

GREEK MYTHOLOGY SECTION

CE Question 4

Here are some suggested answers to use for the most common questions asked about the 6 Mythology stories specified for Common Entrance.

1. THESEUS and the MINOTAUR
2. PERSEUS and MEDUSA the GORGON
3. The LABOURS of HERACLES
4. JASON and the GOLDEN FLEECE
5. THE TROJAN WAR
6. The ADVENTURES of ODYSSEUS

Using the actual answer schemes for the most common questions that have recently been asked, these notes supply 'bullet-points' to include in your answers – the sort of thing that will actually score you marks! There are also some suggestions for questions that have not yet been asked – but could easily be, one day...!

GENERAL POINTS ALSO TO BEAR IN MIND:

1. Make sure you do know something about the story you have decided to answer – and haven't muddled Theseus up with Perseus, for example...!
2. Answer the question **THEY** ask: don't twist it into your own pet subject.
3. Answer **BOTH PARTS** of the question: remember there are 2 marks for the extra part, which is often just asking for your opinion – but be prepared to back yourself up with a good reason for what you say: preferably something from the story.
4. Try to answer the question within about 10-12 lines. No hard-pressed examiner wants to wade through 3 or 4 paragraphs of 'scene-setting' before you get to the relevant bit.
5. Name **NAMES** – and make sure you spell them correctly, especially if they're written on the paper for you somewhere.
6. The marks are for **SEPARATE FACTS**. Don't repeat yourself over & over (& over...) again.
7. Stick to these facts and be as focused and concise as possible. In fact...
8.**DON'T WAFFLE!**

(As past pupils will remember, this question used to be known as "The Waffle Section".... for good reason!)

SPECIMEN ANSWERS

TO GREEK-MYTHOLOGY-SECTION-STYLE QUESTIONS

Marks will be gained by mentioning any of these points. You should try to include as many as possible in your answer.

THESEUS

Question: Describe the adventures of Theseus from his arrival in Crete to his return to Athens. Why do some people feel sorry for the Minotaur?

Answers:

- a) Came with thirteen other young Athenians
 - b) Retrieval of Minos's ring from the sea
 - c) Volunteers to go first against the Minotaur
 - d) Help from Ariadne (in return for taking her with him)
Sword & Ball of Thread
 - e) Showed hero's courage in killing Minotaur & escaped from Labyrinth (orig. built by Daedalus)
 - f) Escaped from Crete with fellow hostages
 - g) Ariadne abandoned on Naxos (found by Dionysus)
 - h) Did not change sails on ship
 - i) Arrived at Athens to find father (Aegeus) dead (Aegean Sea) and became King himself.
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- a) Minotaur's appearance & savagery not its own fault
 - b) In prison for all its life
 - c) An 'Outsider'

N.B. This is basically the question they have always asked on the Theseus story.

PERSEUS

Question: Tell the story of Perseus & the Gorgon Medusa. What qualities do you think Perseus showed during his adventures?

Answers:

- a) Acrisius's oracle & birth of Perseus to Zeus & Danae: cast into the sea
 - b) Perseus challenged to bring back Medusa's head by King Polydectes
 - c) Gifts from the Gods:
 - Athena/Zeus: Sickle-sword & shiny shield
 - Hermes: Winged Sandals
 - Hades (via Stygian Nymphs): Helmet of Invisibility & Pouch for head
 - d) Encounter with the Graeae who showed him the way to Medusa
 - e) Used reflection in shield to avoid being turned to stone (describe Medusa)
 - f) Return (Atlas, Andromeda but only if time/space) and prevented wedding of Danae to Polydectes by showing him the head
 - g) Return to Argos and accidental death of Acrisius
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- a) Loyalty to the Gods & to his Mother
 - Courage (killing Medusa, rescuing Andromeda)
 - Ingenuity in tricking Graeae by stealing their eye
 - Sympathy for Atlas
 - Forgiveness to Acrisius for disowning him & Danae

N.B. This is basically the question they have always asked on the Perseus story; sometimes they concentrate on the gifts and help he received.

HERACLES

Question: Describe TWO of Heracles's Labours. Which was the more difficult?
What qualities did he show in overcoming the problems involved?

