



THE GOLDEN TOUCH

King Midas was one of the richest kings in all the lands. He loved entertaining his guests and treating them to lavish parties. He loved gold and all the possessions he could buy with it. The only thing in the world that King Midas loved more than his wealth was his daughter Marigold.

One day, King Midas was sitting in his palace. He was contemplating what treasures he should buy next. A noise outside disturbed his thoughts. He looked up to see his guards escorting a creature toward his golden throne. This creature, half man and half goat, had been caught taking a nap in the king's vineyard. King Midas carefully studied the creature. He quickly realized that this was Silenus, who served the god Dionysus.

"Set him free at once," ordered King Midas. "See that he gets whatever he needs . . .

food, clothes, anything he wants."

Silenus was pleased to be treated with such courtesy. He praised King Midas when he was reunited with Dionysus. The god decided to repay the king for treating his companion so well.

"King Midas, you have honored me well. I wish to show you my gratitude," said Dionysus. "Wish for anything you please, and I will make your wish come true."

DID YOU KNOW?

There really was a Greek king called **Midas**. However, he did not really have the ability to turn things into gold with his hands.



The king didn't take long to think about his wish before he said, "I wish that anything I touch will turn to gold." Dionysus waved his hand and the wish was granted.

King Midas could not wait to act on his wish. He touched a marble column and it turned to gold. Filled with delight, he walked through the garden, touching roses, twigs, and stones. He squealed with joy as each one turned to gold at his touch.

Just then, the scent of dinner caught his attention and he sat down to eat. He put several plump grapes in his mouth, but quickly spat out a lump of gold. One by one, he picked up pieces of cheese and bread, but they each turned to gold, and he spat them out in disgust.

Little Marigold was confused by what she saw and ran to her father. As she flung her arms around him, her body immediately stiffened and grew hard. King Midas was horrified when he realized that his precious daughter was now a golden statue.

DID YOU KNOW?

The myth of King Midas includes a **moral**, or lesson. The story shows that people and their love for one another are more valuable than gold or possessions.

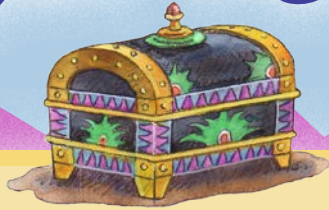
"Dionysus," he cried, "please remove this curse and bring my daughter back to me. I have made a foolish mistake."

The god told King Midas to go to the river and wash himself. The wish was undone and the king's most important treasure, his daughter, was restored to him.

Today you might hear adults say that someone has the Midas touch. For example, "Brett has a very successful business; he really has the Midas touch." This term is used to describe someone who is successful and has the ability to easily make a lot of money.



Pandora's Box



When Prometheus stole fire from heaven and gave it to humans, he angered Zeus, king of all the gods. Zeus wanted to punish people for what Prometheus had done. He ordered the god Hephaestus to create a woman from water and earth. The gods gave her many talents and gifts. Her name was Pandora, which means “the one who bears all gifts.”

Zeus presented Pandora to Prometheus’s brother, Epimetheus. “Here is a lovely woman to keep you company,” explained Zeus. Epimetheus’s eyes widened with delight. Never before had he seen someone so beautiful.

“Before I leave, I have a gift for you, Pandora,” Zeus explained. He handed Pandora a box and said, “This is for you alone. Keep it safe, but you must never, under any circumstance, open the box.”

Pandora smiled, excited to receive a gift from Zeus. She was curious about what could possibly be inside the beautiful container. She nodded her understanding and held the box close to her to show that she would keep it safe.

Prometheus had warned his brother about accepting gifts from Zeus, but Epimetheus was happy to welcome Pandora into his home and eventually he married her.

Pandora kept the box on a high shelf, but she couldn’t stop herself from glancing up at the box every time she passed the shelf. *What could it possibly contain?* she wondered.



It must be something truly marvelous or valuable if it came from the gods, she thought.

