

Tanglewood Marionettes: *Perseus and Medusa* Educational Guide, Grades 1-8



About the Performance

Take a trip back in time to the dawn of civilization, to an ancient world of gods, goddesses, prophecies, and heroes. In this masterful production, your students will accompany Perseus through personal trials and glorious quests. Join Tanglewood Marionettes for its lavish production featuring beautiful handcrafted marionettes, scrolling sets, exotic music, and much more.



About the Artists

Tanglewood Marionettes is a nationally touring marionette theater based in Massachusetts. Skilled puppeteers who have spent many years perfecting their art perform classic tales. Tanglewood Marionettes travels with a self-contained marionette stage that has integrated lighting and sound systems. The programs are presented with the marionettists in full view, so that the audience can witness firsthand the mechanics of puppet manipulation.

Program Learning Goals

1. To bring to life the story of *Perseus and Medusa* through the use of puppetry.
2. To explore the concept of myth as a story form.
3. To learn about technical aspects in theatrical production: scenery, sounds, specials effects, and properties.

Essential Questions

1. What are the origins of puppetry?
2. How can puppetry be used to tell many different stories?



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Vocabulary

- **Myth:** a story that explains a culture's beliefs, practices, or understanding of natural phenomena and that helps people understand and face the unknown.
- **Marionette:** a French word that means "Little Mary". In the early days of Christianity, string puppets were used to act out biblical stories. These stories were often about Mary, the mother of Jesus. People began calling the string puppet representing Mary a "marionette" or "Little Mary". Soon the word became associated with all string puppets.
- **Tanglewood Marionettes:** the ensemble is named "Tanglewood Marionettes" because the strings of the puppets get tangled, and they're made out of wood.

Key Facts and Context for Students

What is a puppet?

A **puppet** is a figure that is moved by a person. It can be controlled by fingers, hands, sticks, or strings. Puppets can represent people, animals, objects, or made up creatures. Someone who operates a puppet is called a **puppeteer**.



Ancient Greece and Greek Mythology

Ancient Greece was home to the first civilizations in **Europe**. The people of Ancient Greece worshipped many gods, goddesses, and heroes. They told stories, or **myths**, about these gods and built temples to them. These myths often feature large battles, monsters, and overcoming challenges, and taught the importance of intelligence, bravery, and acting morally.

The Myth of *Perseus and Medusa*

This myth is about **Perseus**, a young boy in ancient Greece, who must go on a dangerous journey in order to fulfill a promise he made to a young prince named **Polydectes**. On this journey, Perseus meets **Athena**, the Goddess of Wisdom, the **Gray Sisters** who send him to the underworld for a magical sword, and **Medusa**, a feminine creature with snakes for hair that he must battle to fulfill his promise.

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Pre-Performance Discussion Questions

- What do you know about Ancient Greece? What would you like to know? How could you find out more?
- What is a puppet? What characters in TV shows or movies are puppets? How do their puppeteers bring them to life?
- What is the difference between a live performance and a pre-recorded performance? What are the advantages and disadvantages of each? Are there parts of stories that would have to be cut out or altered in a live performance that could be put in a pre-recorded performance? Why?

Pre-Performance Activities

ACTIVITY 1: Understanding Myths

LEARNING GOALS:

- To explore the concept of myth as a story form
- To learn about characters from Greek mythology

MATERIALS:

Perseus and Medusa myth text (see pages 5-6), posterboard, coloring supplies

DIRECTIONS:

1. Read the story of *Perseus and Medusa* with the class.
2. Discuss the characters and the story. What special skills or objects did each character have? How did Perseus achieve his goal?
3. Divide students into 6 groups and assign each a character from the myth (Perseus, Polydectes, Medusa, Athena, the Gray Sisters, and Hesperia).
4. Have each group create a poster depicting the character and its importance to the story.
5. Present each poster to the rest of the class.

EXTENSION:

- Discuss how myths are often used to explain the unexplainable. Have students write their own myth explaining something in their life that they don't completely understand.

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Pre-Performance Activities, continued

ACTIVITY 2: What's So Unique?

LEARNING GOAL:

To explore what characteristics make people unique through the study of ancient Greek mythology

MATERIALS:

Perseus and Medusa myth text (see pages 5-6), writing supplies

DIRECTIONS:

1. Read the story of *Perseus and Medusa* with the class.
2. Discuss the characters and the story. What special skills did each character have?
3. Ask students to identify a unique quality in themselves that relates to one of the characters in the myth.
4. Make a list of various jobs in the classroom. Discuss the special skills it takes to do each one.
5. Have students each write a resume from the perspective of one of the characters to apply for a classroom job. Focus on the unique quality they selected and use it to promote themselves accordingly.
6. Have students share their resumes with the class to hear what makes every person unique.

EXTENSION:

- Hold mock interviews based off of the student resumes. Students can conduct the interviews and decide who they would hire for specific classroom job positions.



