

Mythical Stories from Different Cultures: The Story of Arachne

A long time ago, there lived a young Greek girl called Arachne. She was the daughter of a shepherd. From a young age, Arachne taught herself how to weave beautiful tapestries. She wove pictures of animals, flowers and landscapes. By the time she was an adult, her work was so famous that people would travel for thousands of miles to see it.

When people saw Arachne's work, they would tell her how talented she was. They were so impressed that they started to say that Arachne was like a god. Every day, people would tell Arachne over and over again how brilliant she was. The more praise she was given, the more Arachne believed that she was the best.

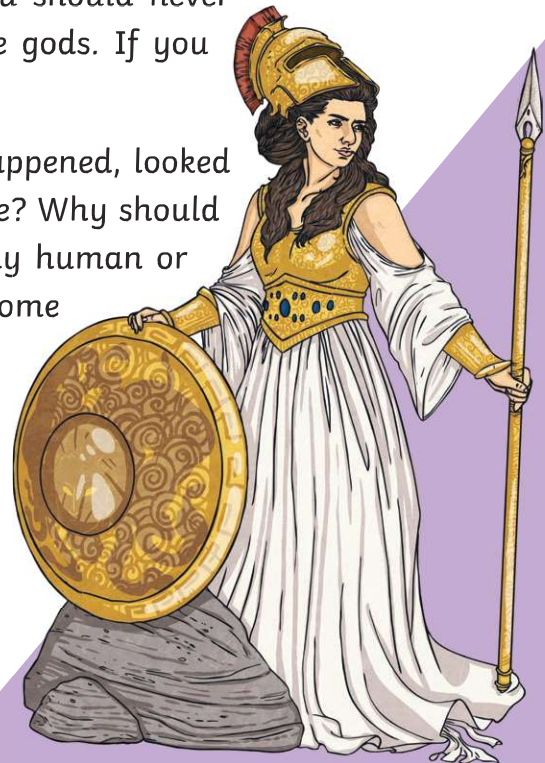


Meanwhile, at the home of the gods, the goddess Athena had heard about Arachne. She was angered by the idea that someone would say that they were more talented than a god so Athena hatched a plan to confront Arachne.

A few days later, disguised as an old woman, Athena knocked on Arachne's door. "I have come to warn you," Athena rasped. "You should never have compared yourself to the gods. If you apologise now, Athena will forgive you."

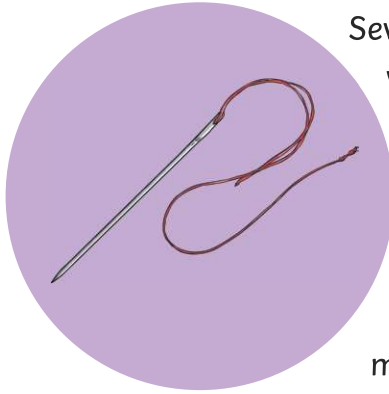
Arachne, who was surprised at what had just happened, looked at the old woman. "Pah!" she laughed. "Apologise? Why should I? You've seen my tapestries; I'm better than any human or any god. If Athena wants an apology, she can come down here and challenge me for it."

By now, Athena was so angry that she threw off her disguise and revealed her true self. "I accept your challenge," she whispered to Arachne in a cold voice.



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Arachne got to her feet right away and began to gather the finest threads she had. Both women started weaving and, for hours, the only noise that could be heard was the gentle sound of working hands.



Several hours later, Athena declared that the competition was over and demanded that Arachne bring over her work. Arachne held up her tapestry to the lamplight. Her scene was beautiful. It showed gods being mean to humans and not being punished. Even in the low light, it was clear to see that this was a masterpiece. Athena's work, which showed the gods punishing humans who misspoke about them, was nowhere near as fine.

Athena was furious that she had lost and immediately ripped Arachne's work into pieces. Arachne screamed at her to stop but it was too late. The tapestry was ruined. Arachne fell to the floor and sobbed; she knew that nobody would buy her work now.

However, Athena did not feel like Arachne had been punished enough. She took a small bag of herbs from her pocket and sprinkled them over Arachne. Suddenly, instead of two legs, Arachne now had eight thin legs coming out of her sides. She was covered in tiny, black hairs and a single thread of silk hung from her.

"Well, you can now weave all day long!" cried Athena, looking at the hideous creature in front of her. "You, a spider, better than the gods? I don't think so."



Questions

1. What type of animal does Arachne get turned into? Tick one.

- ☐ sheep
- ☐ spider
- ☐ scorpion
- ☐ silkworm

2. Number the events from 1-4 to show the order that they happened.
The first one has been done for you.

	Athena disguises herself as an old woman.
	Athena sprinkles herbs over Arachne.
	Arachne wins the competition.
1	Crowds of people told Arachne how talented she was.

3. When Athena accepted the challenge, what was the **first** thing Arachne did? Tick one.

- ☐ She gathered wool.
- ☐ She told the crowds that she was going to win.
- ☐ She gathered the finest threads she had.
- ☐ She begged Athena to reconsider.

4. Match Arachne's actions to Athena's response. One has been done for you.

Arachne believes she is the best.	Athena accepts the challenge.
Arachne says Athena should challenge her.	Athena begins weaving.
Arachne starts weaving a masterpiece.	Athena gets angry and hatches a plan.
Arachne wins the competition.	Athena tears Arachne's work into pieces.

5. What does Athena disguise herself as when she meets Arachne for the first time?

6. Look at the last paragraph. Find and copy one word which tells you that Arachne looks disgusting.

7. Do you think that Arachne's punishment was fair? Explain your answer.

Answers

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hideous

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Pupils' own responses, such as: I don't think that Arachne's punishment was fair because Arachne had won the competition and then Athena punished her.