One day, Epimetheus left Pandora alone for a few hours. Slowly but surely, Pandora's thoughts turned to Zeus's gift. "What good is a gift if you cannot open it and use it?" Pandora said aloud. "Why would Zeus tell me not to open my own gift? Perhaps there is a surprise for me inside the box." Surely, she reasoned, a quick peek inside the box could do no harm, especially since she was all alone.

Pandora quietly crept to the shelf and carefully took down the box. Her curiosity had finally gotten the better of her.

She looked around to make sure no one was watching. Then she opened the lid, just a crack. Without warning, all the evil contained inside the box flew out and spread over the earth. Pandora was horrified and immediately clamped the lid back down, but it was too late.

The one thing left in the box was hope.

DID YOU KNOW?

This **myth** appears in many different versions. In some retellings, hope escapes from the box along with all the evil. The purpose of the story is to explain why evil exists in the world.



Zeus got his revenge by introducing suffering into the world. He hoped this would teach people not to disobey the gods as Prometheus had done.

Today, you might hear the phrase *open Pandora's box*. The phrase means "to start something that causes many new and unexpected problems." It is used to describe an action that appears simple and harmless but has unforeseen and negative consequences. For example, someone might say, "I didn't realize I would open Pandora's box when I asked Jaden about his family vacation."

Lost in His Own Reflection



Golden-haired Narcissus was the most handsome young man in town. Everyone who saw Narcissus immediately fell in love with him. All the women swooned when he passed them on the street. The young ladies, wearing their most beautiful dresses, smiled and waved as they tried to catch the eye of the attractive young man. Narcissus paid them no attention and would have nothing to do with them. Many women were in love with him, but he had rejected them all.

Narcissus wandered through the forest, happy to be alone with his thoughts as he hunted deer. He had no idea that a lovely nymph was secretly watching him. Echo had been cursed by the goddess Hera. The goddess had punished the girl by decreeing that Echo could only repeat the last words someone else had said.

Like all the other ladies, Echo fell madly in love with Narcissus as soon as she saw him. She moved closer to get a better look. Narcissus was startled by the sound of leaves moving and called out, "What's that? Who's here?"

Hidden behind a tree, the nymph could only reply, "Here!" Narcissus pleaded with the owner of the voice to come out so he could meet her. Echo excitedly rushed toward Narcissus with her arms open, ready to embrace him, but the conceited young man pushed her away and yelled, "Leave me alone!"



The heartbroken maiden could only repeat, "Alone! Alone!" as she watched Narcissus run away. He soon found a pool of water. Narcissus was tired and thirsty from running through the forest, so he lay down and leaned over the water. As he looked at the pool, he noticed someone staring back at him.

Look at that lovely golden hair, those sparkling eyes, and those two perfect pink lips, he thought, enraptured. *Why, that is the most beautiful face I've ever seen.* He reached toward the young person before his eyes, but the face disappeared. *What happened?* he asked. *Where did that beautiful face go?* he wondered. *Perhaps if I return tomorrow, I will see it again.* Narcissus pulled himself away from the pool and slowly walked home.

