**Classics 1 Lesson 3: The Birth of Man (and Woman!)**

**The Birth of Man:**

Following the creation story and the Titanomachy, the gods were firmly established and in control. Zeus now set about populating the world that he ruled over, so that the gods would have a plentiful supply of crops, wine, and meat to enjoy. Given that Prometheus, which means foresight, had been smart enough to join Zeus in fighting against the titans, Zeus trusted him with the task of populating the world.

His project was to take some mud and create men, who looked like the gods but in miniature. In some versions of the story Prometheus then breathes life into them, whilst in others Zeus asked Athena to breathe life into them. Meanwhile, Prometheus’ brother Epimetheus, was tasked with creating animals, and providing them with special qualities such as fur, strength, flight and wings. When it came to man, Epimetheus had run out of gifts, so Prometheus made them the only creature to stand up on two legs like the gods, but he knew that man would be weak in the world with no special qualities, so he took a risk with significant consequences.

**Playing with Fire:**

Zeus had been quite clear that Prometheus was to ensure that these little miniature god-like figures were **mortal** and that they did not have the gift of fire, as Zeus wanted them to be easy to control, and to serve the gods. Perhaps fearing that man was too weak without it, or perhaps because he felt some sort of love and affection for his creation, Prometheus stole fire from Mount Olympus, and gave it to man. He then taught them skills which allowed them to build tools and to develop civilisation. Zeus was furious at this deception and demanded that humans make a regular sacrifice to make up for it. Prometheus oversaw the first sacrifice and offered Zeus the choice of two offerings, one of which would be made to the gods by humans forever. The choices were the best bits of the animal, or the bones, but Prometheus had covered the best bits with the guts, whilst the bones were covered with plump looking fat. Zeus was furious to find he had been tricked when he chose the bones, but the deal had been made and humans would forever burn bones and fat as an offering to the gods, whilst keeping the meat to eat.

This is a clear example of a myth being used to explain a **cultural norm**, or way of behaving, of Greek life. Whilst we call the myths stories, and that is correct for us, to the Greeks we must remember that this was the religion that they followed. Unlike modern religions, it was not written down, nor was it as organised or universal as something like the Catholic Church, but it was a sincerely held belief. Whilst Hesiod’s is the first surviving attempt to catalogue these myths, even in the dark ages they were passed down from generation to generation. This leads to different versions of the same myths in different parts of the country and to sometimes extreme variations in the endings of some myths, but if anything, it shows that these were not just stories, which could not have survived thousands of years, but sincerely believed explanations for the way that things were. Prometheus tricking Zeus so that man would have the best bit of the animal was an explanation for being able to give a gift to the gods that was not really a gift at all (these bits would all be thrown away anyway) but truly believing that you were serving the gods by doing so.

**The Birth of Woman!**

Zeus in his rage had to punish Prometheus, and he also chose to punish man. Prometheus was immortal as a titan (2nd generation god) so Zeus came up with a painful way of ensuring that he would not forget what he had done. He was chained to a mountain on which a huge mountain eagle would rip his liver out each day, before it grew back each night (he was immortal after all). For humans though, the punishment was more devastating; those who had known only happiness and peace were about to have their world changed forever, in the form of the first woman.

**Pandora**, as she was called, was created for Zeus by Hephaestus, and she was the most beautiful being in creation. She was given to Epimetheus as a gift, but with the condition that she never open the jar that she had been sent to earth with. (Mistaken down the years for a box after being mistranslated by Erasmus). Accounts differ of when she opened the box, or tipped out the jar, and why, but the outcome is the same; from the jar came flying out forces of evil, perhaps as moth like creatures, including poverty, disease, famine, jealousy and other miseries. Pandora managed to shut the box/jar keeping just one thing in it, which was hope. In some accounts this is taken to be a bad thing, because hope was now enforced on humans and would lead them to keep believing that things could be better whilst enduring terrible suffering in their life, whilst in others it is a good thing because it is the force that allows us to enjoy life and look forward to things.

Between the creation of man and the creation of woman, the myths are very similar to **the Book of Genesis** in the bible. In the Judeo-Christian religions, the Old Testament records that Adam was made by God from dust, and that Eve was made from Adam’s rib. They lived without shame or fear in the Garden of Eden, until Eve ate an apple from the tree that they had been told not to eat from (hence the term forbidden fruit) and she gave some to Adam (hence the idea of men having an Adam’s Apple) after which God banished them from Eden. These stories draw from the same ideas as Pandora’s curiosity, and of Prometheus creating men from mud.

