

Stories in the Stars: A Library of Congress Virtual Program

Pre-Program Activity

Hello!

We're excited to welcome you virtually to the Library of Congress! We'll be exploring very old myths, or stories, about gods and goddesses and then you'll create some new ones of your own. This activity will help you get ready to chat with us during the program.

In Greek mythology, a constellation is a group of stars that used to be a living person or creature. Constellations are placed in the sky by the gods.

We have two myths for you to read, then a few things for you to think about. You can read them on your own or have them read to you. You could take turns reading in a group – or even act the stories out like a play.

Don't be surprised if you don't know how to pronounce some of the words. Names in Greek myths can be hard to say, so here are some tips. The parts of the words in bold letters are stressed.



Bellerophon and the Flying Horse

- **Prince Bellerophon** (Bell-**air**-oh-fon)
- **King Proteus** (**Pro**-tee-us)
- **King Iobates of Lycia** (Eye-oh-**bah**-teez of Lie-**see**-a)
- **Athena** (At-**thee**-na), the goddess of wisdom and knowledge
- **Pegasus** (**Peg**-a-sus), a beautiful, flying horse
- **The Chimaera** (**Ky**-meh-ra), a dangerous monster with a lion's head, a goat's body and a snake for a tail

Prince Bellerophon was exiled from his own country but lived happily at the court of King Proteus. All went well until the King's wife told her husband that the young, handsome prince had insulted her. The King didn't know that his wife was lying so he was very, very angry. He wanted to kill Bellerophon but knew that if he harmed a guest it would offend the gods, and that would have terrible consequences.

To get rid of Bellerophon, the King said to him, "Please take this letter to King Iobates of Lycia." Bellerophon willingly agreed, not knowing that the letter asked King Iobates to kill him.

When Bellerophon arrived in Lycia after a long and dangerous journey, King Iobates welcomed him. He put the letter from Proteus aside and forgot to open it for nine days. By the time he read it, he had grown to like the good-natured young prince and he too felt that he couldn't harm his guest without angering the gods.

Then Iobates remembered the Chimaera, a monster with a head like a lion, a body like a goat and a snake for a tail. "I need a brave hero like you," King Iobates said to Bellerophon. "Please go and rid my kingdom of this terrible creature. It's killing my people and ruining their land. Lots of men have tried to fight it and have died bravely. I'm sure you could kill it," he added, although he was secretly certain that the Chimaera would kill Bellerophon instead.

The young man accepted the challenge. Before he set out, a wise old man said to him "You won't be able to kill that monster unless you are riding on Pegasus, the horse with huge white wings. No one has ever ridden him yet. But the goddess Athena may help you if you ask her".

Bellerophon didn't know if he should believe the old man, but he went to Athena's temple anyway. He prayed to the goddess, then fell asleep. Athena appeared in his dreams and gave him a golden bridle, or harness and told him where to find Pegasus.

One evening, Bellerophon saw Pegasus drinking at a stream. Creeping very quietly closer, he flung the bridle over the horse's head and clung on when it snorted, bucked and reared, trying to escape. At last, the beautiful horse recognized Athena's bridle so it calmed down and allowed Bellerophon to climb on its back.

Pegasus flapped his huge wings and leaped into the air. Soon they were soaring over the land, travelling far across plains and mountains until Bellerophon spotted the Chimaera below. He pulled on the bridle and Pegasus swooped down.

Safe on the horse's back, Bellerophon was able to dodge the fire that the monster poured out of its mouth and the poison which it spat out of its snakey tail. He fired an arrow into its side and then one into its mouth, which killed it. The Chimaera was dead.

Bellerophon returned to a hero's welcome. King Iobates was delighted to be rid of the Chimaera and said to the young prince, "You may marry my daughter and have some good land to live on."

(Image from *A Wonder Book for Girls and Boys*, Library of Congress Rare Books and Special Collections.)



Over the next few years, Bellerophon grew famous for his brave deeds and many adventures. He was so praised wherever he went that he became conceited. When people said he was like a god he started to believe them. He thought that if he was equal to the gods then he should visit them at their home, Mount Olympus. He jumped onto Pegasus and told him to fly up to Mount Olympus. Zeus, the ruler of the gods, was furious at this disrespectful behavior. He sent an insect to sting Pegasus under the tail, which made the horse rear up in pain and fling Bellerophon off its back.

Bellerophon fell to earth. He didn't die, but was badly injured and lost his sight when the thorny bush he fell into damaged his eyes. He spent the rest of his life in pain and misery, all alone, as no one wanted to have anything to do with someone who had made Zeus so angry.



