

The Quest of Medusa's Head

The Brass Prison

There was once a king of Argos, who had a daughter. The king was growing old and he had been told that the son of his daughter (his grandson) would cause his death. To prevent this prophecy coming true, he locked his daughter away in a prison made of brass. She had no one to talk to but her old nurse.

Time passed by and Danae grew more beautiful every day. From his heavens, the god Zeus looked down and saw her and fell in love with her. They were married and had a son, called Perseus.

In spite of all that he had done, Danae's father began to think the words of the prophecy might come true. So, Danae and her son Perseus were put to sea in a wooden chest. The king thought that if they died together, the prophecy couldn't come true. But, they didn't die. After several days at sea, they drifted ashore on a distant island and were found by a kind man, who sheltered and cared for them for many years.

The Magic Sandals

The cruel king of the island wanted to marry the beautiful Danae and when she refused he plotted to send Perseus away in revenge. He challenged Perseus to bring him the head of the Medusa. She was one of three monster sisters, who each had the bodies and faces of women but with golden wings, terrible brass claws and snakes for hair. Anyone who looked at their faces was instantly turned to stone.

Without weapons or any idea where to find Medusa, Perseus went to the shore to plan his quest. Two mysterious people told him where to set off on his journey and that he must get directions from the Grey Sisters and collect three things from the Maidens of the West before challenging Medusa. They gave him magic winged sandals so that he could travel quickly and easily. He realised the people were the gods Athena and Hermes, although he didn't understand why they were helping him.





The Grey Sisters

Hermes' winged sandals flew Perseus to the sisters. These three creatures were so old that they had forgotten their own age and nobody could count the years which they had lived. The long hair which covered their heads had been grey since they were born. They had between them only a single eye and a single tooth which they passed back and forth from one to another. Perseus heard them mumbling and crooning in their dreary home, and he stood very still and listened. Tricking them, Perseus made the old women tell him where to travel to find the Western Maidens.

The Western Maidens

Once more Perseus put on his winged sandals and set off. When he arrived in the Western Lands, he saw the three Maidens of the West guarding a tree which was full of golden apples. Perseus spoke to the Maidens about his challenge. Once they heard his plight, they willingly agreed to help him but they offered not three but four things to help him kill Medusa: a sword, a shield, a magic pouch and a magic cap of invisibility.

Again, he put on the magic sandals and flew off to find Medusa and her gorgon sisters.

The Dreadful Gorgons

With the sharp sword at his side and the bright shield upon his arm, Perseus flew bravely onward in search of the dreadful Gorgons. He wore the Cap of Invisibility upon his head, making him as invisible as the wind.

Cleverly using the shiny shield as a mirror, Perseus saw the reflection of the hideous snake-haired monsters whilst they slept. Very stealthily, he went



nearer and nearer, always with his back towards the monsters and always looking into his bright shield to see where to go. He drew his sharp sword and, dashing quickly, struck a blow, so sure, so swift, that the head of Medusa was cut from her shoulders and the black blood gushed like a river from her neck.

Quick as a thought, he thrust the terrible head into his magic pouch and leaped again into the air, flying away with the speed of a lightning flash. Escaping under his Invisibility Cap and with the help of his magic sandals, Perseus left the anguished screams of Medusa's sisters behind him as he made his way to safety and set off for home.



Questions

1. What did Perseus use to get to where the Grey Sisters lived?

2. Describe the Grey Sisters using as many appropriate adjectives as you can.

hair:

eye:

tooth:

3. What could the three sisters be mumbling about?

Use speech marks to record their conversation.

4. Sort the similarities and differences between the Grey Sisters and the Western Maidens.

Tick if describes the Grey Sisters or the Western Maidens. If it describes both, tick both.

Grey Sisters	Description	Western Maidens
	three in number	
	mumbling and crooning	
	old	
	singing and dancing	
	young	
	women	
	pleasant	
	unpleasant	
	protecting something	

5. What did the Western Maidens give the Perseus to help him? Which do you think is the most useful? Give reasons for your choice.

6. In *The Dreadful Gorgons*, find and copy a phrase that includes a simile.

7. Underline the adjectives in this part of the text.

Cleverly using the shiny shield as a mirror, Perseus saw the reflection of the hideous snake-haired monsters whilst they slept. Very stealthily, he went nearer and nearer, always with his back towards the monsters and always looking into his bright shield to see where to go.

8. Underline the alliteration in this part of the text.

The head of Medusa was cut from her shoulders and the black blood gushed like a river from her neck.

9. In the last paragraph, how does the author use language to good effect in describing the speed that the action takes place?

Write your own version of what happened to Perseus next in the adventure.

[illegible]

Answers

1. What did Perseus use to get to where the Grey Sisters lived?

Perseus used Hermes's winged sandals to fly to the Grey Sisters.

2. Describe the Grey Sisters using as many appropriate adjectives as you can.

hair: **tangled, matted, knotty, straggly**

eye: **bulging, swollen, staring, ogling, gawking, glaring**

tooth: **decayed, rotten, jagged, sharp**

3. What could the three sisters be mumbling about?

Use speech marks to record their conversation.

A variety of correctly punctuated conversation should be recorded.

"Oh sister of mine, I can see with my little eye that your hair looks especially revolting today," croaked the oldest hag.

"Why thank you kind sister, I know that you are jealous of my fine locks but remember that I am the youngest and most beautiful of us all because today I have the single tooth to complete my beautiful looks," crooned the youngest of the three.

"Don't forget me you horrid hags," cackled the middle sister. "I don't need the eye or the tooth to make me beautiful – I am deliciously gorgeous all of the time!"

4. Sort the similarities and differences between the Grey Sisters and the Western Maidens.

Tick if describes the Grey Sisters or the Western Maidens. If it describes both, tick both.

Grey Sisters	Description	Western Maidens
✓	three in number	✓
✓	mumbling and crooning	
✓	old	
	singing and dancing	✓
	young	✓
✓	women	✓
	pleasant	✓
✓	unpleasant	
✓	protecting something	✓

5. What did the Western Maidens give the Perseus to help him? Which do you think is the most useful? Give reasons for your choice.

The Western Maidens gave Perseus a sword, a shield, a magic pouch and a magic cap of invisibility. Followed by appropriate reasoning for the choice of object that is most useful.

6. In The Dreadful Gorgons, find and copy a phrase that includes a simile.

The phrase that has a simile is 'making him as invisible as the wind'.

7. Underline the adjectives in this part of the text.

Cleverly using the shiny shield as a mirror, Perseus saw the reflection of the hideous snake-haired monsters whilst they slept. Very stealthily he went nearer and nearer, always with his back towards the monsters and always looking into his bright shield to see where to go.

8. Underline the alliteration in this part of the text.

The head of Medusa was cut from her shoulders and the black blood gushed like a river from her neck.

9. In the last paragraph, how does the author use language to good effect in describing the speed that the action takes place?

In the last paragraph, the author uses similes to describe the speed; 'Quick as a thought, 'and 'flew away with the speed of a lightning flash'. The author also uses the word 'leaped' to describe how Perseus jumped, giving the impression that he is moving quickly.

10. Write your own version of what happened to Perseus next in the adventure.

Answers will vary.