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Perseus and Medusa Performance Synopsis

In Ancient Greece, on the island of Seriphos, lived a boy named **Perseus**. He had never known his father, and his mother never spoke of him, but she raised him well among the fisherpeople by the shore of the Aegean Sea. Though **Perseus** was poor, he grew up strong, intelligent, and fearless.



There was another boy on the island who lived a different kind of life. **Prince Polydectes** was the son of the king. He was rich, very proud, and refused to go near the common people. So **Polydectes** and **Perseus** never crossed paths until the year they both turned sixteen. That was the year the Panhellenic Games came to Seriphos, and athletes from all over Greece came to the island to compete.

Since the day he could walk, **Polydectes** trained with the finest coaches for this moment. He planned to win the highest honors at the games. But, since everyone was allowed to compete, **Perseus** also decided to try his luck. In every event, **Perseus** beat **Polydectes**! **Polydectes** was humiliated and swore revenge against **Perseus** for stealing his glory.

Prince Polydectes invited **Perseus** to the palace. He said it was to honor **Perseus's** victory at the Games, but really it was part of his plot for revenge. **Perseus** brought a gift for the prince, a precious heirloom and his mother's most prized possession. **Polydectes** mocked the gift and crushed it with his foot. **Perseus** flew into a rage and promised to bring him another gift, anything he should desire. Sensing his opportunity, **Polydectes** told **Perseus** to bring him the head of **Medusa**, a creature with snakes for hair that turned anyone that looked at her to stone. **Polydectes** knew that such a quest would almost certainly end in the death of **Perseus**. But **Perseus** agreed and set off to fulfill his promise.



Perseus lamented his foolish promise to the prince, for he knew the danger that faced him. Suddenly, a majestic figure appeared from the clouds above. It was **Athena**, the Goddess of Wisdom, to help **Perseus** on his quest. She gave him a pair of winged sandals that allowed him to fly. **Athena** also told **Perseus** to find the **Gray Sisters** because they had important information that **Perseus** would need to accomplish his goal. She told him that the **Gray Sisters** could be found in the far away Frozen North. **Perseus** thanked **Athena** for her help, and set off quickly northward.

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Perseus and Medusa Performance Synopsis, continued

The Frozen North was a cold and inhospitable land. **Perseus** found the **Gray Sisters** and saw they only had one eye between them, which they shared by passing it from sister to sister. When **Perseus** asked for the information he needed to defeat **Medusa**, the **Gray Sisters** laughed and refused to help. So **Perseus** jumped between them to steal the eye as it was being passed. Terrified he would destroy it, the **Gray Sisters** told **Perseus** to go to the Land of the Evening Star to find the entrance to the Underworld. In the Underworld was the Sword of Hades, the one blade sharp enough to cut off **Medusa's** head. **Perseus** returned the eye to the **Gray Sisters** and thanked them for their help.

After many days of travel, **Perseus** arrived at the Land of the Evening Star. There he met the nymph **Hesperia**. She learned of his quest, and warned **Perseus** that as a mortal, if he tried to enter the Underworld to retrieve the Sword of Hades, he would die the instant he set foot inside. **Hesperia** offered to go instead since she was not mortal. **Perseus** accepted her offer, and **Hesperia** entered the Underworld and retrieved the magical sword for **Perseus**. **Perseus** thanked her and, sword in hand, flew away to **Medusa's** lair.

When **Perseus** finally encountered **Medusa**, she was more hideous than he could have imagined. Since he knew locking eyes with her would turn him instantly into stone, **Perseus** hid behind a statue and used his wits to trick her into coming closer. With one sweep of his magic sword, **Perseus** severed **Medusa's** neck.

Quickly **Perseus** flew back to Seriphos. He placed **Medusa's** head in a leather sack because even though she was dead, her eyes still had the power to turn living beings to stone. **Perseus** took the sack to the palace, where he tossed it at the feet of **Polydectes**. **Perseus** warned the prince not to open the sack, but **Polydectes** did not believe that the sack contained **Medusa's** head. Despite **Perseus's** warning, the prince opened the sack and was instantly turned to stone!



Perseus returned the sword and winged sandals to **Athena**, and thanked her once again for all her help. From that time on, **Perseus** had many more adventures and eventually became a great king himself. After his death, the gods honored **Perseus** by placing him up in the sky, in the form of a constellation.

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Post-Performance Discussion Questions

- What was your favorite puppet from the performance? Why?
- What made Medusa so scary? Was it her head of snakes? Or her tail? What do you think would make you frightening to other people?
- How is hearing a story told out loud with puppets different from reading a book or watching a movie?

Post-Performance Activities

ACTIVITY 1: What's So Scary?