Stars in the Sky: The Story of Capricorn

- **Pricus (Pri-cus)**, a sea-goat.
- **Chronos (Kro-nos)**, the god of time

Many centuries ago, when gods and goddesses ruled the world, a race of sea-goats lived in the ocean. They had the heads and front legs of goats and the tails of fish. They could think and speak and were very intelligent.

Pricus was the father of all the sea-goats. He was created by Chronos, the god of time, who made him immortal, so he would live forever. Pricus loved his many children and spent many hours with them, teaching them all about the sea and enjoying their company.

Some of Pricus's younger children enjoyed playing in the shallow water by the seashore. They became curious about the land and liked the feeling of the sun's warmth on their heads. They enjoyed the sunshine so much that they began to drag themselves out of the water with their front legs and lie on the beach in the sunshine. They did this every day and encouraged their brothers and sisters to follow them.

But as they spent more and more time on land, they began to change. Their fish tails became hind legs. They could no longer think or speak and became like the goats we know today. Some of them stayed on land and never returned to the sea. They even left the beach and headed inland to the hills and mountains where their father couldn't see them. Pricus was horrified. He tried to reason with his children, telling them that they would lose their intelligence and would never be able to come back home to the ocean if they had legs instead of tails. But the little sea-goats wouldn't listen. He got angry with them and said they were not allowed to go, but it made no difference.

Pricus was determined to stop them. He had the power to turn back time, a gift from his creator Chronos. He reversed time so that everything on earth returned to how it had been before his children left the sea, and they all came back. But as soon as he stopped shifting time, the little

sea-goats headed straight for the land again. He had to keep reversing time to make them stay in the ocean with him.

Eventually Pricus realized that he could not force his children to live as he wanted them to. They had to choose their own futures. He was overcome with sadness and begged Chronos to let him die. He couldn't bear knowing he would be the only sea goat left and that he would never see his children again.

Chronos felt sorry for Pricus. Instead of taking away his immortality, he placed him in the stars as the constellation Capricorn. From his new home in the sky, Pricus can see all his children, no matter how far from the sea or how high in the mountains they are.



We hope you enjoyed these two old Greek myths, full of interesting characters and their adventures. We'll discuss them again, along with other myths, in our virtual visit.

Myths tell different stories but there are some things that come up again and again. Can you identify any of these common themes? Think of a few ideas for us to talk about together. You can mention anything you like, whether it's about who's in the stories, what they do or the kind of characters they are.

As part of the virtual visit you'll be creating your own story set in the stars, and inventing a constellation to go with it.

Let's remember what "constellation" means:

A constellation is a group of stars that seem to form a figure or design in the sky. This design is usually an animal, mythological person or creature.

Being turned into stars can be a reward, or a way to escape something dangerous on earth.

- If you could make a shape in the stars, what would it be? Think about what the constellation for your story will look like.
- What story would you tell about it? Who will be in your story and what adventures might they have before they become a constellation?

Write down some of your thoughts so you remember them for our discussion and for when you write your story afterwards.

If you are able to – go outside when it's dark and look up at the night sky! You may get inspired with some ideas for your own constellation and story in the stars!

We look forward to seeing you!

The Library of Congress Informal Learning Team.

Post-Program Activity

Creating Your Constellation Myth

To help plan your story, write down your ideas in the boxes below. Remember to include our discussions from the virtual workshop. Then use these notes to write your story, and share it with others in your classroom. Add illustrations to help you tell it!

The Constellation Hero

Create a main character, the hero of your story. What does he/she look like? Is there a god or goddess parent in your myth? Describe what your hero wants or desires more than anything else.



(Image from *A Wonder Book for Girls and Boys*, Library of Congress Rare Books and Special Collections.)

The Hero's Helper

Does your hero have a helper or assistant? How do they get along? Are they friends, siblings or enemies? The helper could be an object, animal, person, mythological creature – or anything you like.

Superpowers and/or Equipment

Describe your hero's superpowers and/or equipment. How did he/she get them? Tell why, when and how he/she uses them – use your imagination to think up some fantastic scenarios!

The Complication/Obstacle

Heroes in myths face challenges. What gets in the way of your hero reaching his/her goal? It might be an enemy, nature, emotions, really bad luck – or anything else you want it to be. How does your character use superpowers or special equipment to deal with the obstacle?

The Outcome

Does your hero succeed or fail? Is there a reward or punishment?

The Constellation

How does your hero get into the sky? Decide who puts him/her there and why. Make a quick sketch of your constellation to add to your finished story. What part of your myth does it show?