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What is the moral of the myth persephone

Learn about Greek mythology and the earth science explanation of the seasons by studying the story of Persephone, the goddess of spring. In Greek mythology, Demeter was the goddess of the harvest. She had a daughter, Persephone, whom she loved dearly. As Persephone grew up, she became so lovely that flowers sprang up where she walked. Hades, the god of the underworld, fell in love with Persephone and wanted her for his queen. He knew that Demeter wouldn't agree to their marriage, so he kidnapped Persephone and carried her off to the underworld. He caused a crack in the earth, and Persephone fell in, along with some pigs. The swineherd (like a shepherd, but for pigs) saw his pigs disappear along with the girl, but said nothing except to his brother. Demeter was distraught at the disappearance of her daughter, and she stopped blessing the earth with harvest. All the plants died and winter came for the first time. Meanwhile, Persephone lived sadly as the queen of the underworld. Anyone who ate the food of the dead while in the underworld could never return, so she didn't intend to eat anything. However, up on the earth, people were starving. Demeter was still mourning for her daughter, though, and wouldn't allow anything to grow. At last, the brother of the swineherd told what his brother had seen the day Persephone disappeared. Zeus, the king of the gods, intervened and told Hades to return Persephone to her mother. As he prepared to take Persephone back to the land of the living, Hades offered her a pomegranate. Persephone, distracted and excited, ate six seeds. Triumphantlly, Hades pointed out that Persephone had eaten the pomegranate seeds, and Zeus arranged a compromise: Persephone should live six months (one for each pomegranate seed) with Hades in the underworld, and six months with Demeter on earth. Every year, when Persephone leaves her, Demeter grieves again and lets all the plants die. When Persephone returns, spring comes with her, with flowers that grow where she walks and the abundant fruits with which Demeter blesses the earth. Demeter is too sad while Persephone is gone to allow people to grow food, but she has compassion for the humans, so she gave them cereal grains and taught them to plant and store seeds. We like the version of this story that is in D'Aulaires' Book of Greek Myths, but Sally Pomme Clayton and Virginia Lee have done a beautiful picture book called Persephone. The story in this book is greatly simplified. Ewan Nguyen has imagined the story with birds, and made it simple enough for young children: Aside from the versions which have been deliberately simplified for little kids, this is a complicated story. Read or tell the story to the class, and then have the class retell the story: Activity Village has some Ancient Greek Masks. Have students use these designs as inspiration as they create their own masks for the characters of the story: Demeter, Persephone, Hades, Zeus, the swineherd, and the swineherd's brother. Students can also create masks for the souls of the dead in the underworld, the starving people on the earth, and the rest of the Greek pantheon, if you'd like everyone to have a part. Divide the class into groups and the story into scenes, and have each group write one scene from the story as Reader's Theater. LuAnn Kluge has shared a Google Docs Reader's Theater script, if you'd prefer to skip the writing part of the assignment. Then have some students read the script as other students in masks present the story in a series of tableaux. In a tableau (or tableau vivant), the characters stand still in positions that show the scene. Give students time to plan their tableaux and to practice their readings. Present the story to a neighbor class, or film the performance. Once the story is thoroughly understood, move on to some cross-curricular connections: Science Why do we have seasons? The National Weather Service has a clear explanation with a simple demonstration. They also discuss the idea that eggs can be balanced on their end only on the vernal equinox (first day of spring). We've never heard of this superstition, but we like the way the Weather Service discusses superstitions. Check out the tilt of the earth on its axis at an interactive website. Learn about seeds, a wonderful means of storing energy and an important element in the story. Share the video below with your class, germinate some bean seeds in a damp paper towel, or grow some sprouts in the classroom. Check out some variations on this idea in our Jack and the Beanstalk lesson plans. Jack has a single mom, too, and leaves her to go to another realm. His story has beans rather than grain and pomegranate seeds, but it's still a story with seeds. If you're focusing on seeds, compare the two stories. Social Studies Agriculture is about science, but it's also important in history. If Demeter didn't teach people about agriculture, how did they come up with the idea? Check out Prehistoric Puzzles for some interesting ways to think about the beginnings of agriculture. This is an old-style website, so you must go to the main page>puzzles>diet and subsistence>agriculture and then to classroom>projects>origins of agriculture to find it, but it's worth a bit of clicking. Explore the rest of the site, too, for more interesting things. Ask students to discuss, in small groups, what difference the discovery of agriculture could make for people. Have students create drawings showing the difference between daily life for hunter-gatherers (people before agriculture) and for farmers (people with agriculture). English Descriptions of the underworld in Greek mythology are not like descriptions of Hell in modern religious texts. The underworld which Persephone visited was mostly sort