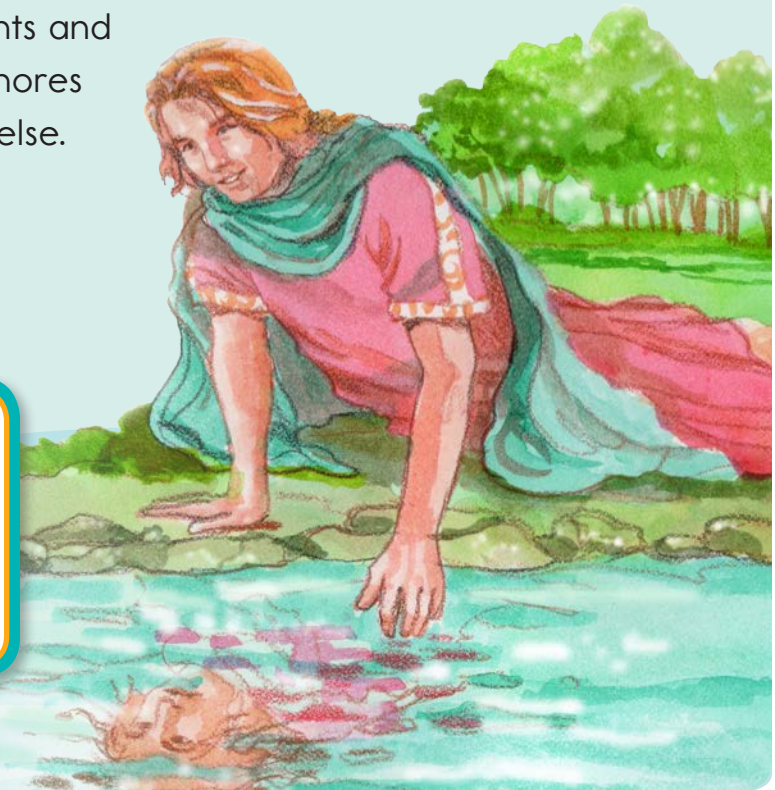
Narcissus did not realize that he had fallen in love with his own reflection. Day after day, he returned to the pool and spent hours staring at the water. Narcissus did not eat or drink,

and his sadness and despair grew inside of him. Finally, the handsome young man withered away and died. His fixation on his own beautiful image was his doom.

Today you might hear someone referred to as a narcissist. For example, "Jeff is such a narcissist; all he does is think about himself and how he looks." A narcissist is a person who is totally focused on himself or herself. The noun has negative associations because a narcissist is someone who focuses only on what he or she wants and selfishly ignores everyone else.

DID YOU KNOW?

This Greek myth provides the source of a second present-day word we use: **echo**. In the story, Echo is only able to repeat the words she hears. The word **echo** comes from the Greek word for "sound."





Greek mythology is full of stories of great heroes, but one of the most famous heroes is Hercules, the son of Zeus and the king of all gods. Hercules showed that he was different from other boys from the very beginning of his life. When Hercules was a baby, the goddess Hera sent two snakes to kill him. Hera had no idea that Hercules was blessed with great strength and fearlessness. He strangled the snakes before they could harm him.

Hera's anger and jealousy grew as Hercules got older. When Hercules was a young adult, Hera cast a spell on him. Hercules temporarily went crazy. Before he knew what happened, his wife and two children were dead. When he realized what he had done, Hercules was heartbroken. He went to the god Apollo for help.

"O mighty Apollo, god of truth and healing, I have done something terrible," said Hercules. "I beg of you, punish me for the evil I have done," he pleaded.

"Hercules, know that this crime was not completely your fault," replied Apollo. "Although you are the victim of a vengeful act, you must atone for what you have done. You shall be given twelve labors. If you perform them all, then your guilt will be wiped away."

These tasks would have been impossible for any mortal to complete, but Hercules was not like most other men. His first task





was to kill a ferocious lion. Hercules discovered that his arrows did nothing to harm the lion. He tracked the mighty beast to a cave and grabbed it with his strong arms. The lion frantically clawed at Hercules, but he refused to let it go no matter how much pain he felt. Like the snakes Hera had sent, Hercules strangled the lion to death.

Hercules' second task was to kill a hydra. The beast had nine heads and spewed poison. Each time Hercules cut off one of the monster's heads, two more grew back in its place! With the help of his nephew, Hercules was finally able to chop off all nine heads and kill the hydra.

For his third task, Hercules had to kill a deer. It sounds easy enough, but this was not an

ordinary deer. It had golden horns and it belonged to the goddess Diana. Hercules shot the deer and started to carry it away when Diana appeared. She was angry, but Hercules told her about his twelve labors and why he needed the deer. The goddess let Hercules take the deer so he could complete his task.

