

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

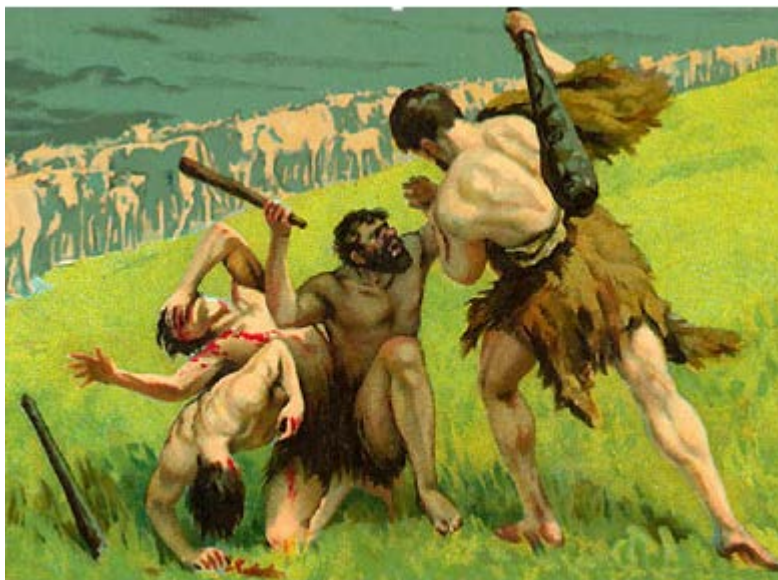
Lesson 15: Hercules

F. Cattle, Apples, Cerberus

To accomplish his **tenth labour**, Hercules had to journey to the **end of the world**. Eurystheus ordered the hero to bring him the cattle of the monster Geryon. Geryon was the son of Chrysaor and Callirrhoe. Chrysaor had sprung from the body of the Gorgon Medusa after _____ beheaded her, and Callirrhoe was the daughter of two Titans. With such **distinguished lineage**, it is no surprise that Geryon was quite unique himself: he had three heads and three sets of legs all joined at the waist.

On his island, Geryon kept a herd of red cattle guarded by Cerberus's brother, Orthus, a two-headed hound. Hercules set off on for the island, encountering and promptly killing many wild beasts along the way, and he came to the place where Libya met Europe. Here, Hercules built two massive mountains, one in Europe and one in Libya, to **commemorate** his extensive journey. These mountains became known as the **Gates or Pillars of Hercules**. The strait Hercules made when he broke the mountain apart is now called the **Strait of Gibraltar**, between Spain and Morocco, the gateway from the Mediterranean Sea to the Atlantic Ocean.

Sailing in a goblet which the Sun gave him in admiration, Hercules reached the island of Erythia. Not long after he arrived, Orthus, the two-headed dog, attacked him, so Hercules bashed him with his club. A 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. In Liguria, two sons of Poseidon, the god of the _____, tried to steal the cattle, so he killed them. At Rhegium, 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.

Hercules made it to the edge of the Ionian Sea, with the end of his journey finally in sight. Hera, however, was not about to let the hero accomplish this labour. She sent flies to attack the cattle,

and the herd scattered far and wide. Now, Hercules had to run around Thrace gathering the escaped cows. Finally, he regrouped the herd and completed his labour.

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

- a) Hercules journeys to the end of the earth.
- b) Hera interferes in his labour, sending flies to attack his herd.
- c) A herdsman notifies Geryon of Hercules' actions.
- d) Orthus attacks Hercules.
- e) Eryx challenges Hercules to a wrestling match.
- f) Hercules kills two of Poseidon's sons.

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. Hera, who didn't want to see Hercules succeed, would never permit him to steal one of her **prized possessions**, would she?

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 and the earth upon his shoulders.

Hercules' first problem was that he didn't know where the garden was. He journeyed through Libya, Egypt, Arabia, and Asia, having adventures along the way.

Hercules came to the rock on Mount Caucasus where Prometheus was chained. Prometheus, who had stolen fire from the gods, was sentenced by Zeus to a horrible fate. He was bound to the mountain, and every day a monstrous vulture came and ate his liver, pecking away at Prometheus' tortured body. After the vulture 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 showed up 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. Everything happened as Prometheus had predicted, and Atlas went to get the apples while Hercules was stuck in Atlas's place, with the weight of the world literally on his shoulders.

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 for the rest of time. Knowing this was a cunning trick, 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. There was one final problem: 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.

The most dangerous labour of all was **the twelfth and final one**. Eurystheus ordered Hercules to go to the Underworld and kidnap the beast called Cerberus, the guardian of the realm of the dead. Eurystheus must have been sure Hercules would never succeed at this impossible task!

The ancient Greeks believed that after a person died, his or her spirit went to the world below and **dwelled** for eternity in the depths of the earth. The Underworld was the kingdom of Hades, also called Pluto, and his wife, Persephone. Depending on how a person lived his or her life, they might or might not experience never-ending punishment in Hades. All souls, whether good or bad, were destined for the kingdom of Hades.

Cerberus was a vicious beast that guarded the entrance to Hades and kept the living from entering the world of the dead. He 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** - but our hero was no ordinary mortal. Hercules knew that once in the kingdom of Hades, he might not be allowed to leave and re-join the living.

Through a deep, rocky cave, Hercules made his way down to the Underworld. He encountered monsters, heroes, and ghosts as he made his way through Hades. Then, finally, he 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.



An unarmed Hercules set off to find Cerberus. Near the gates of Acheron, one of the five rivers of the Underworld, Hercules encountered Cerberus. **Undaunted**, 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!

With that, Hercules' Twelve Labours were complete. He was finally forgiven for killing his children. His twelve labours were remembered for eternity: the **lion**, the **hydra**, the **boar**; the **stag with golden antlers**, the **filthy stables**, the **man-eating birds**; the **fire-breathing bull**, the **flesh-eating horses**, the **Amazon Queen's belt**; the **cattle**, the **golden apples**, and **Cerberus**. The moral for the Ancient Greeks are many. One moral is for us not to give up or complain in the face of difficulties, but to persist.

Activity B: In your book, make a list of all the qualities Hercules had to have in order to successfully complete the Twelve Labours.

Extension: have you read about any heroes who have some of the same qualities? Write their names next to the relevant quality.