**Relationship Between the Gods and Mortals:**

At various points the gods and mortals interacted, and there were various outcomes, but the overall outcome was generally favourable to the gods, since they were powerful immortal beings, whilst humans were mortal and had no special powers. Some myths show gods being particularly cruel to humans or displaying what we might consider human qualities such as jealousy. The myth of Arachne fits with what we have been studying; she was the best weaver or spinner in the world and could make beautiful garments which people came from far and wide to see. Athena was enraged and challenged Arachne to a competition, in which Athena wove a tapestry in which the gods were shown in all their power. Arachne responded with a tapestry in which she showed the gods being cruel to humans. Athena was so angry that she turned Arachne into a spider, explaining where spiders come from, why they have the power of weaving webs and where the name arachnid originates.

Other myths are similarly cruel, such as how foolish King Midas was treated. Famously he was given the ability to turn things to gold, which he gave up when it became more of a curse than a blessing, but less well-known is that he insulted Apollo, the god of music, by saying that Pan was a better musician, and that jealous and spiteful Apollo turned Midas's ears into donkey’s ears. Whilst the relationship is almost always gods showing their power to humans, Prometheus sacrificed himself for man. Scholars debate the idea that Prometheus loved humans, or that he was simply a trickster and defied Zeus too many times, but among ancient Greeks, Prometheus was loved for what he had done. He put humans before himself and by giving them fire, the ability to walk on two legs and to keep the best bits of the animal, he made life easier and more bearable than it could have been. Heracles, also known as Hercules, who is among the more famous mortals (and in some accounts was invited to become a god – the only mortal to become immortal) released Prometheus from his chains and set him free as part of his epic tale. The relationship between the gods and humans is, above all else, complicated!

**Classics 1 Task 3: The Birth of Man (and Woman!)**

Please complete this week’s task as a word document and return it as an attachment on teams. The document title should be PUPIL NAME Classics week 3.

**Part A:**

Choose one of the two questions to answer for the first task, one about hope and one about the relationship between gods and humans. Please just do one!

The idea of hope is a powerful one; it was used by Barack Obama in his famous 2008 election campaign poster, and throughout history. Thinking about Pandora’s Jar (or box) and the fact that hope was the only thing that remained in it, do you think that this was a blessing or a curse? Answer in **less than** 300 words.

OR

The relationship between the gods and humans is complex. Using examples of myths, gods, and what you have learned (including about the underworld if you wish), how would you describe the relationship? Answer in **less than** 300 words.

**Part B:**

We mentioned Heracles (Hercules) very briefly towards the end of the lesson, but his story is one of the best-known heroic myths. In this tale, he is set twelve tasks, or labours, after mistakenly killing his own children. **Choose one of the twelve labours and write a paragraph** explaining what it was and what happened.

The twelve labours are; Nemean Lion, Hydra, Golden Hind of Artemis, Erymanthian Boar, Augean Stables, Stymphalian Birds, Cretan Bull, Mares of Diomedes, Girdle of Hippolyta, Geryon’s Cattle, Golden Apple of Hesperides, Capture Cerberus.

**Part C:**

Once again you may wish to add the words in bold to your ongoing glossary.

**Next Time:**

In the next lesson, we will build on the idea of the first woman being a way of tempting men to look at how women were treated by the myths and what it tells us.

**Further Reading:**

If you enjoyed the stories of Prometheus, Pandora, Arachne and Midas and would like to watch short animations (about 5 minutes) with more information, then check these out.

Prometheus: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U_u91SjrEOE>

Pandora: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pMdJxVjZMRI>

Arachne: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XvUHcsZOhJ8>

Midas: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nn8YGPZdCvA>

If you are looking for something quite highbrow and challenging, this 40 minute conversation about the myths on Radio 4, featuring Melvyn Bragg, Professor Mary Beard, Nick Lowe and Professor Richard Buxton is what you are looking for:

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b0093z1k> (A BBC account is required, which is free to all UK license fee payers) Other episodes of the same show about Ancient Greece (including Plato, Alexander the Great and Art) are available here - <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p01h9vvk?page=2>

Finally, if you wish to spend half an hour watching all of Heracles/Hercules’ labours then watch this: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a8YiZqBIMCo>