

Literacy Tips



Tips for middle school educators on various topics such as grammar, writing, reading, spelling, vocabulary, cooperative learning and more.

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Tip #83: Greek Mythology

Greek mythology is a cornerstone of the 7th grade language arts curriculum and fits nicely into the global study of world literature and mythology. It also helps students build the background they will need to understand major pieces of literature in high school. Most schools use *The Adventures of Ulysses* by Bernard Evslin as a starting point. Some schools even have access to *Heroes, Gods, and Monsters of the Greek Myths* by Bernard Evslin. This excellent book gives detailed background information on the gods themselves.

A new YA novel is being published in June 2005 called *The Lightning Thief* by Rick Riordan. Riordan has published adult mystery novels in the past and has been a classroom teacher in San Antonio for the last 15 years. I had the privilege of meeting him at the International Reading Association last week where he introduced us to his brand-new YA novel. Because he has been a middle school language arts teacher, he knows the importance of providing students with solid background on Greek mythology. He actually wrote *The Lightning Thief* for his son, but he also wanted to give teachers a vehicle to build a unit around.

So imagine modern day, 12-year old Percy Jackson who learns that his true father is Poseidon, the Greek god of the sea. Percy sets off on a cross-country quest to retrieve a stolen lightning bolt and stop a war between the gods. An interesting side note is that

Percy has been diagnosed with ADHD. (Riordan's son was being tested for ADHD in the 2nd grade, which was one of the reasons he used this character trait.)

This is a high-interest, humorous introduction to the Greek myths. Each chapter has an entertaining title and weaves Greek myths throughout. Imagine asking students to predict what this chapter might be about: "I Accidentally Vaporize My Pre-Algebra Teacher." Using *The Lightning Thief* as a read aloud can serve as the backbone to a unit on mythology. As the students follow Percy on his quest and hear allusions to Greek myths, you can stop and study the Greek myths that are mentioned. Rick Riordan also provides teachers a free, downloadable 6-9 week unit on mythology that can easily be used even without reading *The Lightning Thief*. This extremely polished and comprehensive unit is chock full of activities that will make students think deeper about Greek mythology. You aren't going to want to miss this resource.

How good is this book? Read chapter 1 for yourself at:

www.hyperionbooksforchildren.com/board/displayBook.asp?id=1506

I have not yet had a chance to see a preview copy of the book, but Hollywood has already purchased the rights to it. The screenwriter for *Shrek* will be turning Riordan's first young adult book into a movie to be released in two



years. In the meantime, Riordan is working on his second book in what is now a 5-part series. Sounds like another J. K. Rowling success story! Riordan was so nervous about trying his hand at YA literature that he actually submitted his manuscript under a pseudonym.

Be on the lookout for *The Lightning Thief* this June. Spend some time checking out his web site at www.rickriordan.com. For his recommendations on The Best Greek Mythology Resources and The Best Greek Mythology On-Line Games go to: http://rickriordan.com/greek_myths.htm.

