

Demeter and Persephone

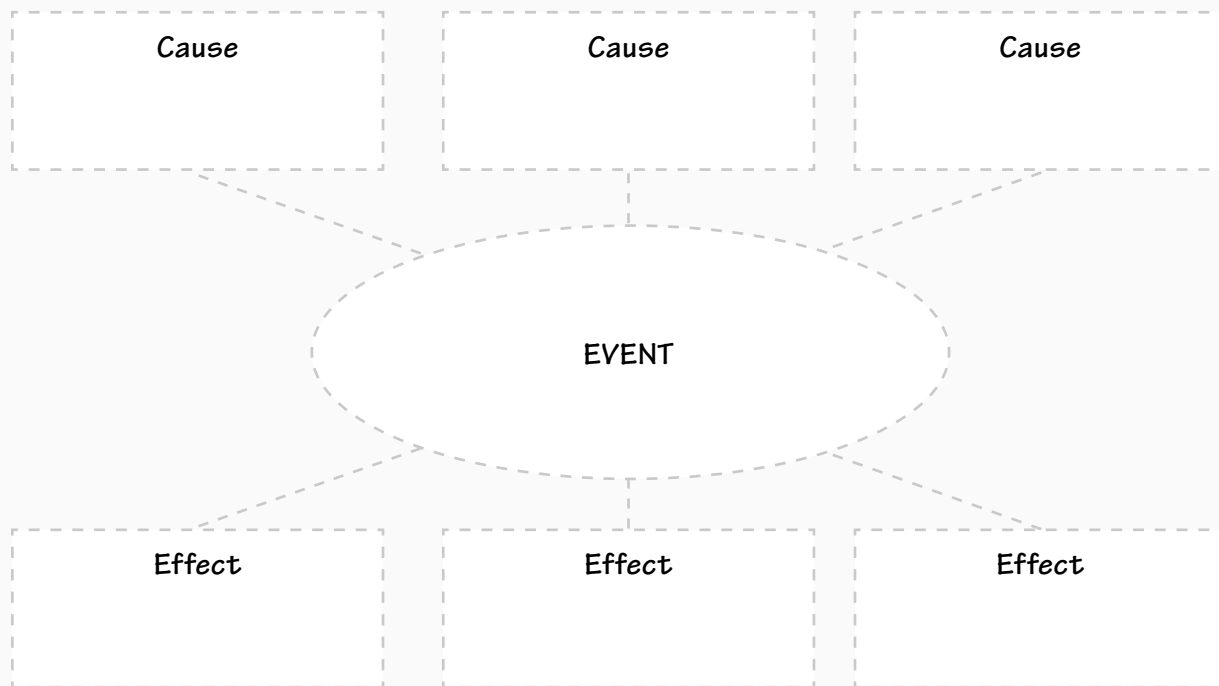
Reading Skill

A **cause** is an event, an action, or a feeling that makes something happen. What happens is called an **effect**. More than one cause can produce a single effect. A single cause sometimes produces several effects. Effects can also lead to more results later on.

Ask questions to analyze cause-and-effect relationships:

- What happened in the story? Why did this happen?
- What will happen because of this action?

Use this chart to record causes and effects as you read.



Literary Analysis

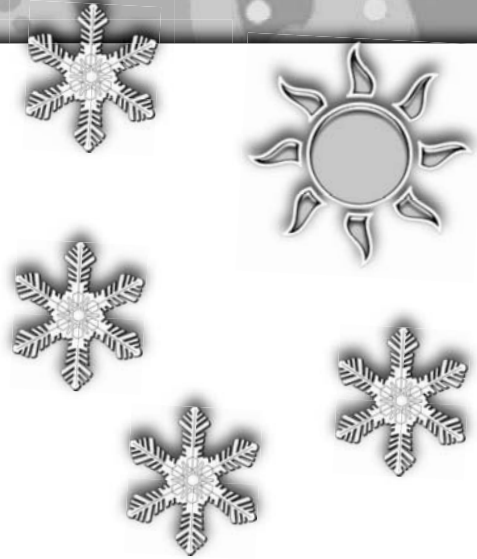
People have always tried to understand the world around them. Ancient people created **myths**. Myths are stories that can explain natural occurrences, such as earthquakes, or express beliefs.

Every culture has its own collection of myths, or *mythology*. Myths have gods and goddesses and explore universal themes.