Answers - will depend on which Labours you choose. You should make FOUR relevant points about each. These are recommended (they obviously want you to choose difficult or interesting ones!):

1. Nemean Lion: Toughness of skin
Strangled it to death
Used its own claws to skin it
Used it as protection/to scare enemies
Fright of Eurystheus when he saw it: bronze jar
2. Lernean Hydra: Lake monster with many heads, deadly poisonous
When one head cut off, two grew back
Extra problem from Hera's crab
Help from Iolaus - seared stumps with flaming torch
Collected poison to use for arrows
Labour 'cancelled' due to help from Iolaus
3. Augean Stables: Large herd of cattle which had never been 'mucked out'
Saw potential of river erosion
Made 'bet' with King Augeas
Difficulty of digging channels, but success in one night
Augeas 'reported' him to Eurystheus; Labour cancelled

4. Golden Apples of the Hesperides:

Journeyed far to the West; Pillars of Heracles
Only Atlas could see into the Garden: High Wall
Had to hold up the sky while Atlas fetched them
Tricked Atlas into resuming his burden

5. Bringing Cerberus from the Underworld:

Had to find deep cave as entrance (Heracleia)
Scared Charon into ferrying him across the Styx
Hades allows him to take Cerberus "if he can tame him"
Battle with Cerberus:
3 heads, serpent's tail, poisonous slobber
Success; drags Cerberus up: Deadly Nightshade formed
Eurystheus so scared at the sight never leaves his jar again

Qualities: Obviously Strength

Courage

Ingenuity

Questions have always asked to describe/contrast at least two labours like this.

JASON

Questions: Describe what happened from the time of Jason's arrival at Colchis to the time of his escape with Medea. How might he have felt about Medea when he arrived home?

Answers:

- a) Aeetes' tasks: Fire-breathing Bulls & Dragon's Teeth
 - b) Help from Medea to achieve these:
(fire-proof ointment; throwing a rock amongst the 'sown men')
 - c) Medea charms dragon guarding fleece to sleep
 - d) Escape by ship with Medea & other Argonauts
 - e) Murder of Absyrtus and scattering of body parts to slow down fleet
 - f) Stop for purification by Circe
 - g) Possibly include how Medea arranges 'disposal' of Pelias
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- a) Mixed feelings: Glad of her help but alarmed by her savagery

Question sometimes just limited to story of Jason's 'Escape' with the fleece.

Possible Question (not yet asked!): Describe Jason's adventures on the way to obtain the Golden Fleece.

Answers:

- a) Harpies: Temple & table of food
Blind old man (Phineus the prophet)
Harpies prevent him from eating; punishment from the Gods
Two Argonauts chase them away (sons of the N. Wind – can fly)
In return Phineus tells Jason how to survive the Clashing Rocks
- b) Clashing Rocks: Real name the 'Symplegades'
Phineus tells Jason to release a dove & wait for rocks to close
Argo has twice as long to sail between
Rocks close on rear timbers, just as they had on dove's tail feathers

The TROJAN WAR

Questions:

1. Describe how Troy was captured by the Greeks. Who contributed most to its fall?

Answers:

- a) Oracles that had to be fulfilled first:
Stealing of the Palladium; Bow of Heracles (Philoctetes)
 - b) Odysseus' plan to build the Wooden Horse
 - c) Greeks hide in horse while fleet sails out of sight to Tenedos
 - d) Sinon left to trick Trojans into accepting the 'gift'
 - e) Poseidon's sea-serpent kills the priest Laocoon as he tries to warn them
 - f) Horse dragged into Troy: Helen: did she help or hinder? (stories vary)
 - g) Trojans celebrate and get drunk
 - h) Greeks emerge and let the rest into Troy
 - i) Troy sacked: only key Trojan to survive is Aeneas
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- a) Argue for Odysseus, Sinon, Poseidon (& Gods generally)
Achilles for killing Hector
(in negative way) Paris for stealing Helen in the first place

- Questions 2. Describe the quarrel between Achilles and Agamemnon, and its results.
Who was most at fault?

- Answers:
- a) Capture of slavegirls Briseis & Chryseis by Achilles: one each(!)
 - b) Agamemnon forced to give Ch. back (daughter of priest of Apollo)
 - c) Orders Achilles to give him Briseis instead
 - d) Achilles withdraws from battle along with the Myrmidons
 - e) Greeks nearly defeated and ships burnt (saved by Ajax)
 - f) Patroclus takes Ach's armour but is killed by Hector
 - g) Achilles rejoins the war to avenge Patroclus & kills Hector.

- a) Against Achilles: stupid to cause near defeat of whole army due to a sulk over a girl?
Against Agamemnon: did his rank give him the right to demand Briseis?

Questions 3. Which hero from the war do you admire most and least? Give reasons

Answers: Admire most:

Achilles: best fighter; son of a goddess (Thetis); fast; handsome; loyal in revenge for Patroclus; merciful to Priam over Hector's body

Hector: best Trojan warrior; defended city loyally when Paris had caused it all; affection for wife Andromache; fighting for his family & country, not just for glory

Ajax: Strongest; protected the ships when Achilles was 'on strike' Deprived of Ach's armour unjustly (?); action man

Odysseus: Clever; brave (night expeditions, e.g. to steal Palladium) Good friend (esp. of Diomedes)

Admire least:

Paris: started war by abducting Helen; cowardly in single combat with Menelaus; stayed in Troy while others fought for him; a lover not a fighter (!)

