

If anything has stood the test of time in the world of storytelling it is the myths and legends of ancient Greece. For over 3000 years these stories of gods, heroes and monsters have been told and retold, each time attracting a new audience. Plays, poetry, movies and books all use Greek characters to tell the human story. Hundreds of words are part of our daily vocabulary because of their use in myths. It's easy to understand what a Herculean task is or why a person has a Narcissistic personality if you know the myth behind the phrase. I can remember iconic movies like *Jason and the Argonauts* from my childhood. Later came the *Clash of the Titans* (the first one with Laurence Olivier as Zeus). A few summers ago a new group of children fell in love with Greek myth all over again with the printing of *Percy and the Olympians: The Lightning Thief* and the movie tie-in. We have all 5 books in this series in our library and they are constantly checked out.

Our 4<sup>th</sup> graders started their Greek myths and legends unit when they returned from Spring Break. The Common Core Standards for English Language Arts in grade 4 actually mention myths. One standard is "Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including those that allude to significant characters found in mythology (e.g. Herculean). Another one is "Compare and contrast the treatment of similar themes and topics (e.g., opposition of good and evil) and patterns of events (e.g., the quest) in stories, myths, and traditional literature from different cultures. " And, finally, one that asks the children to, "Make connections between the text of a story or drama and a visual or oral presentation of the text, identifying where each version reflects specific descriptions and directions in the text." But instead of just making the connections in writing or during a class discussion, the fourth grade students will be creating their own oral and visual presentations and perform them for their classmates and parents.

This week the students received an overview of the unit and all the activities they will be completing. In class they have been looking at various versions of the same Greek myth. The class I sat in on last week was looking at *Pandora's Box* and *Arachne and Athena*. They were completing Venn diagrams finding similarities and differences between the two versions. In one Pandora seemed just curious about what was in the forbidden box. In the other she was more greedy and calculating. It is always interesting to see just how difficult the abstract elements of the story can be to 4<sup>th</sup> graders. They saw the moral of the story as 'you're supposed to follow directions.' Getting them to understand the concept that hope can exist in the midst of all kinds of troubles and challenges went right over their heads at first. It took a lot of discussion with the teacher to get them to look deeper than a surface message.

As a culminating activity the students will be writing, making and performing in puppet shows for their classmates. Instead of just talking about connections between a text and a visual or oral presentation, they will be creating a show of their own. They will learn about the role the chorus plays in Greek theater, how to represent their characters' qualities, how to use their voice to represent different emotions. They will be creating simple puppets to represent the characters in the myth they choose to perform. Writing a script based on their selected myth and then having a few rehearsals. Finally there will be the actual performances where the students will be able to see each other's work.

We could have held class discussions and compared myths that way. We could have had students write papers. But we know that children learn so much more when they actually create something that is uniquely theirs. They will remember the elements of a myth, the characteristics of the gods and heroes, and the components of Greek theater by, on a limited scale, dramatizing a myth of their own choice. We like this kind of active learning because we know it works the best for children. I think they have a date planned where parents can come and see the results of their work. I hope you will be able to attend.