LEARNING GOAL:

To discuss and identify characteristics that make people intimidating

MATERIALS:

Pictures of Medusa (see page 8), coloring supplies, drawing paper

DIRECTIONS:

1. Ask students to think about what made Medusa scary. Discuss the reasons and list them on the board.
2. Explain to students that throughout time, Medusa has been depicted by artists in many different ways. Sometimes she is a beautiful woman and sometimes a hideous monster. Why would that be? Look at the various pictures of Medusa from different artists and time periods. Why do you think she looks so different in all the pictures? Why do you think those artists saw her so differently? How was she depicted in this production?
3. Ask students to draw themselves, but to change one or more of their physical characteristics in a way that would make them frightening.
4. Ask students to share their drawings with the class and explain why they think they would be scary.

EXTENSIONS:

- Ask students to write a short essay explaining why their character is scary. Is this what scares you? Why would it scare other people?
- Ask students to draw their own version of Medusa. Would she be beautiful or scary? Why?

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Pictures of Medusa



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Post-Performance Activities, continued

ACTIVITY 2: What's News?

LEARNING GOAL:

To exercise writing skills while exploring Ancient Greek mythology and culture

MATERIALS:

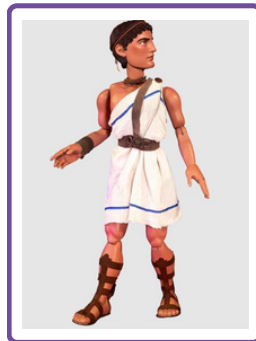
Newspaper, writing and coloring supplies, paper

DIRECTIONS:

1. Look through a newspaper together and discuss the different sections, content, photos, format, etc.
2. Brainstorm how the myth of *Perseus and Medusa* could be covered by a newspaper.
3. Divide students into groups. Assign each group a section of the newspaper to write together, for example:
 - COVER STORY: Perseus defeats Medusa
 - SPORTS: the ancient Greek Olympics
 - OBITUARIES: Medusa
 - PERFORMANCE REVIEW: review of the marionette show
 - ADVERTISEMENTS: special objects or skills related to the myth (i.e. "Athena's Wisdom Elixir", "Hesperia's Delivery Service", "Medusa's Garden Statues", etc.)
4. Discuss the newspaper's layout. Where should the top stories go? What should be the order of sections? Where should advertisements be strategically placed?
5. Create published copies of the newspaper for the entire class and read it together.

EXTENSION:

- Have students create enough copies of their newspaper for their entire grade level or school. Pass out copies to the other classes.



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Further Resources

- [Tanglewood Marionettes Website](#)
- [Encyclopedia of Greek Mythology](#)
- [GreekMythology.com](#)
- Amery, Heather: *Greek Myths for Young Children*, Usborne, 2009
- D'Aulaires, Ingri and Edgar: *D'Aulaires' Book of Greek Myths*, Delacorte Press, 1992
- Hamilton, Edith: *Mythology: Timeless Tales of Gods and Heroes (Illustrated Edition)*, Black Dog & Leventhal, 2017
- Kennedy, John: *Puppet Mania!*, North Light Books, 2004

Curricular Connections

Arts Standards: Theatre and Visual Arts

Creating

- Generate and conceptualize artistic ideas and work. (T.Cr.01, V.Cr.01)
- Organize and develop artistic ideas and work. (T.Cr.02, V.Cr.02)

Performing/Presenting

- Convey meaning through the presentation of artistic work. (T.P.06, V.P.06)

Responding

- Perceive and analyze artistic work. (T.R.07, V.R.07)
- Interpret intent and meaning in artistic work. (T.R.08, V.R.08)
- Apply criteria to evaluate artistic work. (T.R.09, V.R.09)

Connecting

- Synthesize and relate knowledge and personal experiences to make art. (T.Co.10, V.Co.10)
- Relate artistic ideas and works to societal, cultural and historical contexts to deepen understanding. (T.Co.11, V.Co.11)

English Language Arts and Literacy Anchor Standards

Reading

- Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas. (R.PK-12.2)
- Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone. (R.PK-12.4)

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Curricular Connections, continued

English Language Arts and Literacy Anchor Standards, continued

Writing

- Write narratives to develop experiences or events using effective literary techniques, well-chosen details, and well-structured sequences. (W.PK-12.3)

Speaking and Listening

- Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally. (SL.PK-12.2)
- Evaluate a speaker's point of view, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric. (SL.PK-12.3)

Language

- Apply knowledge of language to understand how language functions in different contexts, to make effective choices for meaning or style, and to comprehend more fully when reading or listening. (L.PK-12.3)
- Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships and nuances in word meanings. (L.PK-12.5)

History and Social Science

Grade 1

- Topic 1: Civics: communities, elections, and leadership (HSS.1.T1)
- Topic 2: Geography: places to explore (HSS.1.T2)

Grade 2

- Topic 2: Geography and its effects on people (HSS.2.T2)

Grade 6

- Topic 1: Studying complex societies, past and present (HSS.6.T1)

Grade 7

- Topic 4b: Ancient and Classical Greece, c. 1200-300 BCE (HSS.7.T4b)



Educational Materials compiled by Arts for Learning Massachusetts