

Paper B

The Gods of Greece

The Greeks believed that the world was round and flat. Its outer border was the great river, Ocean. The Mediterranean Sea was in the centre of this circle.

Far to the North lived the Hyperboreans in a beautiful land where cold winds did not blow and snow never fell. These people were not obliged to work, and they had no enemies with whom to fight. Sickiness and old age did not trouble them. Their lives were happy and tranquil. 5

In the distant South were the Æthiopians, who were so good and happy that the gods often went to visit them.

In the far-off West were the Fortunate Isles, or 'Islands of the Blessed', where everything was charming, and where a few people, beloved by the gods, lived forever without pain or sorrow. 10

The Greeks thought there were many gods, most of whom lived above the clouds on top of Olympus, a mountain in Thessaly. They had bodies like men and women, but they were larger, stronger, and usually handsomer than human beings.

The king of all the gods, and the father of many of them, was called Zeus. The Latin name for this god is Jupiter. He was the ruler of the weather. At his command the clouds gathered, rain or snow fell, gentle winds blew, or storms roared. He darted lightning across the sky and hurled thunderbolts upon the world. 15

The tallest trees and highest mountain peaks were sacred to him.

He was also the god of justice, and sent his servants, the Furies, to punish men and women who did wrong. 20

His wife was Hera, who in Latin is called Juno. She was very handsome and stately. Her eyes were large and dark, so that one poet called her 'ox-eyed'. She was proud and quarrelsome and ready to harm those who made her angry.

This couple had several children. One of them, Hephæstus, the Latin Vulcanus, is said by some to have been born lame. Others say that his father in a fit of anger threw him out of heaven. He fell for a long summer day, and when he reached the island of Lemnos he had little life remaining in him, and limped forever after. He was the blacksmith god, who built houses for the other gods and made the sceptre of Zeus, the arrows used by Apollo and Artemis, and other wonderful things. He was good-natured and fond of fun, but not foolish. Volcanoes were called his earthly workshops. 25 30

His wife was Aphrodite, the Latin Venus, the loveliest of all the goddesses, who was said to have been born from the foam of the sea. She was the ruler of love and beauty. Wherever she went soft and gentle breezes followed her, and flowers sprang up where her feet touched. She made some people happy, but for others she caused much grief and trouble. 35

One day Zeus had a terrible headache. Hephæstus, with an axe, split open his father's aching head. The goddess Athene, the Latin Minerva, sprang out, full grown and dressed in armour. She became the goddess of wisdom, and also took care of cities. She never married but lived alone in her house upon Mount Olympus. 40

Phœbus, the Latin Apollo, was the god who ruled the sun. He loved music and poetry.



Artemis, the Latin Diana, was his twin sister. She had charge of the moon and was the friend of the hunters.

Hermes, the Latin Mercurius, whence our Mercury, was handsome and swift, the messenger of the gods. Under his care were merchants, travellers, and public speakers. He wore a low-crowned hat with wings, and wings grew from his ankles. In his hand, he carried a wand around which snakes twined. He was very cunning and full of tricks.

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Ares, the Latin Mars, was the god of war, finding pleasure in battle and death.

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Hestia, the Latin Vesta, was the sister of Zeus. She was the goddess of the fireside and watched over the homes of men. She never married, but Zeus gave her a seat in the centre of his palace and sent her the sweetest morsels at every feast. On earth she was worshipped as the oldest and best of the gods. In her temple a sacred fire was kept forever burning, watched by un-married women, who were called 'Vestal Virgins'.

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These ten gods formed the 'Great Council' of Olympus. They lived in their own houses of brass, built by Hephæstus, but every day they went to the palace of Zeus and feasted on ambrosia and nectar. Hebe, the beautiful daughter of Zeus and Hera, waited upon the table. After her marriage to Heracles her place was taken by Ganymede, a beautiful Trojan boy, whom Zeus in the form of an eagle carried away to heaven. At the feasts Apollo played on his lyre and the Muses sang. The Muses were nine sisters, who lived on Mount Parnassus. They had charge of poetry, history, music, tragedy, comedy, dancing, love-songs, hymns, and astronomy.

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The ruler of the sea was Poseidon, whose Latin name was Neptune. Under the waves he had a shining palace, the work of Hephæstus.

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Demeter, the Latin Ceres, was goddess of the earth, especially of harvests of grain. Dionysus, or Bacchus, was the god of vineyards and wine, and was particularly adored by the Greeks. Eros, the Latin Cupid, the little god of love, was the son of Venus. Eos was the goddess of the dawn. Iris was the messenger of Hera, and the road by which she travelled from heaven to earth was the rainbow, which vanished when her errand was done.

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There were three Fates, who spun the thread of human life and cut it off at their pleasure.

There were three Graces, who favoured everything beautiful and charming in manners and dress.

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There were also three Furies, who had snakes for hair and were frightful to look at. It was their duty to follow wicked men and women and punish them with dreadful whips.

Nemesis, like the Furies, pursued those who had done wrong, particularly those who had insulted the gods. Wherever she went trouble and sorrow followed. Momus was the god of laughter, Morpheus of sleep, and Plutus of riches. Plutus was blind and could not see those to whom he gave his gifts. When he approached men he limped slowly along. When he left them he flew away.

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All these went and came as they pleased, being sometimes in the sky, sometimes on the earth. They did not always do right, and they often quarrelled and fought among themselves. Although they could not be killed, they could be wounded. Then ichor instead of blood flowed from their veins. They took much interest in human affairs; they had their favourites whom they helped, and their enemies whom they tried to harm.

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From *Stories of the Ancient Greeks* by Charles D. Shaw



1 Choose ONE word or short phrase from the list below that best completes each of the following sentences.

North Mediterranean East West Hyperboreans Æthiopians
Fortunate Isles Thessaly South Ganymede Mount Parnassus

- a The lands to the extreme left were called the _____ .
- b The people who lived at the most northern point were the _____ .
- c The Greeks believed that the very middle of the world was the _____ .
- d The Æthiopians lived to the far _____ .

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2 Did the gods ever come down from the skies? Support your answer with TWO pieces of evidence from the text.

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3 What is the Greek name for the god Jupiter? _____

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4 In which part of the world did some people enjoy eternal life?

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5 Write your own description of Hera's physical appearance and her personality.

5

6 Explain the sentence, 'Volcanoes were called his earthly workshops ...', as used in the text (line 31).

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7 Aphrodite was always kind and compassionate. Do you agree with this statement? Refer to the text in your answer.

2



8 Tick the TWO statements that are false.

- A Artemis was the twin sister of Diana.
- B Hermes was crafty.
- C Nemesis made people laugh.
- D Zeus was the brother of Hestia.
- E Hephæstus was Cupid's father.

9 If you held one of the following professions during this time, which god would have been most important to you?

- a a trader _____ b a farmer _____

10 Give an alternative for each word as it is used in the text.

- a hurled (line 18) _____ b morsels (line 53) _____

11 What material was Apollo's house made from?

12 Reread lines 20–21 and 77–79 about the Furies.

a Describe the role of the Furies in your own words.

b Why do you think that the Furies looked so frightening?

13 This mythological extract illustrates several ways in which the Greek gods were different from humans. Explain at least EIGHT of these differences, referring to the text to support your answer.

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Total 35

