

Mythical Stories from Different Cultures: The Story of Arachne

A long time ago, in ancient Greece, there lived a young girl called Arachne. She was the daughter of a shepherd and, from a young age, she taught herself how to weave using wool. For years, Arachne wove pictures of animals and landscapes, taking inspiration from her home. By the time she was an adult, Arachne's work was so famous that people would travel for thousands of miles to see it.

As Arachne became more and more talented, people began to tell her how amazing she was. Not only were people impressed by her work but they had also begun to compare her to the gods. Every day, people would flock to Arachne and tell her that she was more brilliant than any

god. The more praise she was given, the more Arachne believed that she was the best.



Meanwhile, on Mount Olympus, the goddess Athena had heard about a girl who was claiming to be a god. Angered by the idea that someone would say they were more talented than a god, Athena hatched a plan to confront Arachne.

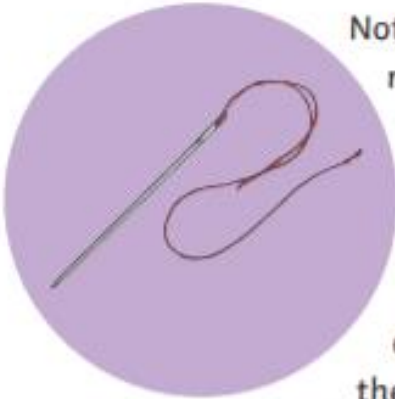
A few days later, dressed in rags and wearing a convincing mask, Athena knocked on Arachne's door. "I have come to warn you, my child," Athena rasped. "You should never have compared yourself to the gods." She looked pleadingly at Arachne. "Say your apologies now and Athena will forgive you."

Initially, Arachne was shocked by the sudden appearance of such a strange figure but soon a small smile appeared on her face. "Pah!" she laughed. "Beg for forgiveness? Why should I? You've seen my tapestries; I'm better than any human or any god. If Athena wants an apology, she can come down here and challenge me for it."



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Anger swept through Athena as she pulled off the mask and revealed herself. Now, at full height, her magnificent and ominous form threw a shadow over Arachne. "I accept your challenge," she whispered in a cold voice.



Not put off by the sudden appearance of a god in her room, Arachne got to her feet right away and began to gather the finest threads she had. Both women started immediately and, for hours, the only noise that could be heard was the gentle sound of working hands.

Several hours into the night, Athena declared that the duel was over and demanded that Arachne bring her the finished piece. With tired, blistered fingers, Arachne held her tapestry up to the lamplight. Her scene was beautiful. It showed gods being mean to humans and not being punished. Even in the low light, it was clear to see that this was a masterpiece. Athena's work, which showed the gods punishing humans who misspoke about them, was nowhere near as fine.

Athena was furious that she had lost and immediately tore Arachne's work into hundreds of tiny pieces. Arachne screamed at her to stop but it was too late; the tapestry was ruined. She fell to the floor and sobbed, wondering how she could have been so foolish as to enter into a competition she would never have been allowed to win. Nobody would ever buy work from her again.

However, Athena was still furious with Arachne and withdrew a small bag of poisonous herbs from her pocket. She sprinkled them over the weeping Arachne, who stopped crying at once. Suddenly, her legs began to shake and change until eight thin, sharp legs were growing from her instead. Her body was now covered in a thin layer of black hair and a small thread hung from her abdomen.

"Well, you can now weave all day long!" cried Athena; power danced in her eyes as she looked at the hideous beast before her. "You, a spider, better than the gods? I don't think so."



Questions

1. What did Arachne's **final** tapestry show? Tick one.

- A creature with eight thin legs.
- The gods going unpunished for being mean to humans.
- Humans being punished by the gods for misspeaking.
- Animals, flowers and landscapes.

2. Number the events from 1-4 to show they order that they happened.

	Arachne realised that she had been a fool.
	The old lady revealed herself to be Athena.
	Arachne produces a masterpiece.
	Arachne grew more and more talented.

3. Tick one word to complete the sentence.

When Athena tore up her work, Arachne was _____.

- angry
- distraught
- confused
- weaving

4. Draw four lines to match each character with their action.

the shepherd
Arachne
Athena
crowds of people

became angered by Arachne's claims
told Arachne she was brilliant
had a daughter named Arachne
taught herself how to weave

5. Look at the paragraph beginning: **Meanwhile, on Mount Olympus...**

Find and copy the group of words that mean 'thought of an idea'.

6. What does Athena do to punish Arachne for beating her?

7. **With tired, blistered fingers...**

Explain why the author has used this phrase.

8. Some people believe that Athena's reaction was extreme. Imagine that you are Athena.

How would you have reacted to Arachne winning the competition?
