

MYTH-O-LOGUES

MONOLOGUES FROM GREEK
MYTHOLOGY IN ONE ACT BY
Janice Harris



CLASSROOM STUDY GUIDE

Introduction

Students hear directly from Cassandra and other Greek mythology characters as they tell their stories from their own points of view. The play is composed of monologues that speak to one another or can be stand-alone pieces.

Playwright Bio

Janice Harris holds a B.A. in English Education from the University of West Florida, a Master's in Reading Education from the University of Alabama, and an M.Ed in Theatre Arts Education from UNC Greensboro. She taught in public schools for 34 years, the last 20 in theatre arts. She is married and has three children and two grandchildren. Janice has been active in community and church theatre and has adapted several Shakespearean plays for her students. Myth-o-logues is her first published script.

Synopsis

Cassandra (the Trojan prophetess no one believes) is here to be your Greek mythology tour guide. She'll lead you through stories of war, relationships, and the origins of good and evil before old Charon ferries the whole audience across the River Styx. Will you listen? Will you learn? Will you believe?

Characters

CASSANDRA: Female. Our hostess. Five monologues.

ANDROMACHE: Female. Wants her husband, Hector, to be careful. One monologue.

ANTIGONE: Female. Wants her poor, dead brother to finally rest. One monologue.

ARACHNE: Female. Lost an important contest to Athena. One monologue.

ARETE: Female. Virtue herself. Don't listen to the others! One monologue.

DAPHNE: Female. Why won't Apollo leave her alone? One monologue.

DEMETER: Female. Beware a mother's fury. One monologue.

ELECTRA: Female. Will avenge her father's death. One monologue.

EURIDICE: Female. Lover of Orpheus. A few steps away from a one-way ticket out of the Underworld. One monologue.

HELEN: Female. Regrets ever taking that lover. One monologue.

ISMENE: Female. Thinks Antigone isn't being reasonable. One monologue.

KAKIA: Female. Her friends call her happiness. One monologue.

PANDORA: Female. If only she had known, she wouldn't have opened that jar. One monologue.

PENELOPE: Female. She hasn't seen her husband in quite awhile. One monologue.

PERSEPHONE: Female. Took a vacation to someplace really hot. One monologue.

PSYCHE: Female. She's lonely. There, she said it. One monologue.

THE SIREN: Female. Come and listen to her song. One monologue.

ACHILLES: Male. Will avenge his friend or die trying. One monologue.

AENEAS: Male. Call him a coward all you like. One monologue.

ACHAEMENIDES: Male. He hasn't been himself lately. One monologue.

BELLEROPHON: Male. In for the ride of his life. One monologue.

CENTAUR: Male. Half-man, half-horse. Does nothing by halves. One monologue.

CHARON: Male. A ferryman on a very peculiar river. One monologue.

DIOMEDES: Male. Had a clever ploy to win the war, once and for all. One monologue.

EPIMETHEUS: Male. Prometheus warned him. Why didn't he listen? One monologue.

EROS: Male. Love, himself. One monologue.

HECTOR: Male. Must do his duty. One monologue.

ORESTES: Male. Electra's brother. Ready for revenge. One monologue.

ORPHEUS: Male. The greatest musician, on the greatest road trip. One monologue.

PARIS: Male. Not much for one-on-one combat. One monologue.

PYGMALION: Male. His girlfriend looks like a Greek statue. One monologue.

Themes

Betrayal, love, death, memory, religion, war, obedience, jealousy, revenge, destiny, gender issues, happiness, quests, relationships

Pre-Read Questions

- ★ What is your prior knowledge of Greek mythology?
- ★ What does it mean to take on a quest? What's your definition?
- ★ What does it mean to have belief? Do you believe everything you hear? Why or why not?
- ★ Do you enjoy monologues? Why or why not? What makes a good monologue?

Pre-Read Activities

Research Project

- ★ In small groups students will research a Greek character mentioned in the play. Who were they? What did they represent in ancient Greece? What are their stories?
- ★ After completing their research, students will create a presentation in which everyone in the group must take part. It can be:
 - » A live oral presentation with a visual component such as a slide deck
 - » An original scene theatricalizing their findings
 - » A recorded presentation (filmed scene, or oral presentation with visual component)

Myth Adaptation Exercise

- ★ Divide students into groups. Give each group a version of a Greek myth of your choosing.
- ★ Discuss the definition of adaptation, and adaptations that students may know.
 - » Adaptation definition: to make something suitable for a new purpose, to modify, to alter
- ★ The goal of the exercise is for students to adapt the myth into a scene. They don't have to tell the whole myth. Perhaps they pick what they consider to be the most important moment. They don't have to specifically use the words of the story, but the scene must be connected to the myth.
- ★ Remind students that they are making something suitable for a new purpose. That means the scene must have characters and a conflict, and take place in a specific location.
 - » Who are the characters?
 - » What is the conflict?
 - » What location can the scene take place in, as indicated by the myth?
- ★ The scene should be approximately one minute, no longer. The point is for students to work quickly. Again, students do not have to stage the whole myth.
- ★ Give groups time to discuss, create, rehearse, and present.
- ★ Afterward, discuss the similarities and differences of the scenes. Hopefully there will be differences! This will show students that there is not just one way to adapt material.
- ★ Also, discuss the process. What were the challenges? How did they modify and alter for a new purpose?

