Echoes from Mount Olympus

Greek Mythology
Cluster II

How does myth explain nature?
“Arachne”

• Reading Hint
  ○ *Arachnid* stands for the eight-legged class of insect that includes spiders

• Thinking Skill
  ○ Evaluate Arachne’s behavior. When Arachne recognized Athena, should she have done something differently? If so, what?

• Extension
  ○ Metamorphosis: Greek myths often feature a mortal who is transformed into a nonhuman creature because of pride.
    ▪ Into what would you turn a person who is spiteful? Lazy? Loud?
“Arachne”

• Discussion Q’s
  ○ What are the different explanations for Arachne’s skilled weaving?
  ○ Why do you think that the people who watch her weave and Arachne herself have different explanations for her skill?
  ○ Why does Athena turn Arachne into a spider instead of saving her life or just letting her die?
“Arachne”

Class Assignment

Objective Summary

- Write an objective summary of the myth of Arachne. Remember that a summary highlights the most important events in a story. Personal opinions and judgments are not included in an objective summary.
Contradictory Deities

In “The Wise Goddess: Athena,” Athena is described as a gentle deity who makes life easier for humans. In this story, the readers see a goddess who gives in to her jealousy, anger, and need for power. The opening essay on p.9-11 suggests that perhaps the ancient Greeks learned humility from their erratic deities.

- Do you think changes in mood make the Olympian Gods seem more or less powerful?
- How might the erratic behavior of the gods explain natural events?
"Artemis, Orion, & the Seven Sisters"

**Reading Hint**
- Artemis is the protector of animals as well as the goddess of hunting
- Apollo is the god of truth

**Thinking Skill**
- Evaluate Apollo’s attitude toward Orion’s friendship with Artemis. What does it say about the gods’ relationships with humans?
“Artemis, Orion, & the Seven Sisters”

• Discussion Q’s
  ○ Who is Artemis’ twin brother?
  ○ Orion is a mighty hunter and loves Artemis. What does he do to demonstrate his affection?
  ○ Why doesn’t Orion approach Artemis and tell her of his love?
  ○ Why does Artemis transform the creatures she loves into stars?
“Artemis, Orion, & the Seven Sisters”

- **Theme**
  - The lesson or insight into life expressed through the story and that can be supported with textual evidence.

- **In small groups, find two themes and support them with textual evidence**
  - Look at the details that support each theme; do the themes interact at all? How?
“Demeter & Persephone”

• Reading Hints
  ◦ He Who Receives Many Guests/He Who Has Many Names is Hades, god of the underworld and leader of the dead.

• Thinking Skill
  ◦ Evaluate Zeus’s response to Demeter’s grief. What finally got his attention and caused him to take action?
“Demeter & Persephone”

- Discussion Q’s
  - Why does Helios believe that Hades would be a good choice of husband?
  - Why does the poet refer to Zeus as “black-clouded”?
  - Demeter is the earth goddess, responsible for growing things and for agriculture. How would you evaluate her helpfulness to mortals?
  - What effect does the poet’s and translator’s choice of words have on the story?
The blind poet Homer is best known as the author of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. Little is known about him except that he lived in the 9th century B.C. Some even think he might be fictional.

- His style was known and imitated by poets in the 6th century B.C.
- Homeric hymns were presented at festivals/gatherings as songs.
“Demeter & Persephone”

Special Focus: Poems & Songs

- What are some of the lessons that this hymn presents?
- What kinds of music today tell stories or deliver messages?
- Can you recall or sing (recite) any lyrics that had a deep impact on you?
- What do you think a message gains when music accompanies the words?
**“Persephone, Falling”**

**Reading Hint**
- The first verse of “Persephone, Falling” is a **succinct** version of the Poem “Demeter & Persephone”
- How does Dove draw on the myth to write the poem?

**Extension**
- **Slant Rhyme**: linking words with similar sounds such as “stick” with “pit” or “school” with “fooling.”
- Look for other examples of slant rhyming in the poem.
“Persephone, Falling”

Discussion Q’s

- In the first stanza, we are told, “he claimed his due.” Who is “he?”
- What does “he claimed his due” mean?
- How do the last two lines of the poem differ in tone from the rest? How does this difference help develop the point of view of the narrator?
- What do the words, “This is how easily the pit opens. This is how one foot sinks into the ground” mean?
“Persephone, Falling”

Special Focus: Cautionary Poem

- A cautionary poem tells a story with dire consequences in order to show readers what to avoid. In this poem, Dove retells the myth in the first stanza and then uses the second stanza to issue a warning.
  - How might the sentence “Keep your eyes down” be interpreted?
  - What other warnings do you hear often?
    - When are they sensible, and when do they keep people from taking appropriate risks?
“Persephone, Falling”

- Cautionary Poem
  - Small Group Task
    - In your small groups, brainstorm about a past selection from this text that would be a good model for poem like “Persephone, Falling”
    - Use the first stanza to summarize/outline the myth
    - Use the second stanza to issue a warning that begins with the word “Remember”

- Hints: Use the class today to decide as a group which story you want to write about. Use the weekend to have group members brainstorm warnings for your audiences taken from the story.
“Echo & Narcissus”

• Reading Hint
  ◦ A Greek nymph is not a deity and is not immortal; however, nymphs can live for several thousand years.

• Retaliation: getting even is a MAJOR theme in Greek mythology.
  ◦ How is this theme conveyed in the details for this story?
“Echo & Narcissus”

• **Discussion Q’s**
  - What is Hera’s relationship to Zeus?
  - Why are the nymphs in the company of Zeus trying to escape when Hera appears?
  - Why did Hera punish Echo instead of retaliating against her husband?
  - Why did the gods punish Narcissus?
Special Focus: Explaining Nature

Most ancient cultures told origin stories—innovative accounts about how familiar things came to be. For example, hearing an echo must have been a curious experience for the ancient Greeks.

Why do you think the Greeks personified such things as echoes?
“Narcissus at 60”

- Reading Hint:
  - This poem is a contemporary “what if” response to the Greek myth about Narcissus

- Thinking Skill
  - Imagine what it will be like to grow old.

- Extension: Then & Now
  - In Greek myths, the gods never aged—apparently a youthful appearance was highly valued.
    - Cite evidence concerning whether a youthful appearance is still highly valued today.
“Narcissus at 60”

• Discussion Q’s
  o The myth about Narcissus says that, unable to tear himself away from his own reflection, he just faded away and died. How is Pastan’s version different?
  o The phrase “drowned in his own perfection” may be symbolic. What could it possibly mean?
  o What does “the old conspiracy between the eye and its reflection” mean?
  o What does the phrase “just beneath the lethal skin of the water” mean?
“Narcissus at 60”

Special Focus: Vanity

- In this selection, Narcissus is punished for his vanity, or excessive pride in his appearance.
  - What would happen if people took all of the time they spent on their looks and instead used it for studying, theorizing, inventing, and thinking?
  - What kind of assumptions, whether positive or negative, do people make about those who are exceptionally good-looking?
  - Do you agree with the saying “good looks are in the eye of the beholder”?
  - What might eventually happen to a person who relies too heavily on his or her looks?