**Perseus and Medusa**

- **Acrisius**, King of Argos, receives an oracle that any child born of his daughter, Danaë, will grow up to kill its grandfather (i.e. him).
- He locks up Danaë alone in an empty room before she has had any children.
- But Zeus comes to her through a window in a shower of golden light and soon Perseus is born.
- Acrisius, scared that Perseus will grow up to kill him, throws Perseus and Danaë into an empty treasure chest and throws them into the sea.
- They are washed up on the shore of the island of Seriphos, where Polydectes is king.
- He is an evil man and wants to marry the helpless Danaë against her will.
- Perseus is told he can attend the wedding if he can bring a wedding present, but having no money of his own he volunteers to bring Polydectes the head of the Gorgon, Medusa, who can turn men into stone if they look at her, instead.

- Athena instructs Perseus to go to the Graiae, 3 forever-old women who share one eye and one tooth between them, since they know the location of the Stygian nymphs.
- Perseus goes to the Graiae and takes their only eye, holding it ransom until they reveal the location of the nymphs.
- When he arrives the Stygian nymphs give him a bag to safely contain the Medusa’s head once he has cut it off.
- Athena gives him a shining shield, Hermes lends him his winged sandals and Zeus gives him a sword and his brother Hades’ cap of invisibility, all of which will help him kill Medusa.

- Perseus makes his way to the Gorgon’s island at the end of the world.
- On the way he meets Atlas, the Titan who must hold the weight of the world on his shoulders forever.
- Atlas points him in the direction of Medusa and remarks that he would like to be turned to stone so as to feel no more weight.
- Perseus manages to kill Medusa by not looking directly at her but using the reflection in his new shield. The brothers Pegasus (the wonder horse) and Chrysaor spring from the neck of the dying Medusa.

- Perseus returns to Seriphos and turns Polydectes to stone using the Gorgon’s severed head.

- Later in his life, Perseus learns of the oracle which stated that he would be destined to kill his grandfather, Acrisius.
- To avoid doing so he moves far away from Argos.
- Unfortunately, he stops at Larissa on the way and enters an athletics contest there. He throws a discus which with the strength of an oracle seeks out Acrisius (who was stood in the crowd) and kills him, fulfilling the prophecy.
Theseus and the Minotaur

- Minos, king of Crete, prayed to Poseidon, the God of the sea, to send him a snow-white bull which he would then sacrifice in honour of Poseidon.
- Minos decided it was too beautiful to sacrifice and kept it instead.
- Angered, Poseidon made Pasiphaë (Minos’ wife) fall in love with the bull sent from the sea (also known as the Cretan Bull, later featuring in a labour of Hercules).
- Pasiphaë made the great inventor Daedalus make her a wooden cow, using which she could mate with the Cretan Bull.
- The Minotaur, half man, half bull was soon born.
- Daedalus was instructed by Minos to build a labyrinth in which this creature could safely be housed.

Every 7 years the Athenians, whose king was Aegeus, had to send their 7 bravest boys and 7 most beautiful girls to Crete to feed the Minotaur, as payment for having killed Androgeos, another son of Pasiphaë (this time with Minos) when he had visited Athens.
- One year Theseus, son of Aegeus the King, got sick and tired of this continual waste of Athens’ youth and went himself as one of the 7 boys intending to kill the Minotaur.
- Outgoing ships taking the 14 sacrificial victims always went under a black sail. Theseus promises Aegeus that if he returns successfully it will be under a white sail.

Upon arrival at Crete, Theseus meets Ariadne, daughter of Minos.
- She falls in love with Theseus and helps him by letting him into the labyrinth at night and giving him a ball of twine by which to retrace his steps. She also tells him to get to the beast he must go always forwards and always down.
- The condition of her help is that he must promise to take her back to Athens as his lover. Theseus promises he will do this.
- Theseus follows her advice, and after a struggle kills the Minotaur.
- On the way back to Athens, after a brief stay on the island of Naxos, Theseus breaks his promise and abandons Ariadne there.
- She curses him and calls upon the Gods to make sure Theseus forgets to change the sail to white.

The now aged Aegeus, upon seeing the black sail approaching the coast, throws himself down from a cliff into the sea below, killing himself. That sea is to this day known as the Aegean Sea.
- Theseus returns to Athens and takes his place as King and is welcomed as a hero.
The Trojan War

- At the wedding of Peleus and Thetis (the mother of Achilles), angered by being the only god or goddess not to receive an invitation, the goddess Eris (“Strife” or “Arguing”) rolls a golden apple into the wedding party with the words “To the most beautiful” on it.

- Aphrodite (goddess of love), Hera (wife of Zeus) and Athena (goddess of wisdom who also has military associations) all fight over who deserves to keep it.

- Zeus is asked, but refuses, to judge the contest, saying that a Trojan shepherd named Paris must do so instead.

- The three goddesses each try and bribe Paris to pick them, Athena with wisdom, Hera with lots of kingdoms and Aphrodite with the most beautiful woman in the world.

- Paris picks Aphrodite, who promises he can have Helen of Sparta, who at the time was married to Menelaus, king of Sparta.