Myth Tableau Series

- ★ In groups, students will research and do a tableau series on a myth of your choosing. What three moments would you choose to visualize the story?
- ★ In groups, students will identify and discuss the three moments that best represent the story. How will they visualize each moment?
- ★ Groups will then create a tableau for each moment.
 - » Emphasize to students any principles of tableau that you use in your class. Do they need to incorporate levels? Connection between individuals?
- ★ Lastly, groups will create transitions between each tableau to form a series.
- ★ Groups will present their series to the class. Those watching should try to identify the moments each group chooses to visualize.
- ★ Discuss afterward. What are the similarities and differences between the moments that the groups chose?

Greek Mythology Character Profile

- ★ Divide students into groups. Each group will create a character profile of one of the mythological characters mentioned in the play. Have them do some research and then come up with the following details as if they are applying modern character traits to the Greek god:
 - » Three physical traits
 - » Three personality traits
 - » Favourite outfit, which includes their favourite colour
 - » Favourite/least favourite food, movie, music
 - » Pet peeve
 - » Secret

- » Motto
- » Living environment
- » Significant relationship or object

Monologue Analysis Work

- ★ Divide students into groups and assign each group a monologue of your choice. It can be from any play.
- ★ Tell students that they are going to work together to analyze the monologue. This activity will help students identify what a monologue is and why they are useful in plays.
- ★ Have students answer the following questions:
 - » What does the character want in this monologue?
 - » How does the character change from the beginning to the end of the monologue?
 - » What tactics does the character use to get what they want?
 - » Who do you think this character is talking to?
 - » Why is what they are saying important? Why do you think it is a monologue instead of a scene?
 - » What are the stakes in the monologue? What happens to the character if they don't get what they want?

Close Reading Analysis Questions

Close reading is an analysis tool. Students read a text multiple times for in-depth comprehension, striving to understand not only **what** is being said but **how** it's being said and **why**. Close reading takes a student from story and character to drawing conclusions on author intention. Close reading prompts students to flex their thinking skills by:

- ★ Teaching students to engage with a text.
- ★ Teaching students to be selective. We can't highlight everything in the text, only the most important elements.
- ★ Teaching students to make educated decisions. All conclusions and opinions must be backed up with a text example.

Have students analyze *Myth-O-Logues*, individually or in groups, using the following text-dependent questions:

Read One: What is happening?

1. Why don't people believe Cassandra?
2. How does Epimetheus want to be remembered? How will he be remembered?
3. Why do Kakia's friends call her Happiness?
4. Compare and contrast Kakia, The Siren, and Arete. What does each character want?
5. Which character wants to tame Pegasus?
6. Why don't centaurs and humans get along?
7. What animal is Arachne? How did she become this animal?
8. Why is Demeter mad at Zeus?
9. Describe Eros and Psyche's relationship. Cite the text to support your answers.

10. Why does Orpheus go into the Underworld?
11. Why does Pygmalion think he is the luckiest man in the world?
12. How did Achaemenides survive Odysseus' ship?
13. How does Andromache feel about the battle between Hector and Paris? Who wins that battle?
14. What is the Palladium?
15. Who is Iphigenia?

Read Two: How is it happening?

1. How does the author use monologues to tell a story? How does a monologue help the characters come alive?
2. Identify two monologues that talk to one another. As a director, how would you stage these monologues and why?
3. When performing these monologues would you break the fourth wall? Why or why not?
4. Why do you think the playwright chose to use monologues in this play instead of scenes? How does that impact how you understand the play?
5. Describe the tone of The Siren's monologue. Do you trust her as a character? Why or why not?
6. How does the playwright use the other characters' monologues to support Cassandra's monologues?
7. Is Cassandra a reliable narrator? Why or why not?
8. How do the gods influence the play without ever being seen? How do they act as unseen characters?
9. In your opinion, would you keep or change the order of the monologues? Why or why not?

Read Three: Why is it happening?

1. What is the playwright trying to say about Greek mythology? Cite the text to support your answer.
2. In your opinion, why does the playwright think it is important to know Greek mythology? Explain your answer.
3. How do you think the playwright decided what mythological characters to include in the play? Why do you think the gods are not heard from in the play?
4. What do you think is going to happen next to Cassandra? Will people begin to believe her? Why or why not?
5. How does the playwright want you to respond to this play?

