

Text: “Medusa”

Name: _____ Date: _____

Medusa

There once lived, in the city of Athens, a gorgeous maiden named Medusa. Medusa’s beauty was celebrated throughout Greece and she attracted many suitors. But as a priestess in the temple of Athena, she had vowed never to marry. Poseidon, the god of the sea, saw Medusa’s beauty and immediately fell in love with her. Medusa loved him in return and, in marrying him, she betrayed her vows to Athena.

Athena was jealous of Medusa’s beauty and of Poseidon’s love for her. Envious and spiteful, Athena punished Medusa in a most terrible manner. Every wavy lock of Medusa’s beautiful hair was changed into a venomous snake. Her once gentle, loving eyes became bloodshot, furious orbs. Her rosy cheeks took on the greenish hue of death. Her smile, which had before caused all to love her, became a hideous grinning mask. Too horrible for human eyes to bear, Medusa’s visage now caused all who looked upon her to turn to stone.

Repulsed by her new form, Medusa fled from her home, never to return. Shunned by the world, her soul changed and darkened to match her monstrous outward appearance. Medusa retreated to the Underworld where she joined her sisters - the Gorgons - frightful winged beasts with bodies covered in scales.

Proud to have made an example of Medusa, the warrior Athena engraved the hideous face of Medusa on her shield. This she showed to the hero Perseus, son of Zeus, and implored him, “Look upon this tragic creature. Someone must end the sorrow of this piteous sinful one.” Just a glimpse of the image of Medusa on Athena’s shield chilled Perseus to his soul. “Will you kill her for me?” Athena challenged.

Perseus agreed, and as he commenced his quest to destroy the dreadful Medusa, Athena watched him leave, smiling with content.

Adapted from:

Berens, E. M. "The Gorgons." *Myths and Legends of Ancient Greece and Rome*. Maynard, Merrill and Co., 1894. Project Gutenberg. Web. Public domain.

Lang, J. *A Book of Myths*. New York, Thomas Nelson & Sons. 2007.

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