

PERSEUS AND ANDROMEDA

Perseus, having severed the snaky-haired head of Medusa from her body, began his journey home. He came first to the mountains of northwest Africa where he found the old Titan, Atlas, holding up the heavens and growing weary with that never-ending chore. Atlas greeted Perseus with pleasure; he had already learned from an oracle what the hero had been up to and that Perseus was fated to relieve his burden and set him free. "You know" he said, "I've never had any time off,



except when Hercules paid me a visit and relieved me to go fetch the golden apples of the Hesperides." He sighed. "I'm tired of this job, it's too much even for a Titan. Please show me the Gorgon's head." Perseus understood and sympathized. With his own head turned away, he drew the dreadful head of Medusa out of the leather bag and showed it to Atlas, then returned it to the bag. He watched as the Titan changed. Atlas, already large, grew larger; his hips thrust out into the foothills of mighty mountains, and his shoulders became their lofty summits. His beard and hair turned into thick forests. His head, turning to stone, reared up among the clouds and stars; his gigantic hands and arms steadied the skies. The Titan had become part of the range that is still called the Atlas Mountains.

Perseus was fated to have one more grand adventure. As he flew east he came to a stretch of African seacoast that lies along Abyssinia (Ethiopia). Here he found a lovely maiden in a white tunic, chained to a rock. Perseus flew down close. "Maiden," he said, hovering, "who does not deserve these chains, who are you? What is your country? Why are you being punished in this cruel way?"



"Sir," the beauty replied, I am Andromeda, Princess of Abyssinia." She explained that she was being sacrificed to a terrible sea dragon because the gods were angry with her mother, Cassiopeia [kas-ee-oh-PEE-uh]. This foolish queen had boasted that she was more beautiful than the daughters of Poseidon, the Sea God. The Nereids, of course, were furious, but their wrath fell not on the vain mother but on the innocent daughter. The sea dragon was devouring youths and maidens all along the coast. If Andromeda were given to him, he would depart, satisfied.

Even as the princess talked, they heard a roaring sound and saw the monster, green and scaly, rapidly gliding toward them across the sea. Perseus leaped into the air, and as the dragon drew near he came down hard and from behind, gashing the beast's neck and shoulder. An awful fight followed; Andromeda shut her eyes in terror. The dragon split huge rocks with his lashing tail,

which cracked like a whip. Perseus came at him again and again, working under the scales with his sickle blade, until the dreadful thing at last lay lifeless on the rocks and sand, its tail floating out to sea. The hero loosened the maiden's chains and took her back to her father, King Cepheus [SEE-fee-uhs], who was quite willing to give Andromeda to Perseus as his wife.

It was a beautiful and happy wedding, but before Perseus could settle down to married life, he had to hurry back to Seriphus and hand Medusa's head to Polydectes [paul-ee-DEK-teez]. When he got to Seriphus, he found his mother, Danae [dan-AY-ee], and his good foster father, Dictys [DIK-tis], taking refuge in a temple. King Polydectes had been harassing them. While Danae was explaining what had happened, the king appeared at the head of a band of soldiers. When he saw Perseus had come back, his false smile grew sickly. "Did you get the Gorgon?" he demanded. For answer, Perseus loosened the leather bag and flashed Medusa's head at the wicked king; he and his soldiers became frozen statues.



Perseus gave back the helmet to Hades, the shield to Athena, and the winged sandals to Hermes, with profound thanks to all the gods. He made the good Dictys king of the island of Seriphus. He sent for his bride, Andromeda, and decided to take her, with Danae, back to Greece to see if they could reconcile with his grandfather, King Acrisius [uh-KRIS-ee-uhs] of Argos, who had sent him and his mother adrift in a sea chest when he was an infant.

They found the king in the North where his host, the King of Larissa, was throwing a series of parties and athletic games. Perseus was a goodhearted youth and quite prepared to forgive his grandfather and treat him kindly. But the oracle had spoken. One day Perseus decided to participate in the discus-

throwing; Acrisius was standing by as a spectator. The hero took up the heavy bronze plate and pitched it far, but it was a curved throw and flew off to the side where it struck Acrisius in the head and killed him.



As for the terrible Gorgon's head, Perseus gave it to Athena, who had helped him so much. An effigy, or image, of it was carved into the aegis, Zeus's shield, which Athena carried for him.

Andromeda in time became a constellation, as did Perseus, Cepheus, and Cassiopeia-the whole family raised to the stars!

Name _____ Date _____

Perseus and Andromeda

1. In North Africa Perseus found the old Titan, _____, still holding up the sky and getting tired of it. Perseus helped him out by showing him the head of Medusa and turning him to _____.
2. Traveling east, he came to a stretch of seacoast along the country of _____. Here he found the maiden, _____, daughter of King _____ and Queen _____.
3. The queen had offended the _____, daughters of the sea god.
4. Perseus killed the sea dragon by working under its _____ with his curved blade.
5. After marrying the princess, Perseus returned to Seriphus to hand _____'s head to Polydectes.
6. Perseus punished King Polydectes by turning him and his soldiers to _____.
7. Perseus still wanted to reconcile with King Acrisius of _____.
8. But the prophecy of the Delphic oracle had to be fulfilled. Without intending to, Perseus killed his evil grandfather with a heavy bronze _____ at an athletic contest in Larissa.
9. Perseus gave the Gorgon's head to _____. An image of it was carved into Zeus's shield, which is called the _____.
10. Andromeda, Cassiopeia, Cepheus, and Perseus eventually became _____ in the heavens.