

L.I. I know about the myth of Hercules.

Lesson 13: Hercules

Draw a table in your books. In the first column, write the names of all the gods we come across. In the next column, write the names of the labours in which they appear. In the third column, keep notes on whether they are positive or negative influences on Hercules.

A. Summary

Hercules was the son of Zeus but Hera, queen of the gods, was jealous of him sent him mad, so he killed his own children. To pay for this crime, Hercules had to complete Twelve Labours. He had to fight a fierce lion, a many-headed hydra, man-eating horses, a fire-breathing bull and a three-headed dog amongst other challenges.

B. Hercules is turned mad and kills his children

Hercules was born strong - fantastically strong - stronger than hundreds of others put together. For he was the son of Zeus, the King of the Gods and a mortal woman - so he was a half-God. Jealous, Hera sent two enormous snakes to destroy Hercules when he was a baby. Now, each snake was several times larger than Hercules, with ferocious teeth and a spitting, poisonous tongue. But when the snakes slithered to strangle him, baby Hercules strangled them, easily killing them.



Unsatisfied, Hera remained his enemy for life. When he was older, Hera drove him mad. One day, Hercules hallucinated and thought he saw six of his worst enemies and immediately killed them all, only to find that they weren't enemies at all - they were his own children. Hercules immediately became an **outcast**, hated by everyone - and most of all, by himself. For his crime, Zeus, king of the gods, sent him to work for twelve years under the orders of a cruel King. The King was a heartless man, and he decided to set Hercules twelve of the most difficult tasks he could think of. These tasks became known as the **Twelve Labours of Hercules**.

Activity A: Label the following statements T (true) or F (false).

1. Hercules was the son of Zeus and Hera.
2. Hera protected Hercules throughout his life.
3. Hercules' twelve tasks have become known as the Twelve Labours of Hercules.
4. Cunning Hera tricked Hercules into killing his own children.
5. Hercules became an outcast - but no one hated him more than himself.

C. The Lion, Hydra, Boar

Initially, Hercules was required to complete ten labours, not twelve. King Eurystheus (the cruel king) decided Hercules' first task would be to bring him the **skin of an invincible lion** which terrorized the hills around Nemea, killing and **devouring** men, women and children.



When Hercules arrived in Nemea and began tracking the terrible lion, he soon discovered his arrows were useless against the beast. Hercules picked up his club and went after the lion. Following it to a cave which had two entrances, Hercules blocked one of the doorways, then approached the fierce lion through the other. Grasping the lion in his mighty arms, and ignoring its powerful claws, he held it tightly until it choked to death. When it was dead, he

skinned it and wore the lion skin as clothing.

When Hercules made it back to Mycenae, Eurystheus was amazed that the hero had managed such an impossible task. The king became afraid of Hercules, and forbade him from entering through the gates of the city. Furthermore, Eurystheus had a large bronze jar made and buried underground: he could hide there from Hercules if need be. After that, Eurystheus sent his commands to Hercules through a herald, refusing to look the powerful hero in the eyes.

Activity B: Read the events below. Write a number next to each event to put it into the correct order.

1. Hercules wears the lion skin.
2. Hercules is challenged to kill the Lion of Menea.
3. Hercules discovers his arrows are useless.
4. Hercules blocks one of the entrances to the cave.
5. Eurystheus becomes frightened of Hercules.
6. Hercules strangles the lion.



Hercules' **second labour** was to kill the **Lernean Hydra**. From the **murky** waters of the swamps near a place called Lerna, the hydra would rise up and terrorise 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. Hercules set off to hunt the nine-headed menace, but he did not go alone. His trusty nephew, Iolaus, was by his side. Iolaus, who shared many adventures with Hercules, accompanied him on many of the twelve labours. Legend has it that Iolaus won a victory in chariot racing at the Olympics and he is often depicted as Hercules' charioteer. So, the pair drove to Lerna and by the springs of Amymone, they discovered the lair of the loathsome hydra.

First, Hercules **lured** the coily creature from the safety of its den by shooting flaming arrows at it. Once the hydra emerged, Hercules seized it. The monster 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! To make matters worse, the hydra had a friend of its own: a huge crab began biting the trapped foot of Hercules. Quickly disposing of this nuisance, most likely with a swift bash of his club, Hercules called on Iolaus to help him out of this tricky situation.

Each time Hercules bashed one of the hydra's heads, Iolaus held a torch to the headless tendons of the neck. The flames prevented the growth of replacement heads, and finally, Hercules had the better of the beast. 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 leading from Lerna to Elaeus, and for good measure, he covered it with a heavy rock. As for the rest of the hapless hydra, Hercules slit open the corpse and dipped his arrows in the venomous blood.

For the **third labour**, Eurystheus ordered Hercules to bring him the **Erymanthian boar** alive. Now, a boar is a huge, wild pig with a bad temper, and tusks growing out of its mouth. This one was called the Erymanthian boar, because it lived on a mountain called Erymanthus. 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.

It wasn't too hard for Hercules to find the boar. He could hear the beast snorting and stomping as it rooted around for something to eat. Hercules chased the boar round and round the mountain, shouting as loud as he could. The boar, frightened and out of breath, hid in a **thicket**. Hercules poked his spear into the thicket and drove the exhausted animal into a deep patch of snow. Then he trapped the boar in a net, and carried it all the way to Mycenae. Eurystheus, again amazed and frightened by the hero's powers, hid in his partly buried bronze jar.

Activity C: What are the first three labours? Write them down in the correct order.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Activity D: Is Hercules' success down to brains or brawn? Fill in the table, making sure to use evidence from the first two labours.

	<u>The Lion of Nemea</u>	<u>Lernean Hydra</u>	<u>The Boar</u>
<u>Brains</u>			
<u>Brawn</u>			

Extension: write a paragraph explaining whether Hercules' success so far has been down to brains or brawn. You must use at least one argument from each side and then come to a conclusion. Use the words 'myth', 'cunning' 'on the one hand', 'on the other hand' and 'in conclusion'.
