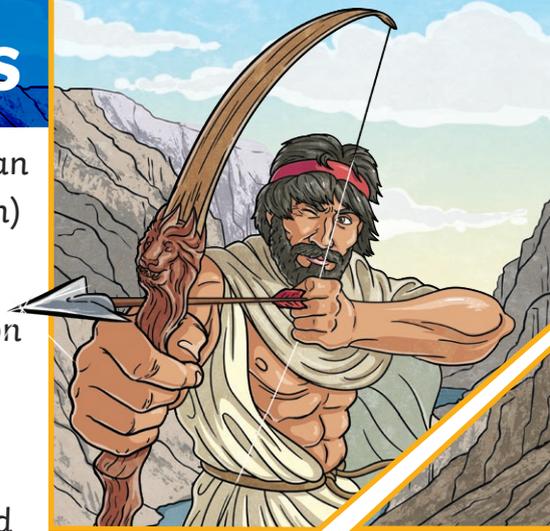


The Labours of Hercules

Thousands of years ago in ancient Greece, there lived a man named Hercules. He was a demi-god (half god, half human) with the power of incredible strength.

The goddess Hera disliked Hercules and placed a curse upon him. This forced him to commit terrible acts. When the curse finally lifted, Hercules wanted forgiveness. An oracle told him to visit King Eurystheus who would give him 12 labours to complete. When he had finished all 12, he would be forgiven. However, Hera had already convinced the king to set impossible tasks that Hercules would surely never be able to complete.



For the first two tasks, Hercules was asked to defeat the Nemean lion and the Lernaean hydra. These were two powerful beasts who had been terrorising local towns. Each time, Hercules used his strength and cunning to defeat the beasts and return victorious to King Eurystheus.



Wanting a task that wouldn't involve Hercules' strength, King Eurystheus challenged him to catch the hind of Ceryneia: an incredibly fast deer. Hercules spent a whole year chasing the animal around Greece before finally catching it and returning to the king.

After completing the fourth labour, which was to capture a giant boar, Hercules was tasked with cleaning the stables of a huge herd of cattle. This herd produced a large amount of foul-smelling waste. Immediately, Hercules began to dig trenches that changed the route of two rivers so that they flowed through the stables. The fresh water took away the waste and the task was complete.

Hercules next defeated a flock of vicious birds that were destroying crops and villages by luring them into the air and shooting poisoned arrows. Then, for his seventh task, he was asked to bring back an enormous bull that had been causing havoc on the island of Crete. When he arrived at the island, the king of Crete was so pleased that someone was going to remove the creature that he immediately allowed Hercules to capture the bull and take it to King Eurystheus.

Amazed that Hercules had made it this far, King Eurystheus sent Hercules to capture the horses of Diomedes. These were four terrifying, man-eating horses. Hercules dug a trench around the horses that filled with sea water. This meant that they were now imprisoned on a makeshift island. With nothing but grass to eat, the horses were eventually calmed and captured.



Hercules' ninth task was to bring back a magic belt from an Amazonian named Hippolyte. Hippolyte was happy to help Hercules before Hera spread the rumour that Hercules was really trying to defeat Hippolyte. When a fight threatened to break out, Hercules stole the belt and sailed away.

Following the completion of his tenth task, which was to steal a herd of cattle from a monster named Geryon, Hercules was asked to retrieve some golden apples. Hercules decided to ask the god, Atlas (who carried the world on his shoulders) for help. In return, Hercules offered to carry the weight of the world for a short amount of time. Atlas agreed and Hercules was successful.



Hera was angry that Hercules had nearly completed all of the tasks and asked King Eurystheus to come up with an impossible final task. So, Hercules was sent to the underworld to steal a three-headed hound named Cerberus. Deciding to approach its owner Hades first, Hercules was told that he could borrow the dog if he could calm him. After wrestling for a long time, Hercules was able to wear the beast out and present it to King Eurystheus.

Terrified to see the beast of the underworld in front of him, King Eurystheus hid and told Hercules that everything in his past had been forgiven.