Among his other labors, Hercules wrestled a bull, captured man-eating horses, and kidnapped Cerberus, the terrifying beast that guarded the entrance to the Underworld. Through superhuman strength, courage, and perseverance, he completed all twelve labors.

Today, we use the name *Hercules* to refer to anyone who displays superhuman strength. A Herculean task is an extremely difficult job that requires great physical strength and effort. For example, swimming across the Pacific Ocean would be a Herculean task.

DID YOU KNOW?

During his life, **Hercules** endured endless hardships and challenges. When Hercules died, the gods honored and rewarded him by bringing him up to Mount Olympus to live with them.



Everyone knew to be careful around Sisyphus. The man was notorious for being a trickster. In fact, Sisyphus was so clever that he had no trouble deceiving both humans and the gods.

One day, Sisyphus made the mistake of angering Zeus, the king of all the gods. “How dare you interfere in my life!” roared Zeus. “I condemn you to spend eternity in Tartarus, suffering in torment and despair.”

Tartarus was a place of punishment for the most evil people. It was located in the deepest, darkest part of the Underworld where all people went when they died. Hades, the god of death, led Sisyphus away to serve out his punishment.

Sisyphus’s mind worked furiously as he tried to figure a way out of his predicament.

He watched Hades take out a heavy set of chains. Each metal rung looked as if it weighed a ton. Sisyphus saw an opportunity to turn the tables on his captor.

“I’ve never seen chains like those before, O mighty King of the Underworld,” said Sisyphus. “Perhaps you can show me how they work.”

“It’s quite simple,” replied Hades. “There is a circle of metal on the end that clasps around your wrist like this.” Before he realized what he had done, Hades had chained himself in place.



Sisyphus couldn't believe how clever he had been or how foolish Hades had been. He celebrated his victory, but his freedom didn't last long because Zeus soon discovered what had happened. Hades was freed, and Sisyphus was once again sentenced to Tartarus.

"Your insolence is unbearable," said Zeus. "I decree that your punishment shall be excessively difficult and laborious. I'm sure Hades will have no trouble finding a punishment fit for your crimes against the gods."

Hades led Sisyphus back to Tartarus and said, "Gaze upon your new home and the task I have set before you." Sisyphus stood in front of an enormous boulder as Hades pointed to a nearby hill. "You will roll that boulder to the top of the hill,

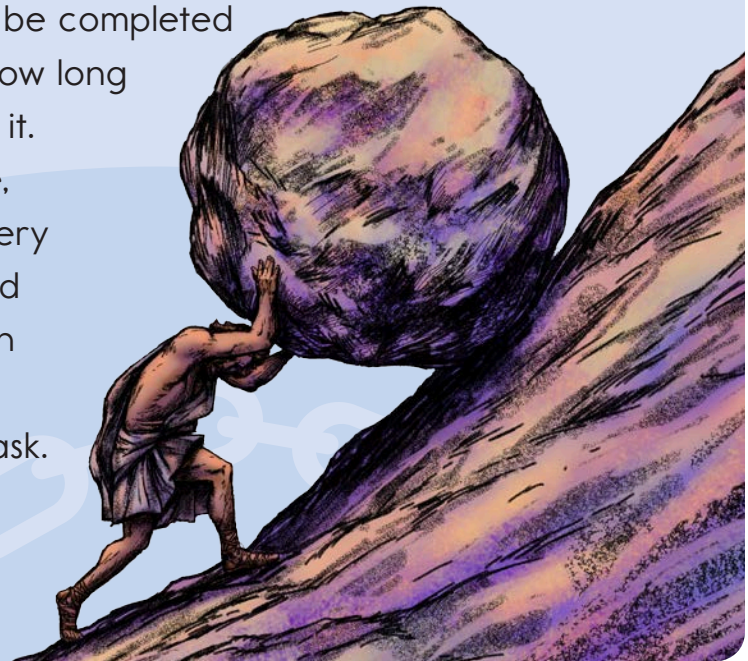
no matter how long it takes," explained Hades. "Let's see if your wits can save you this time."