of boring. Have students use the library or internet to research the underworld, or use the descriptions found in D'Aulaires' Book of Greek Myths, and write descriptive passages about it. Hades was, in Greek mythology, the god of the dead, but also of prosperity (so was Demeter's son, Plutus, and some say that Pluto, the equivalent of Hades in Roman mythology, has gotten confused with Plutus). In D'Aulaires' Book of Greek Myths, he tries to woo Persephone with a black marble throne and glittering jewels, but she prefers the warmth of the sun to the cold jewels. Not only did Hades have access to the precious minerals under the ground, but he was also greedy and didn't want the souls in his care to be able to leave. Demeter, since she is the goddess of harvest, is also associated with prosperity, so the story of Persephone contrasts two ideas of prosperity: abundance and greed. Have students create a mind map about this idea, and then write a reflective essay on the subject. Related Bookmark the permalink. At the beginning of the world, there were no winters. All year round was perfect for farming and harvesting. The rain fell, the sun shone, flowers blossomed, the crop grew, and fruits dropped ripe and luscious from the trees. Tending them all was Demeter, goddess of the harvest. At her side, as beautiful as a wildflower, was her daughter, Persephone. She was beloved by all and adored by her mother. Persephone was so beautiful that she caught the eye of another god, Hades. The beautiful Persephone enchanted Hades, the god of the underworld. He used to look at Persephone working on the earth and was mesmerized by her. Hades went to Zeus, king of the gods, to seek permission to marry Persephone and to his delight, Zeus agreed to his plan. As long as he could snatch her away, Persephone would be his. Hades watched and waited until Persephone was out alone one day in a field of golden corn. As she walked among their shining stems, she felt the ground tremble beneath her feet. With a great crack, the Earth opened before her, revealing a dark chasm. And out of it, on a horse-drawn chariot of black and gold, swept Hades. He plucked Persephone from the field as quickly as if she were a flower herself, and then swept her down, down, down into the underworld. The chasm closed over their heads, and all was quiet again. When Demeter discovered her daughter was missing, she was inconsolable. She began to search the world for her, neglecting the Earth she so loved. Flowers died, crops withered, fruit failed to ripen, and the soil turned to chalky dust. People and animals starved, but Demeter didn't notice. At last, Helios, the sun god, took pity on her. "Demeter," he said, "I saw that Hades had taken your daughter to the underworld." "So she's in the Land of the Dead!" wailed Demeter. "How can Zeus let this happen?" "Zeus knew this all along..." confessed Helios in a fury. Demeter stormed Zeus' palace on Olympus. "How could you let my daughter be taken away from me by Hades?" she raged. Zeus looked down at the withered Earth, the starving people, and dying plants, and admitted something had to be done. So he called for Hermes, the winged messenger, and sent him down to the underworld. "Bring back Persephone," he commanded, "or all is lost." Down in the underworld, Persephone missed the sunlight, warmth, and flowers of the world above, but most of all she missed her dear mother. Hades, however, treated her well with kindness and gentleness. She was intrigued by the dark caverns of this new realm, its glittering gemstones and how Hades handle souls of the dead. Could she, after all, become the queen of the underworld? Hades sat beside her, day after day, urging her to be happy and tempting her to eat the delicious food. The red seeds of pomegranate caught her eye. They were like glinting jewels. She looked down at the juicy red seeds. Then she popped one, two, three, four, five — six into her mouth. Hades watched her eat each one with glowing satisfaction. Just as Persephone popped her sixth pomegranate seed on her mouth, Hermes came rushing like a wind. "Ah, a visitor," said Hades. "I have been expecting you." "I come from Zeus," replied Hermes. "Hades, you must let Persephone return to the Earth. The king of the gods demands it." "Of course I obey Zeus in all things," said Hades. "But in this I can't!" He held up his hands in mock sorrow. "There is a law, is there not, that it is only possible to leave the underworld if no food has passed your lips?" "That is so," said Hermes. Persephone gasped. "Yes, my love," said Hades. "You have just eaten six seeds of pomegranate..." Hermes paused. There was a deal to be done here, and he loved nothing more than an agreement. If he returned without Persephone, the Earth would die, and Zeus would never forgive him. But nor could he break the law the Fates has made at the dawn of time. Hermes requested the Hades to consider because the Earth would suffer if he didn't. "Six seed shall equal to six months," said Hermes. "For six months of the year, Persephone shall live down here in the underworld with Hades as a queen. For the other six, she may return to the Earth, and tend to the flowers, fruit, and the soul with her mother." Persephone smiled. "It is a fair plan," she said. Hades looked at smiling Persephone and agreed to let her go to the Earth for six months if that made her happy. And so, for six months of the year, when Persephone reigned in darkness, Demeter wept. The leaves fell from the trees, the cold wind whipped the land, and her tears fell as rain and snow. Then in the spring when Persephone returned, the Earth burst unto life with Demeter's joy. New shoots appeared, flowers blossomed and crops ripened under a golden sun. So it went, year after year, cycle after cycle. And this is how the season came to be. Demeter, goddess of