- Later, at a party celebrating a pact of peace between Sparta and Troy, Paris finds Helen, who by now has been made to fall in love with Paris by Aphrodite, and the two run off back to Troy.

- Menelaus is (understandably) furious and goes to his brother Agamemnon, king of Mycenae who held great power over most of Greece, for help.

- Agamemnon has wanted to conquer Troy, which lay on the cost of Asia Minor (modern day Turkey) for some time, and saw this as a perfect excuse.

- The two brothers lead an expedition of troops from all across Greece to Troy to try and conquer it and retrieve Helen.

- For 9 years very little happens. The Greek forces try to cut off the Trojans’ supply routes and reinforcements from other cities, but due to the Trojan King Priam’s extensive range of allies (some as far as the Ethiopians in Africa) the Trojans hold out.

- In the 10th year all the events of note take place.

- After a raid on a settlement on the outskirts of Troy, the Greeks divide up their plunder and Achilles receives a young woman called Briseis as booty.

- Agamemnon takes a fancy to her and pulls rank, stealing her away from Achilles.

- Achilles is furious and withdraws from the fighting.

- As a result the Trojans have some of their greatest successes of the war, with Hector (their leading warrior and the brother of Paris) burning some of the Greek ships on the beach and only being denied certain victory (from totally burning all the ships) by the near-singlehanded, heroic efforts of Ajax, the second greatest Greek warrior after Achilles.

- Agamemnon is desperate for Achilles to re-enter the fighting. Achilles refuses, even after Achilles’ closest friends Ajax and Odysseus, and his now-aged childhood tutor Phoenix, go and beg him and after Agamemnon offers him almost endless amounts of treasure and kingdoms.

- One day, angered by the numbers of Greeks dying at Hector’s hand with Achilles on the sidelines, Achilles’ young cousin Patroclus puts on Achilles’ armour and enters the fight. The Trojans assume (because of the armour) that it is Achilles.
• Patroclus fights Hector but is killed.
• Achilles is very angry that his cousin has been killed and re-enters the fighting, killing lots of Trojans in his fury.
• Achilles knows from a prophecy told to him by his mother Thetis that if he kills Hector then he will die soon after, but (preferring glorious death over long empty life) fights him anyway in single combat after the other Trojans retreat behind their high walls.

• Hector’s courage fails him and he runs around the circumference of Troy with Achilles chasing him 3 times, before on the 4th time finally stopping to face him.
• Achilles kills Hector and, still anguished at his cousin’s death, desecrates his body by tying it to the back of his chariot and dragging it around the plain of Troy, causing it to be bloodied and covered in dust.
• Late one evening old King Priam, who is distraught at seeing his son’s body, manages (with the help of Hermes) to infiltrate the Greek camp and begs Achilles to give him his son’s body back for proper burial.
• Impressed with the old man’s bravery, and put in mind of his own father Peleus (who Achilles knows from the prophecy will never see him again), Achilles gives Hector’s body back to Priam.

• Achilles is killed soon after, hit in his vulnerable heel by an arrow fired by Paris (the rest of his body being invulnerable after Thetis dipped it into the river Styx as a child, holding him by the heel).

• Odysseus comes up with a plan to end the war once and for all: the Trojan Horse.
• A huge, hollow horse is built by the Greeks and left outside Troy. Inside it are 30 of the Greeks’ best warriors, including Odysseus himself.
• The rest of the Greek ships sail away from the beach and hide in a cove behind the island of Lemnos, therefore not being visible from the Trojan shore.
• A single Greek is left behind, in rags and looking downtrodden. His name is Sinon.
• He convinces the Trojans who come out and find the horse, including King Priam, to take it into their city on the grounds that if they do it will work as an offering to the gods to keep Troy safe.
• Of the few who distrust the horse, Laocoön, a priest of Poseidon, is killed, along with his two young sons by sea serpents sent by Poseidon (Poseidon hates the Trojans after they cheated him out of promised payment for building their city walls long before).
• Taking this as an omen to trust the horse, the Trojans take it inside the city walls amid much drinking and celebration.
• At night the Greeks slip out of the horse and slaughter the drunken, sleeping Trojans. They give a fire signal to the ships waiting at Lemnos who return and join in the takeover.
• Troy is burnt to the ground, with only a few, including Aeneas who will go on to found the city that will become Rome, escaping.

• NB: Whether the Trojan War is a historical event is much disputed.
• If it is to be considered so, the best approximation for a date is usually given as 1194-1184BC.
The 12 Labours of Hercules

Background to the labours:

Driven mad by the goddess Hera, Hercules killed his own children. To correct the crime, Hercules was required to carry out 10 labours set by his archenemy, Eurystheus, who had become king in Hercules' place. If he succeeded, he would be purified of his sin and, as myth says, he would be granted immortality.

Hercules accomplished these tasks, but Eurystheus did not accept the cleansing of the Augean stables because Hercules was going to accept pay for the labour. Neither did he accept the killing of the Lernaean Hydra as Hercules' nephew, Iolaus, had helped him burn the stumps of the heads. Eurystheus set two more tasks (fetching the Golden Apples of Hesperides and capturing Cerberus), which Hercules performed successfully, bringing the total number of tasks up to twelve.