Sisyphus leaned his shoulder against the giant rock and

pushed as hard as he could. The rock barely moved, but Sisyphus knew he could not give up. He groaned as he struggled to move the boulder inch by inch up the hill. His spirits started to lift as he saw the top of the hill edge into sight, but suddenly the rock rolled back down to the bottom.

"NO!" he pleaded in agony and despair. Sisyphus started his task anew, but each time the result was the same. He was doomed to repeat his frustrating, difficult, and pointless task forever.

Today, we use the adjective *Sisyphean* to describe any task that is endless and ineffective. A Sisyphean task is something that cannot be completed no matter how long you work at it. For example, counting every grain of sand at the beach would be a Sisyphean task.



DID YOU KNOW?

The name **Sisyphus** means "crafty" in Greek. The character of Sisyphus is similar to the tricksters who appear in folktales. The clever Coyote in American Indian mythology has many of the same characteristics as the Greek legend.

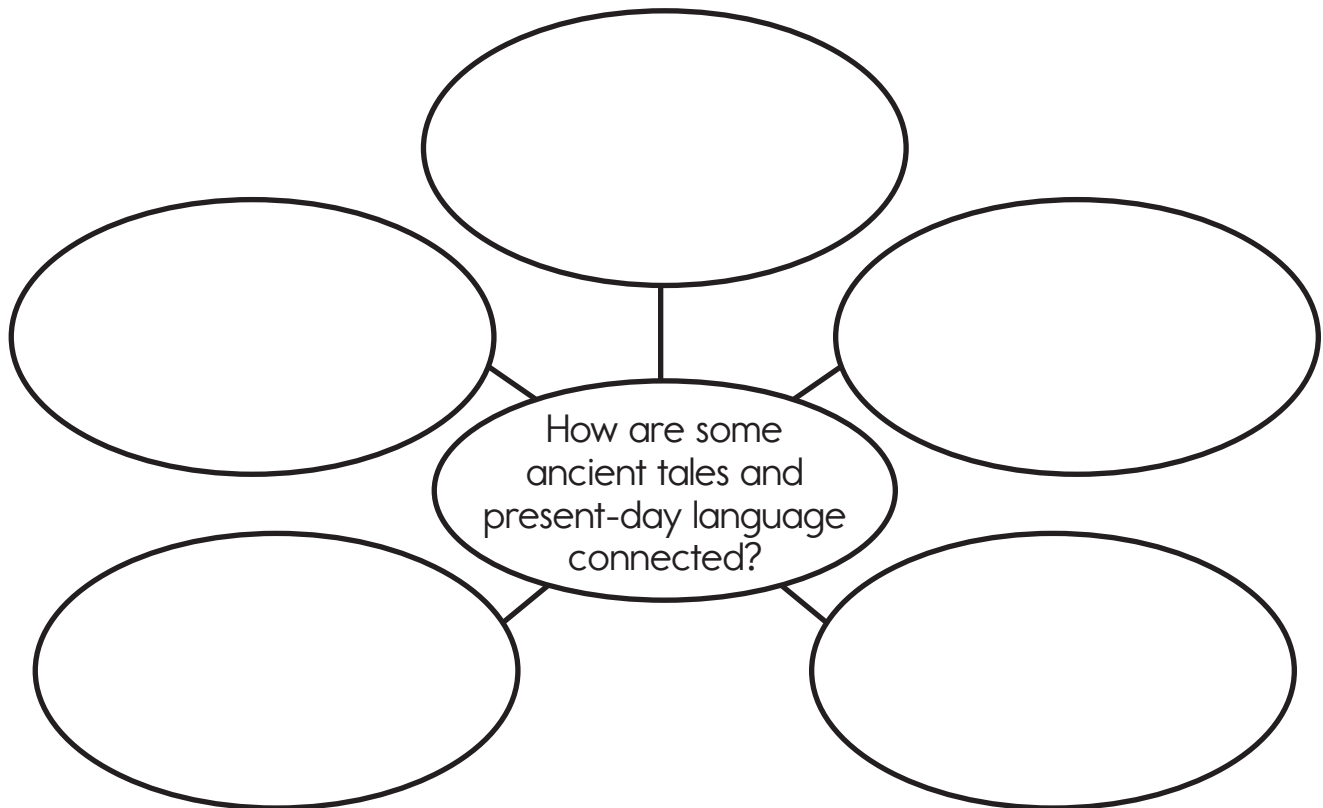
Name _____

 **Key Question**

How are some ancient tales and present-day language connected?

 **On Your Own**

1. Read the Key Question. Then read the story. Look for details in the story that help you answer the Key Question. Circle or underline these details.
