

Lesson 3

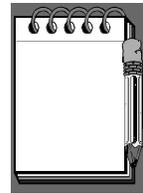
“Arachne the Weaver”

Materials Needed:

-  journal
-  pen or pencil
-  Internet access

Journal Entry

Do you think people need to feel proud of themselves? What happens when they appear to feel too much pride? Use your journal to describe your feelings about pride because of an incident you experienced or witnessed.



Vocabulary

Words to help you understand the myth



Word	Definition
loom	a machine used for weaving thread into fabric
shuttle	device in a loom used for passing yarn back and forth
tapestry	a heavy decorative fabric with an image woven in it
nemesis	foe, rival; punishment

Add these words and their definitions to the vocabulary list in your journal.

Word	Definition
revenge	punishment in return for a wrongdoing
indignant	rightfully angry; angry over an unjust action
enraged	very angry

Use a vocabulary word to complete these quotes from the myth.

1. “Arachne was _____ because her admirers said her talent was given to her by Athena.”
2. “...when Athena saw what Arachne had woven into her tapestry, she became _____.”
3. “My powers of _____ will teach this arrogant mortal a lesson.”

Guided Reading

Arachne, the best mortal weaver, believes her talent is greater than that of the goddess Athena. Her excessive pride is an example of hubris. Hubris can lead individuals to extremely negative consequences. As you read, observe the development of Arachne’s pride and see how it changes when she is challenged.

Arachne the Weaver

retold by Elizabeth Wiemann

1 Arachne was a young woman who lived in the country of Lydia. Her one great talent was weaving, which caused many of her own people, as well as citizens from neighboring countries, to come to Arachne’s home to admire her work. They enjoyed watching her performance, from the spinning of the wool into yarn to the designs she made with her shuttle. They were in awe at the detail she put into her tapestries. Everyone thought only Athena, the Goddess of Arts and Crafts, could have taught Arachne her great skill.

2 Yet, Arachne was a very proud and independent young woman. She denied she had received any help from the goddess. In fact, she arrogantly boasted she was far superior to Athena in the art of weaving. “Let the great Athena appear and challenge me to a weaving contest,”

Arachne said indignantly. “I will then prove I am the better weaver and possess greater skill.”

Athena heard these ungrateful words and became outraged at this disrespect. “I deserve respect and praise from mortals, not this lack of appreciation,” she angrily exclaimed. “My powers of revenge will teach this arrogant mortal a lesson.” Athena was determined to punish Arachne for her disrespect and decided to make an appearance before her and all of her admiring neighbors.

4 One day, as Arachne sat weaving in front of a large crowd, a strange old woman appeared before the people. “Young lady, may I interrupt you? I am old and deserve respect for my age and experience. I advise you to remain satisfied with your fame

among mortal woman, but do not challenge the great Athena. Your skill could never match that of the Goddess of Arts, the goddess who has blessed you with this talent. You should not disrespect her, but give her thanks for your skill.”

The words of the old woman caused Arachne to burn with anger. “Old woman,” she exclaimed, “maybe your own children will bother with your words of wisdom, but I have no interest in your advice. As for the great goddess, why has she not appeared? Why has she avoided our contest? Let Athena show herself and accept my challenge!”

Just then, the old woman transformed into a great, beautiful goddess. Emerging from her disguise, Athena evoked feelings of awe and admiration from all who witnessed her greatness. Only Arachne seemed to remain fearless, but even she, deep down inside, felt a twinge of fear. However, she remained stubborn and was determined to prove herself the better weaver. The goddess no longer tried to advise Arachne, and no longer did she avoid the young woman’s challenge.

The mortal and the goddess began to prepare their looms. After doing this, each weaver’s fingers moved swiftly and smoothly through the threads. As she worked, Arachne regained confidence and began to enjoy her work. Athena even seemed to enjoy the work, but she took the opportunity to again warn Arachne. As the images on her tapestry became clear, the onlookers could see that Athena wove a beautiful image of an olive tree in the middle of the fabric and in the four corners were miniature scenes, each depicting the horrible fate of arrogant women who had offended the gods with their disrespect. With these terrifying illustrations, Athena

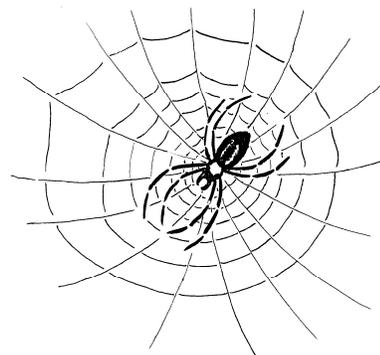
attempted to again warn Arachne about what she would suffer for her pride.

Arachne, however, was only further angered by these images and decided to use her artistry to ridicule the gods. In her tapestry, she depicted the many love affairs of Zeus, the King of the Gods - and Athena’s father.

When each weaver had finished her work, she stepped back to admire what she had done. However, when Athena saw what Arachne had woven into her tapestry, she became enraged. She could no longer tolerate the disrespect of this young mortal. The great goddess tore Arachne’s tapestry into shreds.

Arachne, in defeat and shame, knit a rope around her neck and tried to hang herself. However, Athena took pity upon her and gently touched the top of her head. Upon receiving the touch of the goddess, Arachne changed in her appearance. Her head and body shrank until all that remained was the form of a spider, with a large, black belly and eight spiny legs.

Thus, Athena saved Arachne from her



death, but did not allow her to go unpunished. Arachne was transformed into a spider, weaving beautiful, intricate webs.

Reading Comprehension: Answer thought questions using complete sentences.

- _____ 1. Which sentence best describes Athena’s response to Arachne in the myth?
- a. Athena feels pity for Arachne.
 - b. Arachne’s talent makes Athena proud.
 - c. Arachne’s disrespect irritates Athena.
 - d. Athena hopes Arachne’s skills improve.

2. In what ways does Athena try to warn Arachne not to be disrespectful? (HINT: She warns her in two specific ways.)

3. According to the myth, how does Arachne feel about herself and about Athena? Provide three details from the text to support your answer.

4. Describe the images Arachne weaves into her tapestry. How does the author's word choice help you visualize the tapestry?

5. How does Arachne treat Athena? How does she further insult Athena with her tapestry?

6. What is Arachne's reaction to her defeat? What is her nemesis? (What quality or character trait did Arachne have which led to her problem with Athena?)

7. What natural phenomenon does this myth attempt to explain? What is the author's message?

8. What are some of the human characteristics Athena possesses and how do they relate to her actions?

9. Use the Internet or an encyclopedia to find the scientific name or classification for *spider*.

Character Poetry

Because there are so many characters in Greek mythology, it is hard to keep them straight. Although you are only studying three myths, you need to know quite a few characters. A good way to remember these characters is to create short poems about them. Follow the simple formula listed below and write poems for Rhea, Arachne, and Athena. First, practice by writing one about yourself in your journal.

FORMULA:

name
event or action done by character
when the action occurred
where the action occurred
why the action occurred

SAMPLE:

Cronus
swallowed his children
after he held them in his arms
turning away from his sad wife
hungry for power

Now you try.

Rhea

Arachne

Athena