1. The Nemean lion:
   - King Eurystheus decided Hercules' first task would be to bring him the skin of an invulnerable lion which terrorized the hills around Nemea.
   - When Hercules got to Nemea and began tracking the terrible lion, he soon discovered his arrows were useless against the beast's fur.
   - Following it to a cave which had two entrances, Hercules blocked one of the doorways, and then approached the fierce lion through the other. Grasping the lion in his strong arms, and ignoring its powerful claws, he held it tightly until he'd choked it to death.
   - When Hercules made it back to Mycenae, Eurystheus was amazed that the hero had managed such an impossible task. He became afraid of Hercules, and forbade him from entering through the gates of the city.
   - Eurystheus also had a large bronze jar made and buried partway in the earth, where he could hide from Hercules if need be. After that, Eurystheus sent his commands to Hercules through a herald, refusing to see the powerful hero face to face.

2. The Lernaean Hydra:
   - From the murky waters of the swamps near a place called Lerna, the hydra would rise up and terrorize the countryside. A monstrous serpent with nine heads, the hydra attacked with poisonous venom. Nor was this beast easy prey, for one of the nine heads was immortal and therefore indestructible.
   - When he found it, Hercules seized the monster, but it was not so easily overcome, though, for it wound one of its coils around Hercules' foot and made it impossible for the hero to escape. With his club, Hercules attacked the many heads of the hydra, but as soon as he smashed one head, two more would burst forth in its place.
   - Each time Hercules bashed one of the hydra's heads, Hercules' nephew Iolaus held a torch to the headless tendons of the neck, preventing others growing back.
   - Once he had removed and destroyed the eight mortal heads, Hercules chopped off the ninth, immortal head. This he buried at the side of the road and he covered it with a heavy rock. As for the rest of the hydra, Hercules slit open the corpse and dipped his arrows in the venomous blood.
   - Eurystheus was not impressed with Hercules' feat, however. He said that since Iolaus had helped his uncle, this labour should not count as one of the ten.

3. The Golden Hind of Diana
A hind is a female red deer.

One would think it would have been easy for a hero like Hercules to go and shoot a deer and bring it back to Eurystheus, but a few problems made things complicated.

This was a special deer, because it had golden horns and hooves of bronze. Not only that, the deer was sacred to the goddess of hunting and the moon, Artemis; it was Artemis' special pet.

That meant that Hercules could neither kill the deer nor hurt it. He couldn't risk getting Diana angry at him.

Hercules hunted the deer for a whole year. At last, when the deer had become weary with the chase, it looked for a place to rest and then made its way to a river.

Realizing that the deer was about to get away, Hercules shot it just as she was about to cross the river. He caught the deer, put it on his shoulders and turned back to Mycenae. On the way, he was met by Artemis.

Artemis was very angry because Hercules tried to kill her sacred animal. She was about to take the deer away from Hercules, and she would have punished him, but Hercules told her the truth. He said that he had to obey the oracle and do the labours Eurystheus had given him.

Artemis therefore stopped being angry and healed the deer's wound. Hercules carried it alive back to Mycenae.

4. **The Erymanthian Boar**

Eurystheus ordered Hercules to bring him the Erymanthian boar alive. The boar was a huge, wild pig with a bad temper, and tusks growing out of its mouth.

Every day the boar would come crashing down from his lair on the mountain, attacking men and animals all over the countryside, gouging them with its tusks, and destroying everything in its path.

On his way to hunt the boar, Hercules stopped to visit his friend Pholus, who was a centaur and lived in a cave near Mount Erymanthus. Hercules was eating with him and asked for wine, Pholus said that he was afraid to open the wine jar, because it belonged to all the centaurs in common, not just him.

But Hercules said not to worry, and opened it himself. Soon afterwards, the rest of the centaurs smelled the wine and came to Pholus' cave. They were angry that someone was drinking all of their wine. The first two who came in were armed with rocks and fir trees.

A fight broke out and Hercules chased the centaurs away, shooting his arrows at them.

While Hercules was chasing the centaurs, Pholus pulled an arrow from the body of one of the dead centaurs. He wondered that so little a thing could kill such a big creature. Suddenly, the arrow slipped from his hand. It fell onto his foot and, because it had been dipped in the venom of the hydra, killed him on the spot. So when Hercules returned, he found Pholus dead. He buried his centaur friend, and proceeded to hunt the boar.

Hercules chased the boar round and round the mountain, shouting as loud as he could. Eventually, when it was tiring, Hercules drove the exhausted animal into a deep patch of snow.

Then he trapped it in a net, and carried it all the way to Mycenae. Eurystheus, amazed and frightened by the hero's powers, hid in his partly buried bronze jar.

5. **The Augean stables**

For his fifth labour, Eurystheus ordered Hercules to clean up King Augeas' stables in a single day.

Augeas was very rich, and he had many herds of cows, bulls, goats, sheep and horses.

Hercules went to King Augeas, and without telling anything about Eurystheus, said that he would clean out the stables in one day, if Augeas would give him a tenth of his fine cattle.

