

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 the wool her father brought home with him. For years, Arachne wove pictures of animals, people, landscapes and anything else which inspired her. By the time she was an adult, Arachne's work was so well known that people would travel for thousands of miles to see her incredible pictures.

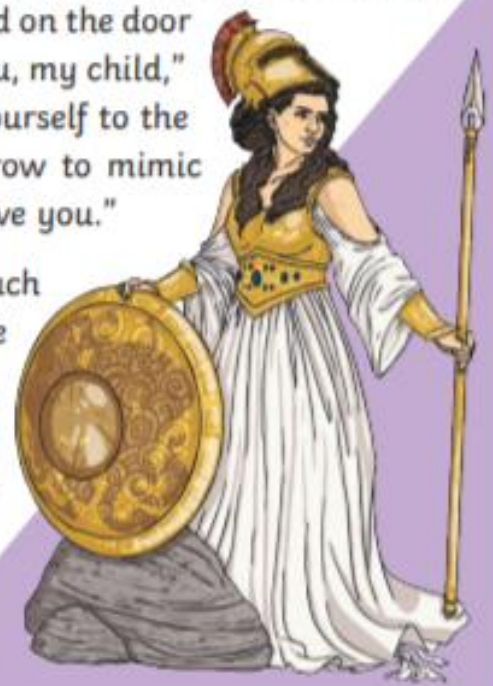
As Arachne's talent flourished, so did the praise that she received. Not only were people impressed by her work but they had now begun to compare her to the gods. Every day, people would flock to Arachne and declare that she possessed a godlike talent. The more praise was lavished upon her, the more Arachne started to believe that she was more talented than any god.



Meanwhile, high on Mount Olympus (the home of many Greek gods) Athena, the goddess of war, had heard about a girl who was claiming to be a god. Enraged by the idea that someone had dismissed the very gods who gave them their gifts, Athena hatched a plan to confront Arachne while disguised as an old woman.

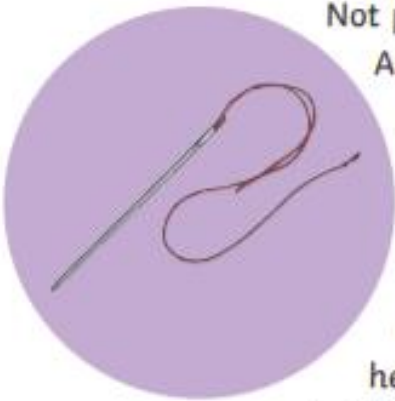
A few days later, dressed in rags and wearing an incredibly convincing mask, Athena knocked on the door of Arachne's weaving room. "I have come to warn you, my child," Athena rasped. "You should never have compared yourself to the gods." Athena wiped a shaking hand across her brow to mimic fear. "Say your apologies now and Athena will forgive you."

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



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Anger surged through Athena; she pulled off the mask and discarded the old rags that surrounded her. Now at full height, her magnificent and ominous form loomed over Arachne. "I accept your challenge," she whispered in a slow, 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 got to work immediately and, for hours, the only noise that could be heard was the soft sound of working hands.

Several hours into the night, Athena declared that the duel was over and that Arachne should bring forward her piece for comparison. With blistered fingers, Arachne held her tapestry up to the lamplight. She had beautifully crafted a scene in which gods were mistreating humans and going unpunished. Even in the dim light, it was clear to see that this was a masterpiece. Athena's, which depicted the gods winning a fight against humans who had forsaken them, paled in comparison.

Athena was furious to be beaten and tore Arachne's work into hundreds of tiny pieces. Arachne screamed at her to stop but it was no use; the tapestry was ruined. Knowing that she should have been victorious and feeling ridiculous for allowing herself to be tricked into a fight that she could never win, Arachne fell to the floor and sobbed. Nobody would ever buy her work again; she was such a fool.

However, Athena didn't think that this was punishment enough and withdrew a small bag of poisonous herbs from her pocket. She sprinkled them over the weeping Arachne, who stopped crying at once. Suddenly, Arachne's legs began to shake and split until eight thin, sharp legs had taken their place. Her body was 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; a venomous look of joy and power danced in her eyes as she looked at the hideous beast in front of her. "You, a spider, better than the gods? I don't think so."



Questions

1. Draw four lines to match each event to how the characters are feeling at the time.

People travel for miles to see Arachne's work.
Athena hears that Arachne is claiming to be a god.
Arachne's work is torn into tiny pieces.
Arachne is praised by everyone.

distraught
impressed
proud
furious

2. What did Athena's tapestry depict? Tick one.

- Gods fighting humans and winning.
- Gods going unpunished for mistreating humans.
- The gods on top of Mount Olympus.
- Gods and humans living together peacefully.

3. Look at the paragraph beginning **Anger surged through...**

Find and copy one word which means 'threatening'.

4. Fill in the missing words.

After duelling for several _____, Arachne had blisters on her _____.

5. Why did Arachne feel foolish?

6. Describe Athena's character. Explain your answer.

7. What do you think will happen next to Arachne? Explain your answer.

8. What lesson do you think that people might learn from reading this story? Explain your answer.