Agamemnon: Poor leader, esp. over quarrel with Achilles; too ready to believe 'dreams'; sacrificed daughter at start

Achilles: Too interested in his own vanity; caused death of Patroclus Ill-treatment of Hector's body Unwise in falling in love with Polyxena (Trojan princess), which led to his ambush and death by Paris

ODYSSEUS

Questions:

1. Describe Odysseus' encounter with the Sirens. Did he show good leadership qualities?

- Answers:
- a) Sirens female bird-monsters luring sailors to their doom on the rocks by their singing
 - b) Odysseus wants to be only man ever to hear them & survive
 - c) Tells crew to put wax 'plugs' in their ears...
 - d) ...and tie him to the mast, ignoring any signs he may make to be released
 - e) Does become enchanted, but crew obey orders until well past the island
 - f) Sirens (in most versions) commit suicide by jumping into the sea in frustration
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- a) Shows ingenuity in thinking of how to achieve his aim...
 - b) ...but was it a bit vain and risky in the first place?
 - c) Lucky crew so obedient (this time...not always: compare Bag of Winds episode)

Questions:

2. Describe Odysseus' encounter with the Cyclops. Did the Cyclops deserve its fate?

- Answers:
- a) Needing food & water, crew finds deserted cave full of cheese & milk
 - b) Crew want to leave straight away: Odysseus makes them stay to meet owner
 - c) Cyclops (describe) arrives & eats 2 men, then blocks door & sleeps.
 - d) Next day similar, but O. devises plan to make Cyclops drunk & blind him
 - e) Cyclops enjoys wine & wants to reward 'Nobody' for it
 - f) Plan works; other Cyclopes fooled by 'Nobody' trick; to release sheep next day Cyclops sits at entrance to catch crew
 - g) Odysseus tells men to hang under sheep's stomachs to avoid detection
 - h) Under Cyclops favourite ram, O. himself nearly caught
 - i) O. reveals his 'Nobody' deceit and Cyclops prays to father Poseidon to punish Odysseus

- a) Cyclops a savage monster, deserved what he got.... OR...
- b) Cyclops only a simple shepherd until Odysseus arrived...?

Questions: 3. Describe Odysseus' encounter with Circe. What qualities did he show in defeating her?

- Answers:
- a) Returning from Trojan War, driven to island of Aeaea
 - b) Half crew (with O) stay at ship, others, led by Eurylochus, go in search of food
 - c) Eurylochus returns, tells how beautiful enchantress Circe turned the rest into pigs
 - d) Odysseus vows to free them himself; given herb to protect him by Hermes
 - e) Circe's magic doesn't work; threatened by O, she agrees to release crew
 - f) Crew stay with Circe 'x' years
 - g) Circe gives Odysseus advice to visit Tiresias in the Underworld to help him get home
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- a) Responsibility: goes alone to save crew
 - b) Courage
 - c) Obedience (to Hermes)
 - d) ...but unwise to stay with Circe afterwards (child by her eventually kills him)

Other possible questions:

4. Describe episode of Scylla & Charybdis (this one has now come up recently!)

Answers: Many-headed cave monster & Whirlpool: either side of narrow strait
 Had to sacrifice some crewmen to avoid all being sucked down
 But driven back there anyway (Cattle of the Sun); all drown except O

5. Describe Aeolus & the Bag of Winds episode

Answers: Aeolus (God of Winds) gives O. a bag of contrary winds to help him get home

Odysseus doesn't tell crew – a mistake?

They release all the winds in search of gold & the ship is driven straight back

Aeolus unwilling to help a second time – O must be 'cursed'

6. Describe what happened when Odysseus arrived home in Ithaca (never been asked – must be one day!)

Answers: a) Alcinous, King of Phaeacia brings O finally safe to Ithaca

b) Penelope menaced by gang of Suitors

c) Athena disguises O as a beggar: only Telemachus (son) can recognise him (but Eumaeus the herdsman also knows)

d) At palace, beggar is known by old Nurse (scar) and old dog

e) Penelope sets contest to string bow & fire through axe-heads

f) After all suitors fail, O himself succeeds and is revealed again as himself

g) Telemachus, Eumaeus and O massacre the suitors

h) Penelope 'tests' O with suggestion to move their bed outside (built around a tree & can't be moved – only O knows this)

i) O and Penelope reunited at last.

REMEMBER, IN GENERAL:

1. KEEP TO THE POINT (answer the question!)
2. NAME NAMES! (spell them correctly!)
3. BE CONCISE (don't write more than about 12 lines)
4. DON'T WAFFLE!!! (write facts! Include these details!)

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