Augeas couldn't believe his ears, but agreed to the deal. Hercules brought Augeas' son along to watch. First the hero tore a big opening in the wall of the cattle-yard where the stables were. Then he made another opening in the wall on the opposite side of the yard.
Next, he dug wide trenches to two rivers which flowed nearby. He turned the course of the rivers into the yard. The rivers rushed through the stables, flushing them out, and all the mess flowed out the hole in the wall on the other side of the yard.

When Augeas learned that Eurystheus was behind all this, he would not pay Hercules his reward. Not only that, he denied that he had even promised to pay a reward. Augeas said that if Hercules didn't like it, he could take the matter to a judge to decide.

The judge took his seat. Hercules called the son of Augeas to testify. The boy swore that his father had agreed to give Hercules a reward.

The judge ruled that Hercules would have to be paid. In a rage, Augeas ordered both his own son and Hercules to leave his kingdom at once.

Eurystheus still said that this labour didn’t count, because Hercules was paid for having done the work.

6. The Stymphalian Birds

For his sixth Labour, Hercules was to drive away an enormous flock of birds which gathered at a lake near the town of Stymphalos.

Arriving at the lake, which was deep in the woods, Hercules had no idea how to drive the huge gathering of birds away. The goddess Athena came to his aid, providing a pair of bronze noisemaking clappers made by the blacksmith god, Hephaestus.

Hercules clashed the clappers loudly, scaring the birds out of the trees, then shot them with his bow and arrows (dipped in the blood of the hydra) as they took flight.

Some versions of the legend say that these Stymphalian birds were vicious man-eaters.

7. The Cretan Bull

*See Theseus and the Minotaur for how the Cretan Bull came into existence and how it mated with Minos’ wife Pasiphaë *

After it had mated with Pasiphaë, the bull went rampaging all over Crete.

When Hercules got to Crete, he easily wrestled the bull to the ground and drove it back to King Eurystheus.

Eurystheus let the bull go free. It wandered around Greece, terrorizing the people, and ended up in Marathon, a city near Athens where it was killed by Theseus, in the years before he went on to kill the Cretan Bull’s son, the Minotaur.

8. The Mares of Diomedes

For his 8th labour, Eurystheus sent Hercules to get the man-eating mares of Diomedes, the king of a tribe called the Bistones, and bring them back to him in Mycenae.

Hercules overpowered the grooms who were tending the horses, and drove them to the sea. But by the time he got there, the Bistones had realized what had happened, and they sent a band of soldiers to recapture the animals.

To free himself to fight, Hercules entrusted the mares to a youth named Abderos.

Unfortunately, the mares got the better of young Abderos and dragged him around until he was killed.

Hercules fed Diomedes to his own mares.

In honour of the slain Abderos, Hercules then founded the city of Abdera.
The hero took the mares back to Eurystheus, but Eurystheus set them free. The mares wandered around until eventually they came to Mount Olympus, the home of the gods, where they were eaten by wild beasts.

9. **The Belt of Hippolyte**

- For the ninth labour, Eurystheus ordered Hercules to bring him the belt of Hippolyte.
- Hippolyte was queen of the Amazons, a tribe of women warriors.
- The Amazons lived apart from men, and if they ever gave birth to children, they kept only the females and reared them to be warriors like themselves.
- Queen Hippolyte had a special piece of armour. It was a leather belt that had been given to her by Ares, the war god, because she was the best warrior of all the Amazons.
- Eurystheus wanted Hippolyte's belt as a present to give to his daughter.
- Hercules' friends realized that the hero could not fight against the whole Amazon army by himself, so they joined with him and set sail in a single ship. After a long journey, they reached the land of the Amazons and put in at the harbour. When Hercules and the Greeks got off the boat, Hippolyte came down to visit them.
- She asked Hercules why he had come, and when he told her, she promised to give him the belt.
- But the goddess Hera, Hercules' immortal enemy, disguised herself as an Amazon warrior and went up and down the army saying to each woman that the strangers who had arrived were going to carry off the queen.
- The women warriors charged on horseback down to the ship. But when Hercules saw that they were wearing their armour and were carrying their weapons, he knew that he was under attack. Thinking fast, he drew his sword and killed Hippolyte.
- Then he undid her belt and took it away from her.
- Hercules and the Greeks fought the rest of the Amazons in a great battle. When the enemy had been driven off, Hercules sailed away back to Eurystheus.