Demeter and Persephone

Anne Terry White

Summary The myth “Demeter and Persephone” explains Earth’s seasons. Pluto takes Demeter’s daughter Persephone to his home in the underworld. Demeter is the goddess of the harvest. She becomes angry. Zeus asks Pluto to release Persephone as long as she has not eaten any food in the underworld. Persephone’s mistake causes the change of seasons.



Writing About the Big Question

Community or individual: Which is more important? In “Demeter and Persephone,” Pluto’s abduction of Persephone nearly caused the demise of humankind. Complete this sentence:

When making a decision that will affect the greater **community**, a person is responsible for _____.

Note-taking Guide

Use this chart to help you clarify the actions taken by the characters in the story.

Character	Action
Eros	Causes Pluto to fall in love with Persephone
Pluto	
Demeter	
Persephone	
Zeus	

Demeter and Persephone

by Anne Terry White

Do you know what causes the changing seasons? Today, scientists explain that as the Earth revolves around the sun during the course of a year, it tilts. Part of its surface gets more sunlight, and the other part gets less. In regions getting more direct sunlight, it is summer. In areas tilting away from the sun's rays, it is winter. Thousands of years ago, the ancient Greeks explained the changing seasons with the myth of "Demeter and Persephone."

As the story begins, Pluto, the king of the underworld, becomes alarmed at the shaking of the earth.



Deep under Mt. Aetna, the gods had buried alive a number of fearful, fire-breathing giants. The monsters heaved and struggled to get free. And so mightily did they shake the earth that Pluto, the king of the underworld, was alarmed.

"They may tear the rocks asunder and leave the realm of the dead open to the light of day," he thought. And mounting his golden chariot, he went up to see what damage had been done.

Now the goddess of love and beauty, fair Aphrodite [af ruh DYT ee], was sitting on a mountainside playing with her son, Eros.¹ She saw Pluto as he drove around with his coal-black horses and she said:

"My son, there is one who defies your power and mine. Quick! Take up your darts! Send an arrow into the breast of that dark monarch. Let him, too, feel the pangs of love. Why should he alone escape them?"

Vocabulary Development

realm (RELM) *n.* region ruled by a king or queen

defies (dee FYZ) *v.* refuses to obey

monarch (MAHN ahrk) *n.* a king or queen

1. **Eros** (EER ahs) in Greek mythology, the god of love; identified by the Romans as Cupid.

TAKE NOTES

Activate Prior Knowledge

This myth explains the changing of the seasons. Which season is your favorite? Why?

Literary Analysis

Myths are stories that explain natural occurrences and express beliefs about what is right and wrong. What natural occurrence does the bracketed paragraph explain?

Literary Analysis

How do the Greeks explain how people fall in love?

Reading Check

Who is Pluto?

TAKE NOTES

Reading Skill

A **cause** is an event or action that produces a result. That result is called an **effect**. What **effect** does Eros's arrow have on Pluto?

Reading Skill

What is the result of Demeter's anger at the land?

Literary Analysis

How do the details that describe what happened to the earth explain natural occurrences?

Eros shoots an arrow straight into Pluto's heart. The grim Pluto has seen many fair maids. But never has his heart been touched. Now he is filled with a warm feeling. Before him is a young woman gathering flowers. She is Persephone [per SEF uh nee], daughter of Demeter [duh MEET uhr], goddess of the harvest. Pluto looks at Persephone and falls in love with her.

Pluto sweeps Persephone onto his chariot and speeds away. As she struggles, her girdle² falls to the ground, but Pluto holds her tight. Soon they reach the River Cyane.³ Pluto strikes the bank with his trident.⁴ The earth opens and darkness swallows them all—horses, chariot, Pluto, and weeping Persephone.

Demeter searches all over the earth, but no one can tell her where Persephone is. Worn out and filled with despair, Demeter returns to Sicily. There, near the River Cyane, where Pluto has gone down to the underworld, a river nymph⁵ brings her Persephone's girdle.



The goddess knew then that her daughter was gone indeed, but she did not suspect Pluto of carrying her off. She laid the blame on the innocent land.

"Ungrateful soil!" she said. "I made you fertile. I clothed you in grass and nourishing grain, and this is how you reward me. No more shall you enjoy my favors!"

That year was the most cruel mankind had ever known. Nothing prospered, nothing grew. The cattle died, the seed would not come up, men and oxen toiled in vain. There was too much sun. There was too much rain. Thistles⁶ and weeds were the only things that grew. It seemed that all mankind would die of hunger.

2. **girdle** (GERD uhl) *n.* belt or sash for the waist

3. **River Cyane** a river on Sicily, an island just south of Italy.

