moment one of Zeus's bolts of lightning might flash down out of the sky.

Epimetheus knew he had to act quickly. First he called an eagle. Then he wrote a message to his brother Prometheus [*pro MEE thee us*]: SEND SOMETHING FOR MAN BEFORE ZEUS DISCOVERS MY MISTAKE. Finally he tied the note around the eagle's leg, and sent the bird flying off toward Mount Olympus.

When Prometheus received his brother's message, he knew right away what he would send—*fire*. For many years Prometheus had looked down at humans and felt sorry for them. He had often thought what man could do with the help of fire. But now Prometheus wasted no time thinking. He hurried to the palace of the sun-god to get a flaming torch.

Zeus noticed Prometheus as he was leaving the sun-god's palace with a large torch in his hands. "What can Prometheus be up to now?" Zeus asked himself. "We have no need for fire here on Mount Olympus."

When Prometheus reached the gate of clouds, he found Zeus waiting for him. The king of the gods stood quietly with his arms folded. He had an angry look on his face.

"Just what do you think you're doing with that torch?" Zeus asked.

Prometheus told the truth. He knew better than to lie to the all-knowing Zeus.

"You must not take fire to man!" Zeus thundered. "Not now, and not ever. Is that understood?"

Prometheus nodded. For a moment he stared at the tops of his shoes. Then he looked Zeus straight in the eye. "I think the mighty Zeus is selfish and thinks only of his own glory," he said slowly.

No one talked to Zeus like that. Prometheus expected Zeus to punish him, but the king of the gods made a long speech instead.

"Have you thought what would happen if men had fire?" Zeus asked. "They would be able to cook meat. Soon they would be killing other animals. They would melt gold and silver into coins, and start selling things for money. They would be able to get iron from rocks. With iron they could make guns and start killing each other. Wars would start. They might even learn how to make machines that could fly through the air, right over Mount Olympus." With one hand Zeus imitated an airplane in the sky above his head. "Oh," he groaned, "it's all too terrible to think about." And then, shaking his head sadly, he returned to his palace.

Prometheus stood by the gate of clouds, still holding the burning torch in his hands. What *would* humans do with

fire? He thought about what Zeus had said. It was true, of course, that men might use fire to kill each other. But it was also true that fire could make their lives more comfortable. There were thousands of interesting things men could do, if only they had fire.

Prometheus had spent many years watching men. He thought he knew them pretty well. He thought they could be trusted. Suddenly he opened the gate of clouds. Holding the lighted torch high above his head, he ran down to earth.

Prometheus knew he would be punished. But he had never dreamed of a punishment like the one he was to receive. When Zeus heard what Prometheus had done, he sent for Vulcan [*VUL kan*], the blacksmith of Mount Olympus. Vulcan was ordered to make a set of strong iron chains. Prometheus was chained to a huge rock high on a mountain. Here the hot sun burned into his skin. Rain whipped his helpless body. Ugly birds pecked at him when he tried to sleep. Many years were to pass before he would be rescued by a strong man named Hercules [*HUR kew leez*].

As for Epimetheus, he was not brave enough to return to Mount Olympus. He stayed on earth, hoping Zeus would forget, and maybe forgive.

But Zeus did not forget. Every day he looked down at the earth and saw humans busy with their new fires. The gods and goddesses tried to cheer Zeus up, but he refused to smile.

When Zeus finally did smile, it was a sly smile. "Epimetheus must be lonesome down on earth," he told the gods and goddesses. "Come, let's make a wife to keep him company. We shall make as perfect a woman as we can."

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self. When the woman was finished, Zeus breathed life into  
her. She opened her eyes and smiled.

"Your name is Pandora [*pan DOR a*]," Zeus told her.  
"You were made on Mount Olympus to be a wife for Epime-  
theus."

A short time later, Pandora walked into the house that  
Epimetheus had built for himself on earth. "My name is  
Pandora," she said. "I was made on Mount Olympus to  
be a wife for Epimetheus."

Epimetheus blinked his eyes. He had expected Zeus to  
send a thunderbolt, not a beautiful wife. Could there be  
some trick?

"In fact," Pandora added, "we are married already, I  
think."

Then Epimetheus took a closer look at Pandora. He  
couldn't take his eyes off her. Suddenly she smiled, and  
his doubts were gone for good.