10. **The Cattle of Geryon**

- Eurystheus ordered the hero to bring him the cattle of the monster Geryon. Geryon had three heads and three sets of legs all joined at the waist.
- Geryon lived on an island. On this island, Geryon kept a herd of red cattle guarded by Cerberus' brother, Orthrus, a two-headed hound, and the herdsman Eurytion.
- Not long after he arrived, Orthrus attacked Hercules, so Hercules bashed him with his club. Eurytion followed, with the same result. Another herdsman in the area reported these events to Geryon. Just as Hercules was escaping with the cattle, Geryon attacked him. Hercules fought with him and shot him dead with his arrows.
- The stealing of the cattle was not such a difficult task, compared to the trouble Hercules had bringing the herd back to Greece. On his way back two sons of Poseidon tried to steal the cattle, so he killed them. Later, a bull got loose and jumped into the sea. The bull swam to Sicily and then made its way to the neighbouring country. The native word for bull was "italus," and so the country came to be named after the bull, and was called Italy.
- The escaped bull was found by a ruler named Eryx, another of Poseidon's sons, and Eryx put this bull into his own herd. Meanwhile, Hercules was searching for the runaway animal. He temporarily
entrusted the rest of the herd to the god Hephaestus, and went after the bull. He found it in Eryx's herd, but the king would return it only if the hero could beat him in a wrestling contest. Never one to shy away from competition, Hercules beat Eryx three times in wrestling, killed the king, took back the bull, and returned it to the herd.

- Hera then sent a gadfly to attack the cattle, and the herd scattered far and wide. Now, Hercules had to run around Greece gathering the escaped cows. Finally, he brought the cattle of Geryon to Eurystheus, who sacrificed the herd to Hera, a grave insult against Hercules!

11. The Apples of the Hesperides

- Poor Hercules! After eight years and one month, after performing ten superhuman labours, he was still not off the hook. Eurystheus demanded two more labours from the hero, since he did not count the hydra or the Augean stables as properly done.
- Eurystheus commanded Hercules to bring him golden apples which belonged to Zeus, king of the gods. Hera had given these apples to Zeus as a wedding gift, so surely this task was impossible.
- These apples were kept in a garden at the northern edge of the world, and they were guarded not only by a hundred-headed dragon, named Ladon, but also by the Hesperides, nymphs who were daughters of Atlas, the titan who held the sky upon his shoulders.
- Hercules' first problem was that he didn't know where the garden was. Hercules seized the sea-god Nereus, who knew the garden's secret location. Nereus transformed himself into all kinds of shapes, trying to escape, but Hercules held tight and didn't release Nereus until he got the information he needed.
- Hercules then came to the rock where Prometheus was chained. Prometheus, a trickster who made fun of the gods and stole the secret of fire from them, was sentenced by Zeus to a horrible fate.
- He was bound to the mountain, and every day a monstrous eagle came and ate his liver, pecking away at Prometheus' tortured body. After the eagle flew off, Prometheus' liver grew back, and the next day he had to endure the eagle's painful visit all over again. This went on for 30 years, until Hercules came and killed the eagle.
- In gratitude, Prometheus told Hercules the secret to getting the apples. He would have to send Atlas after them, instead of going himself. Atlas hated holding up the sky and the earth so much that he would agree to the task of fetching the apples, in order to pass his burden over to Hercules.
- Hercules took Prometheus' advice. When Atlas returned with the golden apples, he told Hercules he would take them to Eurystheus himself, and asked Hercules to stay there and hold the heavy load until he came back (never intending to come back).
- Hercules slyly agreed, but asked Atlas whether he could take it back again, just for a moment, while the hero put some soft padding on his shoulders to help him bear the weight of the sky and the earth. Atlas put the apples on the ground, and lifted the burden onto his own shoulders. And so Hercules picked up the apples and quickly ran off, carrying them back, uneventfully, to Eurystheus.
- However, because they belonged to the gods, the apples could not remain with Eurystheus. After all the trouble Hercules went through to get them, he had to return them to Athena, who took them back to the garden at the northern edge of the world.

12. Cerberus

- Eurystheus ordered Hercules to go to the Underworld and kidnap the beast called Cerberus.
Cerberus was a vicious beast that guarded the entrance to Hades and kept the living from entering the world of the dead. Cerberus was a strange mixture of creatures: he had three heads of wild dogs, a dragon or serpent for a tail, and heads of snakes all over his back.

Before making the trip to the Underworld, Hercules decided that he should take some extra precautions. This was, after all, a journey from which no mortal had ever returned. Hercules knew that once in the kingdom of Hades, he might not be allowed to leave and re-join the living. The hero went to Eleusis and saw a priest there who began what were known as the Eleusinian Mysteries. The mysteries were sacred religious rites which celebrated the myth of Demeter and her daughter Persephone. The ancients believed that those who learned the secrets of the mysteries would have happiness in the Underworld. After the hero met a few conditions of membership, the priest initiated Hercules into the mysteries.

Hercules made his way down to the Underworld and found Hades and asked the god for Cerberus. The lord of the Underworld replied that Hercules could indeed take Cerberus with him, but only if he overpowered the beast with nothing more than his own brute strength.

The hero threw his strong arms around the beast, perhaps grasping all three heads at once, and wrestled Cerberus into submission. The dragon in the tail of the fierce flesh-eating guard dog bit Hercules, but that did not stop him. Cerberus had to submit to the force of the hero, and Hercules brought Cerberus to Eurystheus.