the corn and harvest, has one daughter, Persephone, the maiden of spring. Hades, god of the Underworld, kidnaps Persephone and brings her down to be his wife in the Underworld. Grief-stricken and confused, Demeter withholds her gifts from the world, which becomes "a frozen desert." She comes down to human beings in the form of an elderly woman and is taken in by a woman named Metaneira. At night, Demeter attempts to grant Metaneira's son immortal youth by secretly anointing the boy with ambrosia and placing him in a hot fire. When Metaneira discovers Demeter putting her son in the fire, she becomes irate. Demeter then sheds her disguise and demands that the people of the town build her a temple.In this temple, far removed from the other gods in Olympus, Demeter sits in longing for her daughter. The earth, meanwhile, freezes to a bitter cold that threatens mankind's extinction. Finally, Zeus intervenes by telling Hermes to go down to the underworld and bring Persephone back. Hades knows he must agree to Zeus's terms, but he gives Persephone a pomegranate seed, knowing that if she eats it she will have to return to him. With her daughter back, Demeter leaves her temple and joins the other gods on Mount Olympus. But because Persephone does eat the pomegranate seed, she must return to the Underworld for four months a year. In these months, Demeter grieves and the earth goes through winter...Dionysus, son of Zeus and a mortal Theban princess, is the only god whose parents were not both divine. Zeus was madly in love with a mortal, Semele, and he promised her that he would do anything for her. She asked to see him in all his glory as the King of Heaven, and although Zeus knew that it would kill her to see him this way, he held to his word. As Semele died, Zeus took her almost-born child and brought him to be raised by nymphs in a particularly lush, verdant land. Dionysus, the wine-god, thus grows up among rain and foliage, and by the time he is an adult he has rescued his mother from the Underworld and brought her to Olympus, where she has been allowed to reside because she gave birth to a god. Dionysus, meanwhile, builds a following of mortals known for wearing ivy leaves, running through the forest, and drinking wine. These followers, mostly women, travel with Dionysus to Thebes, the city where Semele lived when she was alive. Penthus, who rules Thebes, becomes quite disturbed by the loud, wine-drinking women and by Dionysus himself. He insults Dionysus, jails him, and refuses to believe that he is dealing with a deity. Dionysus responds by sending Penthus to the hills to meet his clan of female followers. Then, Dionysus shows his cruel power: he makes his followers mad. All the women mistake Penthus for a mountain beast and rush to destroy him. They tear him apart, limb by limb, and Penthus finally understands that he has insulted a god and must pay for that mistake with his life. Once Penthus has been sufficiently torn apart, Dionysus returns his followers to their senses.AnalysisLike many myths, the story of Persephone does more than account for a natural phenomenon such as the seasons. This story shows the emotional complexity of Demeter; she is a god who suffers. Persephone too suffers, for every year she must return to the Underworld. These two figures provide touchstones for people who are grappling with death or grief. As for Metaneira, her hospitality is undercut by her anger at Demeter's generous response.The story of Persephone also reveals a trend in Greek mythology in which different gods represent different aspects of the natural world. Persephone comes to represent spring, and Demeter represents summer. Zeus, often associated with lightning bolts, remains most powerfully positioned in the sky. By defining characters through natural elements, the Greek myths succeed in making the characters and morals relevant to the everyday person's life.Many scholars note that the story of Persephone captures the important spirit of the natural process. As the descent and return of the goddess bring about the seasons, so too does her transition resemble the birth-and-death cycle of all living things. One of the most innocent characters in Greek mythology, Persephone shows that youth must eventually grow old and die. Finally, the story of Persephone revolves around a crucial symbol: the pomegranate seed. Considered the "food of the dead," the fruit suggests the deceptive nature of the Underworld, for although the pomegranate is temptingly sweet and attractive, its power is strong and irreversible.The story of Dionysus shows the binary nature of this god. Like wine itself, Dionysus can cause extreme joy but also drunken confusion. This dual nature of being man's benefactor and man's destroyer is not just a moral reminder about the effects of wine. It expresses a common dichotomy in the myth literature, reflecting the Greek interest in balance. Throughout the mythology, the ideal of balance emerges after characters tend to find trouble when they seek extremes. Gods often punish extreme behavior and reward a balanced, grateful, and graceful way of living.Dionysus's tale reveals a way in which Greek myths served to enforce a moral code. Although some tales are more complex than others, they tend to hold moral significance for the reader. In this case, the story of Dionysus reminds the reader that bad deeds will be remembered and revenge will ensue.The Dionysus story is also important because it is one of the few instances in which a character goes into the Underworld and out again. In this case, it takes a god to retrieve the human. Dionysus rescues his mother and experiences a kind of life after death, thus also representing resurrection. A similar feeling might come to pass among someone who has just become sober.

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