Epimetheus had never been so happy as he was with  
Pandora. They passed their days much like humans. Epime-  
theus searched for food while Pandora looked after the house.  
Sometimes they took long walks together. They watched  
men doing things with fire. Pandora learned the names of  
the plants and animals of the earth. Epimetheus taught her  
everything she wanted to know—except one thing. He would  
not tell her what was in the little box that he kept on the  
top shelf of the bedroom closet.

"Please," Pandora teased him. "Just one little peek?"

"No!" said her husband. "Zeus said never to open it, and  
that's that!"

One day Pandora was cleaning the closet shelves. She  
lifted the box down and set it on the bed. Surely one little

look wouldn't hurt. "After all," she told herself, "it isn't as if I were going to *steal* anything."

Pandora reached down and opened the latch on the box. The lid shot open with a bang. Out of the box flew greed, hunger, and fear.

It was a box full of troubles! Pandora tried to close the lid, but the escaping troubles were too much for her. Measles, mumps, and chicken pox went out through the window. Pandora threw herself down on the bed. Soon the pillow was soaked with tears.

When Epimetheus arrived home, the last of the troubles were flying out the window and into the world. He raced into the house. Pandora lay crying on the bed. The open box was beside her.

"What have you done?" Epimetheus cried.

Pandora could not look at her husband. "Yes, I opened it," she said into the pillow. "The box was full of troubles, and I opened it."

Epimetheus stepped over to look inside the box. Something moved. The box was *not* empty!

Epimetheus took a closer look. There in the bottom, almost crushed by the escaping troubles, lay hope!

A shout of joy filled the room. "Get up!" Epimetheus yelled. "Look! Look in the box!"

Slowly Pandora rose to her feet. She peered into the box. Then she looked up at Epimetheus and smiled.

"The world may be full of troubles," Epimetheus told her, "but things won't be too bad, so long as we still have hope."

And Epimetheus was right. For from that day to this, hope has been man's best friend in a world full of troubles.

## A time-tested tale:

**PYGMALION** Pandora, as we have read, was made by the gods on Mount Olympus. Here is a story about a woman who was put together right here on earth.

Pygmalion [*pig MAY li on*] was a famous maker of statues. He could turn a block of stone into a statue that looked more real than life itself. It is said that when a person first saw one of his statues, it appeared for an instant to be moving. Hunters used to shoot arrows at his stone animals, and people were forever saying things to his statues of men and women.

No one becomes perfect without practice, and Pygmalion had practiced twelve hours a day for many years. His practice had started when he was fifteen years of age. He had been jilted by a girl he loved dearly. From that day on, Pygmalion hated women and girls. He thought them stupid, dishonest, and more trouble than they were worth. If he had since made the greatest statues on earth, he had also made himself the world's loneliest man. He never spoke to women. This was too bad, for he was still young, strong, and handsome.

One day Pygmalion had an idea. "If the perfect woman cannot be found," he told himself, "I shall make her myself out of stone!"

The longer Pygmalion thought about his idea, the better he liked it. He searched all over Greece until he found a perfect piece of white stone. Then he set to work. Never had he taken more care. A creature of breath-taking beauty slowly took shape under his hammer.

Finally the day came when the statue was finished. Pygmalion stepped back to look at his work.

In front of him, carved out of white stone, was beauty itself! Pygmalion sighed. He could feel himself falling in love with the piece of stone. Try as he would, he could not help dashing forward to kiss the statue.

But the stone lips were hard and cold against his.

Pygmalion cried out to the heavens. If there was anything worse than falling in love with a girl, it was falling in love with a statue! He fell to the floor and beat his fists against his head. There was nothing he could do. All his skill could not put one drop of blood into the stone body.

It happened that soon there came the holiday in honor of Venus. This was the biggest celebration of the year. People danced in the streets and sang songs before the altar of the goddess of beauty. Pygmalion, when he had done his part, went forward and stood before the altar. "O Venus," he said, "who can do all things, give me a wife as beautiful as my stone statue."

But deep in his heart, Pygmalion knew that this was impossible. How could Venus grant his prayer? There *was* no woman as beautiful as his statue. As he walked home his sadness increased. Tears flowed down his cheeks when he opened the door and saw the statue he had come to love.

Suddenly Pygmalion blinked. He rubbed his eyes and looked again at the statue. Was it possible? Was the stone beginning to change color?

As Pygmalion watched, the stone cheeks of the statue started to turn pink. The lips moved and grew red. The eyes turned blue. Blood ran through the body.

"My love!" cried Pygmalion, rushing forward with joy.

And the statue?

She blushed.