Unlike other monsters that crossed the path of the legendary hero, Cerberus was returned safely to Hades, where he resumed guarding the gateway to the Underworld. Presumably, Hercules inflicted no lasting damage on Cerberus, except, of course, the wound to his pride!
Jason and the Argonauts

- Jason’s wicked uncle Pelias takes the throne of Iolcus (a place) away from Jason’s father (Aeson).
- So that Pelias doesn’t kill the young Jason, he is taken out to the countryside and raised by Chiron the centaur.
- Pelias, taking steps to secure his position on the throne, consulted an oracle which warned him to beware of a man with one sandal.
- Many years later Jason, when he was making his way back to Iolcus, lost one of his sandals when he was crossing a river.
- Alarmed and to try and get rid of him, Pelias tells Jason that he can have the throne if he brings him back the Golden Fleece.
- This fleece originated from a winged ram whose fleece was gold. At this time the fleece lay in a grove of Ares far away in Colchis, and was protected by a dragon which never slept.

- Jason accepts the challenge and assembles a group of heroes of the age to help him on his quest.
- Some of the most notable Argonauts (the band being named after the ship they went on, the Argo) were Bellerophon (who also features in the myth with Pegasus and the Chimaera), Hercules, Peleus (father of Achilles), Theseus and Orpheus the great musician.

- On the way to Colchis, the Argonauts first come to the island of Lemnos (for which see also Trojan War) where they stop off for a while with a band of women who had killed their husbands to create a new race with them.
- They then come to the land of the Doliones, where they are entertained generously before setting off back out to sea in darkness. They soon get lost, though, and by accident land back at the land of the Doliones. The Doliones think they are pirates or invaders and come to fight them, leading to many deaths on both sides until they all realise their mistake the next morning.
- The Argonauts then come to the court of King Phineas. He is troubled by Harpies (frightening women with wings), who each day take the food the king is about to eat. Jason helps Phineas by killing these Harpies. In return Phineas points the Argonauts in the right direction to Colchis.
- The Argo then comes to the Clashing Rocks. To get through this dangerous obstacle, Jason sends a dove through first, realising that if the dove gets through then they too will be able to by rowing as fast as they can. The dove just about gets through, losing some of its tail feathers as the rocks clash together. In turn the Argo just about gets through, losing the back end of its stern.
- The Argonauts finally arrive at Colchis, where the King who controls the fleece there is Aeetes.
- His daughter, Medea, who is a sorceress, is made to fall in love with Jason by Aphrodite’s son Eros (Roman name Cupid).

- Jason is told that he can have the Golden Fleece if he plows a field with some fire-breathing bulls.
- Medea gives Jason some magic ointment which makes him immune to the bulls’ fire.
- Jason successfully sowed dragon’s teeth into the field, but these immediately sprouted into warriors.
- Jason throws a rock into the field and after hearing the noise all the warriors rush towards the sound and kill one another instead of Jason.
- Jason sprays the dragon which never sleeps which was guarding the Golden Fleece with a magic potion, again provided by Medea, and successfully takes it away.
- Aeetes chases the Argo out to sea, but Medea slows her father down by chopping up his son (i.e. her own brother) Apsyrtus and throwing the pieces into the sea behind the Argo, making Aeetes slow down to recover them.

- On the way back to Iolcus, Jason and the Argonauts encounter the Sirens (later also encountered by Odysseus). As they pass them, Orpheus, the master musician, plays louder and better music to drown out the Siren song and allow the Argo to pass their island safely.

- When they return to Iolcus, Medea promises the daughters of the evil, and by now old, king Pelias that she can make him young again with her sorcery by chopping him up and boiling him. She “demonstrates” by chopping up an old lamb in a cauldron and bringing out a young one which she had hidden underneath all along. Pelias’ daughters fall for the trick and consent to the procedure, meaning Pelias is killed.

- One of Pelias’ sons drives Medea and Jason out of Iolcus for this murder and the pair later settle at Corinth.
The Adventures of Odysseus

Lotus Eaters

- After leaving Troy, **Odysseus’** ships are driven off course on their voyage home by a series of storms.
- They first come to the land of the **Cicones**. Some of Odysseus’ men visit the **Lotus Eaters** who live there and sample the Lotus plant.
- This, because of how delicious it is, makes whoever eats it forget everything but the thought of staying where they are and eating more of the Lotus plant.
- Odysseus drags the men who have tasted the Lotus plant back to the ships and orders his other men to get aboard immediately. All the ships are then able to get away.

The Cave of the Cyclops Polyphemus

- Odysseus and his men land on an island and see a cave.
- Odysseus’ natural curiosity to know what kind of people live there and whether they are civilised or not takes them inside the cave.
- They eat some of the milk and cheeses they find inside, but are soon trapped when the owner, an enormous **Cyclops** (one-eyed giant) called **Polyphemus**, a son of Poseidon, comes back and places an enormous boulder in the mouth of the cave.
- Polyphemus grabs a handful of Odysseus’ men and smashes them on the ground before eating them.
- Odysseus is appalled, but comes up with a plan to escape from the cave.
- He gives the Cyclops some excellent, unmixed (i.e. very potent – the Greeks diluted their wine with water) wine and gets him very drunk, telling him that his name is “Nobody” as he does so.
- The Cyclops promises that in return he will eat Odysseus last.
- As the drunken Cyclops sleeps, Odysseus and his men sharpen a wooden stake from one of Polyphemus’ sheep pens and heat it in a fire.
- They drive this into the Cyclops’ one eye, blinding him.
- The next day when the Cyclops lets his sheep, for whom he cares very much, out to graze, Odysseus and his men tie themselves to the underside of the larger rams and escape as the blind Cyclops only feels for them riding on top of them.
- As he sails away, Odysseus cannot resist boasting that he has beaten the Cyclops, telling him his real name and where he comes from.
- This puts his crew in immediate danger as the Cyclops throws large boulders in the direction the sound came from.
- The Cyclops is also able to curse Odysseus now that he knows his name, calling on his father Poseidon to make life difficult for Odysseus as he makes his way home to **Ithaca**.

