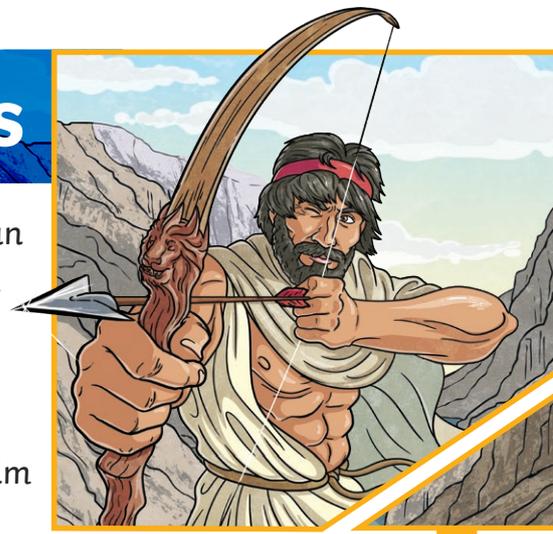


The Labours of Hercules

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 had placed a curse upon him which drove him to commit terrible acts. When the curse lifted, Hercules wanted to repent for his actions. An oracle told him to visit King Eurystheus who would give him 12 labours to complete in order to earn forgiveness. Unknown to Hercules, Hera had already convinced the king to set impossible tasks that would surely destroy the demi-god.



For his first task, Hercules was asked to defeat the Nemean lion: a ferocious beast who had been terrorising a local town. The lion was said to have skin that was so thick that no metal could penetrate it. Not one to be easily dissuaded, Hercules crept into the lion's den, wrestled the beast and defeated it.

Shocked that Hercules had returned, King Eurystheus asked him to go and destroy the Lernaean hydra. This nine-headed beast was unique because when one head was chopped off, another two grew back in its place. Hercules was able to defeat the beast by using fire to prevent the heads from reforming.



Telling Hercules that power wasn't everything, King Eurystheus demanded that he bring him the hind of Ceryneia: an incredibly fast deer which belonged to the goddess, Artemis. After spending a year chasing the animal around Greece, Hercules was successful and returned.

Annoyed at his success, King Eurystheus next sent Hercules in search of a powerful boar. Upon tracking down the beast and wearing it out with a long chase, Hercules captured it in a net and brought it to the king.

For his fifth labour, Hercules was tasked with cleaning the huge stables of a herd of cattle that produced large amounts of pungent waste. Immediately, Hercules began to dig trenches that rerouted two rivers through the stables. The fresh water washed away the waste and the task was complete.

Back on the plan to overpower Hercules, King Eurystheus sent him to defeat a flock of vicious birds that were destroying crops and villages. Aided by his sister, Hercules used a special rattle to lure the birds into the air where he defeated them using poisoned arrows.



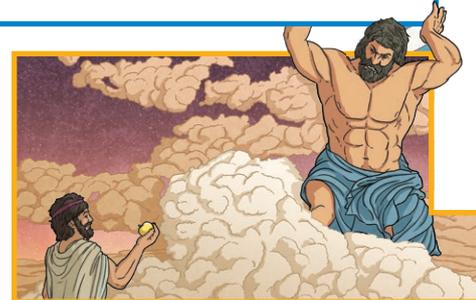
Next, Hercules was asked to bring back a large bull that had been causing havoc on the island of Crete. When he arrived at the island, the king of Crete was so pleased that someone was going to remove the creature that he allowed Hercules to capture the bull and take it straight to King Eurystheus.

Hercules' eighth task was to capture the horses of Diomedes. These were four untamable, man-eating horses. With quick thinking, Hercules dug a trench around the horses that filled with sea water - imprisoning them on a makeshift island. With nothing but grass to eat, the horses were eventually subdued and captured.

Thinking that he had finally devised an impossible task, King Eurystheus sent Hercules to retrieve a magic belt from an Amazonian named Hippolyte. Hippolyte was happy to help Hercules. However, Hera interfered and spread the rumour that Hercules was really trying to defeat the Amazonians. When a fight threatened to break out, Hercules was forced to steal the belt and sail away.

For the tenth task, Hercules was tasked with retrieving a herd of cattle from a winged monster named Geryon. Using his strength, Hercules overpowered the monster before transporting the herd by boat back to King Eurystheus.

Next, Hercules was asked to retrieve some heavily guarded golden apples. Hercules asked the god, Atlas (who carried the world on his shoulders), to help him in return for carrying the weight of the world for a short amount of time. Atlas agreed and Hercules was successful.



Hera urged King Eurystheus to come up with an impossible final task. Agreeing, he sent Hercules to the underworld to steal Hades' three-headed hound, Cerberus. Deciding to approach Hades first, Hercules was told that he could borrow the dog provided that he subdued him. After wrestling the beast for a long time, Hercules was able to wear it out and present it to King Eurystheus.

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