2. Now look back at the story. Write the details you circled or underlined in the Web Diagram below.



3. Think about the Key Question. Write your answer to the Key Question using the details you found in the story you read.

 **My First Answer**

Name _____

Key Question

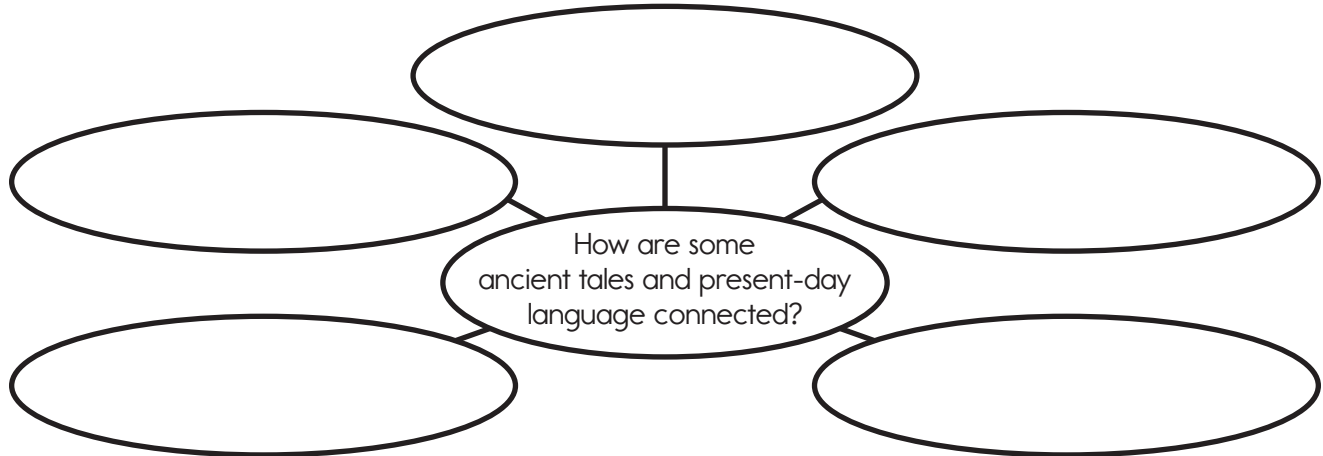
How are some ancient tales and present-day language connected?

Share Your Ideas

Meet with your team. Talk about each story your team read.

1. Tell the team what you learned in the story you read. Show the Web Diagram you made.
2. Look at the diagrams your team made. Compare the details in each of your stories by looking at all the diagrams you made. Answer these questions together.
 - *How are the characters in the stories like real people from today?*
 - *Why do you think we still use words named after the characters in these stories?*

Next, write the details that answer the Key Question on the Web Diagram below. Write only the details that are in every story your team read.



Answer the Key Question

Review the details on your team's Web Diagram. As a team, write an answer to the Key Question. Use details from the stories to support your answer.

How are some ancient tales and present-day language connected?

Our Team's Answer