Aeolus – King of the Winds

- Odysseus and his men come to the island home of **Aeolus**, king of the winds, and stay with him for a while, enjoying his hospitality.
• As they leave, Aeolus gives them a bag with all the winds of the world, except for the west wind, in it, to give them the direction of wind they need to blow them more quickly back to Ithaca.
• Odysseus keeps the leather bag with him as they journey over the sea, not telling his men what the present from Aeolus is.
• As they get within sight of the coast of Ithaca, the men’s curiosity and jealousy at Odysseus keeping the gift all to himself, which they assume is treasure, reaches breaking point.
• Odysseus, who had stayed awake for days guarding the bag, finally falls asleep and the men open it.
• All the other winds are released, blowing the ships straight back to Aeolus’ island.
• Odysseus begs Aeolus to tie up the other winds again and give them a second chance, but he refuses and he has to go back on his journey unaided.

The Man-eating Laestrygonians

• Odysseus and his men approach another foreign land, and all the ships sail heedlessly into the main harbour, except Odysseus’ own ship. Being cautious and clever he leaves his ship in an offshore cove.
• Odysseus sends a few men to investigate who the natives are and what they are like.
• One of these men is snatched up by the King of the Laestrygonians when they reach the palace, who claims he intends to eat him.
• The others escape and run back to Odysseus with the news.
• They are pursued by the Laestrygonians, who are man-eating giants.
• They throw huge boulders destroying the ships in the main harbour and kill the majority of Odysseus’ men with spears.
• Only Odysseus’ ship, safely moored offshore and a small number of men on it escape.

The witch Circe

• Odysseus’ lone ship soon arrives at Aeaea, the island home of Circe, a goddess who specialises in witchcraft.
• Odysseus sends some of his men to investigate the land, and they find lots of tame animals roaming around the place, including lions and bears.
• Circe welcomes them all and gives them some food, which is cheese and meal laced with honey, wine and her magical potions.
• After the men gratefully eat, Circe uses a magic wand to turn them all into pigs.
• One of the men Odysseus sent, Eurylochus, sensed a trap and went back to Odysseus to tell him what he found.
• Odysseus goes to rescue his transformed men, and does so with the help of Hermes, who gives him a herb called moly, which made him immune to Circe’s magic potion.
• Hermes also tells Odysseus to charge at Circe with his sword and then only go to bed with her after making her swear that she will not try to harm him anymore.
• Odysseus and his men remain on Aeaea for a whole year, only leaving when Odysseus’ men get restless.
• Circe gives them directions to other places, such as the Underworld and tells them about what awaits them when they reach the Sirens and Scylla and Charibdis.
The Underworld and Tiresias the prophet

- Following Circe’s directions, Odysseus gets down to the Underworld.
- He sacrifices some sheep (taken from Circe) there and invites the shades of the dead to come forward and drink the black blood.
- The prophet Tiresias appears and gives Odysseus some advice about how to proceed on his journey home, including the warning not to eat the cattle of the Sun God, Helios.
- Odysseus then sees the ghost of his dead mother, who died out of grief at her son’s long absence.
- His mother forewarns him of the dangers he must expect at home in the form of the Suitors, trying to woo his wife Penelope.

The Sirens

- As they continue their journey, Odysseus and his men pass the island of the Sirens, three bird-women whose song is so beautiful that it lures sailors near them and dashes their ships on the rocks.
- Odysseus wants to hear the beautiful song without being shipwrecked, and so, acting on Circe’s advice, plugs the ears of all of his men with beeswax so that they cannot hear the song.
- He has his men tie him to the mast of the ship tightly and tells them not to release him no matter how much he begs or commands them to.
- As they move into earshot, Odysseus orders his men to release him, but they do not and actually bind him more tightly.
- After they have passed to a safe distance, Odysseus gives the sign with his eyebrows that he has come out of the Sirens’ spell and that he should be released.
- In some versions of the myth the Sirens cannot survive if someone hears their song and lives and so fling themselves onto the rocks.

Scylla and Charibdis

- Circe had advised Odysseus that when faced with the twin perils of the six-headed sea monster Scylla and the whirlpool Charibdis, he ought to steer nearer to Scylla on the logic that Scylla could only take 6 of his men at a time whereas Charibdis would drown them all.
- Odysseus heeded the advice and sacrificed 6 of his men to Scylla’s heads rather than getting sucked down Charibdis.
- [Unfortunately, Odysseus later has to face Charibdis again, alone and on a raft he has built for himself when leaving the island of Calypso.
- His raft is sucked down by Charibdis, but Odysseus survives by clinging to the branch of a fig tree overhanging the whirlpool.
- During Charibdis’ next expulsion of water, the raft is ejected and Odysseus is able to get away on it once more.]