4. **trident** (TRYD uhnt) *n.* spear with three points.

5. **river nymph** (NIMF) *n.* goddess living in a river.

6. **thistles** (THIS uhlz) *n.* stubborn, weedy plants with sharp leaves and usually purplish flowers.

“This cannot go on,” said mighty Zeus. “I see that I must intervene.” And one by one he sent the gods and goddesses to plead with Demeter.

But she had the same answer for all: “Not till I see my daughter shall the earth bear fruit again.”



Zeus, of course, knows where Persephone is. He is sorry to take from his brother the one thing that brings joy to his life. But he must if mankind is to be saved. So he calls Hermes⁷ to him and says:



“Descend to the underworld, my son. Bid Pluto release his bride. Provided she has not tasted food in the realm of the dead, she may return to her mother forever.”

Down sped Hermes on his winged feet, and there in the dim palace of the king, he found Persephone by Pluto’s side. She was pale and joyless. Not all the glittering treasures of the underworld could bring a smile to her lips.

“You have no flowers here,” she would say to her husband when he pressed gems upon her. “Jewels have no fragrance. I do not want them.”



When Persephone sees Hermes and hears his message, she is filled with joy. She gets ready to leave at once. But one thing troubles her—she cannot leave the underworld forever. For she has accepted a pomegranate⁸ from Pluto and has sucked the sweet pulp from four of the seeds.

Pluto helps Persephone into his chariot and Hermes takes the reins. “Dear wife,” says Pluto, “think kindly of me, for I love you truly. It will be lonely here these eight months you are away. So fare you well—and get your fill of flowers!”

Vocabulary Development

intervene (in tuhr VEEN) *v.* become involved in an argument or fight in order to change what happens

7. **Hermes** (HER meeZ) a god who served as a messenger.

8. **pomegranate** (PAHM uh gran it) *n.* round fruit with a red leathery skin and many seeds.

Stop to Reflect

Do you think Zeus should have told Demeter where her daughter was?

Read Fluently

A *simple sentence* has a subject and a predicate and expresses a complete thought. A *compound sentence* is two simple sentences joined by a conjunction—for example, *and*, *but*, or *or*—and a comma. Underline an example of a compound sentence in the bracketed passage.

Reading Skill

When Persephone eats four pomegranate seeds, what is the result?

Reading Check

Who is Persephone’s mother?

• TAKE NOTES

Reading Check

Why does Persephone have to stay in the underworld for four months each year?

Literary Analysis

What human traits does Pluto show?

Literary Analysis

How does the **myth** explain winter?

Hermes drives the chariot straight to the temple of Demeter. Persephone flies to her mother's arms. The sad tale of each turns into joy in the telling.



So it is to this day. One third of the year Persephone spends in the gloomy abode of Pluto—one month for each seed that she tasted. Then Nature dies, the leaves fall, the earth stops bringing forth. In spring Persephone returns, and with her come the flowers, followed by summer's fruitfulness and the rich harvest of fall.



Vocabulary Development

abode (uh BOHD) *n.* house; home; dwelling place

Demeter and Persephone

1. **Make a Judgment:** Demeter changes the earth so that plants are unable to grow. Do you think Demeter’s actions are right or wrong? Explain your answer.

2. **Synthesize:** How do the emotions of the main characters cause the seasons to change?

3. **Reading Skill:** Persephone returns to Earth at the end of the myth. What is the cause of this event?

4. **Literary Analysis:** Myths often teach lessons. Use this chart to describe the lessons that the **myth** teaches through each character. Include the way that each lesson was taught.

Character	Lesson	How Taught
Demeter	Mothers want to protect their children.	
Persephone		
Pluto	Selfish actions often have bad results.	

Writing: Myth

Write a short **myth** that explains something that happens in nature. Think of a natural phenomenon and a creative explanation for it. Respond to the following to help you write your myth.

- List three natural events.

- How does each event affect people or the natural world?

Then, decide how many characters your myth will have. Limit the number to keep the story simple. Describe your characters' appearance, actions, words, and the ways in which other characters relate to them. Plan the action of your story by identifying a problem and its solution.

Listening and Speaking: Debate

Plan a **debate** about whether or not Demeter was justified when she changed the weather on Earth. First, consider what the opposing arguments might be. Prepare to challenge these ideas. Record strengths and weaknesses of the arguments in this chart. Use the bottom box to develop an opening statement that summarizes your point.

Strengths of Argument	Weaknesses of Argument
Opening Statement	

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