

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

Lesson 14: Hercules

D. Stag, Stables, Birds

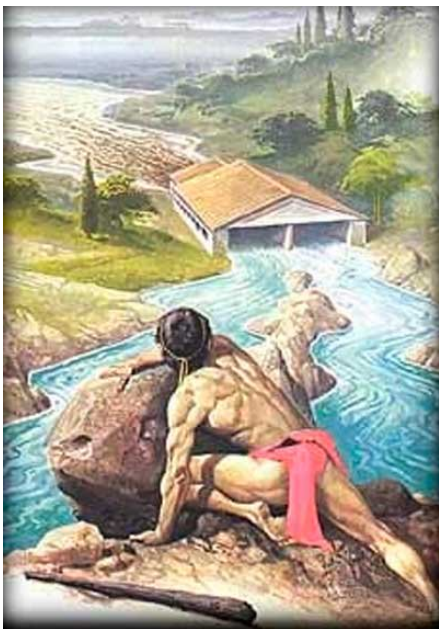
For the **fourth labour**, Eurystheus ordered Hercules to bring him the Stag of Cerynei. You'd think it would have been easy for a hero like Hercules to go shoot a deer and bring it back to Eurystheus, but a few problems complicated matters. This was a special deer, because it had golden horns and hoofs of bronze. Not only that, the deer was **sacred** to the goddess of hunting and the moon, Diana;



he was Diana's special pet. That meant that Hercules could neither kill the stag nor hurt him. He couldn't risk getting Diana angry at him; he was already in enough trouble with Hera - he couldn't risk another goddess' **wrath**!

Hercules set out on this adventure, hunting the stag for a whole year. At last, when the stag had become **weary** with the chase, he looked for a place to rest on a mountain and then made his way to a river. Realising that the stag was about to get away, Hercules shot him just as she was about to cross the stream. He caught the deer, put him on his shoulders and turned back to Mycenae. As Hercules hurried on his way, he was met by Diana and Apollo.

Diana was furious because Hercules tried to kill her sacred animal. She was about to take the stag away from Hercules, and surely 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. Diana let go of her anger and healed the deer's wound. Hercules carried it alive to Mycenae.



For the **fifth labour**, Eurystheus ordered Hercules to clean up King Augeas' stables. Hercules knew this job would mean getting dirty and smelly, but sometimes even a hero has to do these things. Then Eurystheus made Hercules' task even harder: he had to clean up after the cattle of Augeas in a single day

Now, King Augeas owned more cattle than anyone in Greece. King Augeas kept one thousand animals in **stables** stretching the length of a foul valley. He was too lazy to clean out his animals. Nobody had cleaned the stables for thirty years, so the **wretched** beasts stood up to their bellies in their dung. People for miles around complained about the smell.

Hercules stood on a hilltop, looking down on the valley. He saw a river close by, and it gave him an idea. Moving rocks as easily as if they were pillows, he built a **dam**, so that the river flowed out of its course and down the valley instead. Startled horses and cows and sheep and goats staggered in a torrent of rushing water. The dung beneath them was washed away by the river. Hercules only had to **demolish** the dam with one blow of his club, and the river flowed back to its old ways. The animals stood shaking themselves dry, in a green, clean valley.

After Hercules returned from his success in the Augean stables, Eurystheus came up with an even more difficult task. For the **sixth labour**, Hercules was to drive away an enormous flock of man-

eating birds which gathered at a lake near the town of Stymphalos. They were known to be equal to lions or leopards in their ferociousness.

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 **krotala**, noisemaking clappers similar to **castanets**. These were no ordinary noisemakers. They had been made by an immortal craftsman, Hephaistos, the god of the forge at Mount \_\_\_\_\_.

Climbing a nearby mountain, Hercules clashed the **krotala** loudly, scaring the birds out of the trees, then shot them with bow and arrow as they took flight.

Hercules had now faced the **lion, hydra, boar, stag with golden antlers, filthy stables and man-eating birds**.

E. Bull, Horses, Belt



After the complicated business with the Stymphalian Birds, Hercules easily **disposed of** the Cretan Bull.

At that time, Minos, King of Crete, controlled many of the islands in the seas around Greece, and was such a powerful ruler that the Athenians sent him tribute every year. There are many bull stories about Crete. Zeus, in the shape of a bull, had carried Minos' mother Europa to Crete, and the Cretans were fond of the sport of bull-leaping, in which contestants grabbed the horns of a bull and were thrown over its back.



Minos himself, in order to prove his claim to the throne, had promised the sea-god Poseidon that he would sacrifice whatever the god sent him from the sea. Poseidon sent a bull, but Minos thought it was too beautiful to kill, and so he sacrificed another bull, trying to trick the god of the sea. Poseidon was furious with Minos for breaking his promise. In his anger, he made the bull **rampage** all over Crete, and caused Minos' wife Pasiphae to fall in love with the animal. As a result, Pasiphae gave birth to the **Minotaur**, a monster with the head of a bull and the body of a man. Minos had to shut up this beast in the Labyrinth, a huge maze underneath the palace, and every year he fed it prisoners from Athens.

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

**Activity A:** In your book, make a list of all the characters who have tried to trick the gods, starting with the Titans' war. Include the consequences they faced for their actions.

**Extension:** *what do you think the moral of trying to trick the gods is? How could we apply that to modern life in Britain?*



After Hercules had captured the Cretan Bull, Eurystheus sent him to get the man-eating horses of Diomedes, the king of a tribe. Hercules sailed with a band of **volunteers** across the Aegean sea. Once they had arrived Bistonia, Hercules and his companions overpowered the men 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 horses to a youth named Abderos.



Meanwhile Hercules fought the Bistones, killed Diomedes, and made the rest flee. In honour of the slain Abderos, Hercules 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.

**Activity B: Make a list of all the characters from whom Hercules has received help. Include the labour in which they support Hercules.**

For the **ninth labor**, Eurystheus ordered Hercules to bring him the belt of Hippolyte. This was no ordinary belt and no ordinary warrior. Hippolyte was queen of the Amazons, a tribe of women warriors. These Amazons had nothing to do with the Amazon river in South America. Their name comes from a Greek word meaning "missing one breast." This is because an Amazon's right breast got in the way when she threw a spear. 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 fiercest warrior among all the Amazons. She wore this belt across her chest and used it to carry her sword and spear. Eurystheus wanted Hippolyte's belt as a present to give to his daughter, and he sent Hercules to bring it back.



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 greet them. She asked Hercules why he had come, and when he told her, she promised to give him the belt.

But the goddess Hera, who hated Hercules, knew that the arrival of Hercules meant nothing but trouble for the Amazons.

Disguised as an Amazon warrior, Hera convinced all the Amazons that the strangers who had arrived were going to carry off the queen. So the Amazons put on their armour.

The women warriors charged on horseback down to the ship. Then Hercules, thinking that Hippolyte had betrayed him, undid her belt and took it away from her. Hercules and the Greeks fought the rest of the Amazons in a great battle, which he and his men eventually won.