The Cattle of Helios

- Odysseus and his men escape Scylla and Charibdis and arrive at the island of Thrinacia, the home of the cattle of the sun god, Helios, where they stop and rest.
• Odysseus makes his men swear that they will heed the advice of Circe and Teirisias and not eat the cattle.
• For a month the wind blows against their ships on the beach, meaning they are unable to leave the island.
• Eventually, Odysseus heads out on his own to pray in peace for a safe return to Ithaca.
• Whilst he is gone his men, by now nearly starving, eat some of the cattle.
• Odysseus and his men eventually sail away, but, furious, Helios persuades Zeus to send a thunderbolt, killing all the men on the ship except for Odysseus who is washed out at sea.

**Odysseus and Calypso**

• Odysseus is washed up on Ogygia, the island home of the nymph Calypso.
• Calypso falls in love with Odysseus and will not let him leave.
• She offers him the gift of immortality if he will become her husband.
• After 7 years Odysseus can take being apart from Penelope no longer and wants to leave.
• Athena persuades Zeus to send Hermes to tell Calypso that she must let Odysseus leave.
• Odysseus tells her that she is more beautiful than Penelope, but that he cannot deny his true love for her and must return to Ithaca.
• Calypso is upset, but helps Odysseus build a raft to sail away on and provides him with food and wine to take.

**Odysseus and the Phaeacians**

• Odysseus then washes up on the island of Phaeacia.
• Athena tells the princess Nausicaa in a dream to go down to the seashore the next day and wash some clothes with her maids.
• Odysseus is woken by the noise of Nausicaa and her maids playing.
• The other maids run away, terrified at the sight of a near-naked and sea-battered Odysseus.
• Nausicaa is brave and stands her ground, and directs Odysseus to the palace of her father Alcinoos.
• Athena helps Odysseus get past all the many security measures stopping outsiders entering the palace.
• Odysseus emerges from a cloud Athena has hidden him in at the feet of the Queen, Arete, and begs for mercy. Alcinoos and the Phaeacians welcome Odysseus kindly.
• Odysseus tells Alcinoos and his people his tales from the Trojan War.
• The Phaeacians agree to take Odysseus back to Ithaca in one of their special ships powered by thought.
• They leave him, asleep, on the shore of Ithaca with lots of treasure and other gifts.
• Athena makes sure no-one finds Odysseus or his treasure by keeping them safe in a cave.

**Odysseus and the contest of the axes**

• Athena disguises Odysseus as a beggar to ensure that none of the suitors will recognise him and try and kill him.
• He meets up with Eumaeus, his swineherd who has remained faithful to him despite his long absence.
• Eumaeus entertains and feeds Odysseus well, despite his lowly position, even before he knows who he is, and is delighted when Odysseus reveals his true identity.
• Odysseus also reveals himself to his other trusty servant, Philoteus, his cowherd.
• Odysseus returns to his own palace, still disguised as a beggar.
• He sees how arrogantly and distastefully the suitors behave and plans to kill them.
• Penelope instructs one of her housekeepers, the old woman Eurycleia, to wash the feed of the “beggar”.
• Eurycleia, who was Odysseus’ childhood nurse, gasps when she sees the distinctive hunting scar Odysseus got in a hunting accident with a boar as a young man because she recognises who he really is.
• Odysseus briefly has to cover her mouth to stop her giving the game away with shouts of joy.

To this point Penelope had been fooling the suitors by saying she would choose one of them to marry as soon as she had finished weaving a funeral shroud for Odysseus’ elderly father, Laertes.
• She had actually been unstitching each day’s work at night, but her trick has just been discovered and the suitors have told her she must choose one of them immediately.
• Penelope tells the suitors that whoever can string Odysseus’ bow and shoot an arrow through twelve axe-heads is the man she will marry.
• All of the suitors who try are unsuccessful even at stringing the mighty bow.
• Telemachus, Odysseus’ son, tries to test his strength and nearly strings it, before his father gives him a signal with his eyebrows to stop.
• The beggar Odysseus asks for a go and is promised money and clothing if he succeeds (ironically on the logic that it would not be right for Penelope to marry a “beggar”!).
• Odysseus strings his bow with ease (as Zeus thunders overhead to mark the significance of the event) and shoots the suitors, who cannot escape as they have been locked in the hall by Eumaeus and Philoteus. All their weapons have also been taken away by the two of them and Telemachus.

• Odysseus reveals himself to Penelope at last.
• Penelope is suspicious and tells a servant to bring her bed into the porch for the “beggar” to sleep on.
• Odysseus falls for her trick and yells furiously that whoever tries to move the bed he built for himself and Penelope will struggle as one of its legs is built around a still-living olive tree.
• This marks the only time in all his adventures that Odysseus, with all his famous cunning, is tricked by someone else. It is very fitting that it is by his own wife Penelope.
• Penelope finally believes that it is Odysseus and the two are happily reunited.