

Greek mythology stories are the genesis for many useful words in English

aegis - The piece of defensive armor or protective shield carried by Zeus, the sight of which filled enemies with horror.

epicurean - Epicurus, the founder of a school of philosophy, believed the supreme goal in life should be pleasure.

mentor - Faithful adviser to whom Odysseus entrusted the education of his son, Telemachus, while he fought at Troy.

chimerical - Chimera, a fire-breathing monster with a lion head, goat body, and dragon tail.

labyrinth - Built to contain the monster Minotaur (cleverly killed by Theseus), this maze was a masterpiece of confusion.

palladium - The statue of Pallas was prophesied to protect the city of Troy as long as it remained inside the city's walls.

museum - The Muses, nine Greek goddesses, presided over arts and literature. This structure was the name of their temple.

narcissism - Narcissus fell in love with himself after seeing his own reflection in a pool. He pined away and died of despair.

herculean - Hera, wife of Zeus, arranged for Hercules to be given penance of performing twelve, apparently impossible, tasks.

laconic - The disciplined and militaristic Spartans were known for being blunt and using words sparingly.

zephyr - This mild west wind is the harbinger of spring and always supplants the cold northerly winds of winter.

Nemesis - This goddess doled out rewards for noble acts but vengeance for evil ones. Punishment wasn't always immediate.

odyssey - Homer's hero had adventures with Calypso, Circe, and The Cyclops, among others, before returning to Troy.

Meander - A Turkish river which was proverbial in ancient times for its crooked and wandering course.

stoical - A Greek philosophical school believing that one should avoid joy, grief, and passions in order to obtain wisdom.

Protean - This sea-god would reveal the secret of getting home, but he had to be caught first before he changed forms.

Flora - The name of the goddess of spring and flowering plants, esp. wild flowers and plants not raised for food.

ambrosia - Homer, in *The Iliad*, said that Zeus sent out his workers every day to bring back this delicious substance.

hermetic - Hermes was the god who conducted souls to the judges of the Underworld where one's afterlife was determined.

promethean - Prometheus protected the human race from Zeus and taught them all the arts and skills to make humans unique.

nectar - Beverage of the gods like the divine food, ambrosia, conferring immortality on any mortal lucky enough find it.

sibylline - In *The Aeneid*, a priestess delivered a prophesy that led Aeneas to his father in the Underworld.

tantalize - Tantalus so offended the gods that he was condemned in the afterlife to an eternity of hunger and thirst.

delphic - The oracle of Apollo in Delphi made pronouncements that would be the right answer regardless of the outcome.

halcyon - This is the Greek word for kingfisher, a bird of classical legend, that the Greeks believed could nest at sea.

platonic - The Greek philosopher, Plato, believed that physical objects are weak representations of their ideal form.

draconian - Draco, an Athenian legislator in the 600s B.C., was noted for the severity of his code of laws.

Calypso - She was the sea nymph who detained Odysseus for seven years on her lush and hidden island of Ogygia.