Post-Read Questions

- ★ Which was your favorite myth? Why?
- ★ Do you recognize yourself in any of the characters?
- ★ What is one question that you still have about the play?
- ★ What did you learn from reading the play? What lesson(s) are you taking away?
- ★ What surprised you about the adaptation?
- ★ What is one thing you would change about the adaptation?

Post-Read Activities

Monologue Adaptation

- ★ Divide students into groups and assign each group a monologue and character from the play.

- ★ Tell students they are going to create a 1–2-minute scene out of the monologue. Who is the character talking to? What does the character want? What will happen if they don't get what they want? How does the other character react? What triggers their next line?
- ★ Once students create their scenes, they will perform them.
- ★ After every group performs discuss:
 - » What was it like adapting the monologue?
 - » What challenges did you face and how did you overcome them?
 - » What stood out to you about the other scenes you watched?
 - » What was it like stepping into the shoes of a playwright?

Create Your Own Monologue

- ★ Have students research a Greek mythological figure who isn't in the play.
- ★ After students research, tell them to write a monologue for that character that they would include in the play. The monologue should be about a minute long at most.
- ★ After students write their monologues, have them present. Then discuss:
 - » Why did you choose this character?
 - » What event in their history inspired your monologue?
 - » How does this character add to the play?
 - » What challenges did you face when writing the monologue and how did you overcome them?
 - » How did you identify what your character wanted in the monologue? What tactics did they use to get what they wanted?

Greek Mythology Comparison

- ★ Divide students into groups of four and assign each group a Greek myth that appears in the script.
- ★ Have them research the original Greek myth and compare it to the version in the play.
 - » What was similar? What was different?
 - » Is there a version you prefer? Why?
 - » What surprises you about the way the playwright adapted the original myth?
- ★ After completing their research, students will create a presentation in which everyone in the group must take part. It can be:
 - » A live oral presentation with a visual component such as a slide deck
 - » An original scene theatricalizing their findings
 - » A recorded presentation (filmed scene, or oral presentation with visual component)

Character Costume Design

- ★ Choose a character and design their costume.
- ★ Based on their personality, what would they wear? What pieces of clothing define them? What colours and textures would they choose?
- ★ Draw a colour costume rendering.

Monologue Tableau Series

- ★ In groups, students will create a three-picture tableau on one of the monologues from the play that you assign them.

- » Emphasize to students any principles of tableau that you use in your class. Do they need to incorporate levels? Connection between individuals?
- ★ The first picture will feature a group at the beginning of the monologue, the second picture will feature a group midway through the monologue, and the third picture will feature a group at the end of the monologue.
- ★ Lastly, groups will create transitions between each tableau to form a series.
- ★ Groups will present their series to the class.
- ★ Discuss with students: How did the character change from the beginning to the end of the monologue? How do the tableaux tell a story? What does the character want and how do they get it?

Character Study

- ★ Assign each student a character and monologue in the play. Tell students they are going to do a character study on their assigned character.
- ★ Students should answer the following questions:
 - » How did their character get to this point in their journey?
 - » What happened right before this monologue? What do you think happens after?
 - » What does the character want? Why are they saying this?
 - » What are the stakes for this character?
 - » What history do they have with the person they are talking to?
 - » What likes and dislikes does this character have?
 - » Where is this character from? What is their family life like?
- ★ Then have students present their character study. Students can present their findings with a slide deck or a written report.

Playwright Process

Playwright Janice Harris talks about her process writing Myth-o-logues. Have students read and then discuss/reflect on how their perception of the writing process compares to the playwright's.

What was the inspiration for writing this play?

I grew up being well versed in many of the Greek mythological stories. When I read something that had a reference to a Greek character or story, I usually understood the allusion. However, as I was teaching about Greek theatre to my beginning theatre students, I found that many of my students did not seem to have that rich foundation from ancient literature. Therefore, I set out to write a series of monologues that would widen my students' knowledge of Greek mythology.

What challenges did you encounter during the writing process?

There are so many Greek stories and characters. My first challenge was to narrow down the field of which characters and events I would include in my script. Then, once selected, I had to decide which specific event or events I would choose to cover in each monologue. I spent hours pouring over various stories making lists and notes on different characters before selecting which to include in the script.

What was it like to see the play performed?

To see the play performed was very affirming. The play was first workshopped by my advanced students who gave me helpful notes and criticisms. After some revisions, they went on to do a student directed performance of the play. The next year, a different group of students performed the play. It was very interesting to see different interpretations of the characters. It was very rewarding to see that the script "worked" with different levels of student experience.

As a playwright, what is your favorite moment/character in the play and why?

Antigone is probably my favorite character. Each actor's interpretation and objective definitely affect the performance of this character. I have seen several different performances of the play, and in each one, the portrayal of Antigone is very strong and effective.

Which is harder for you, first drafts or rewrites?

First drafts are definitely harder, because of all the research and choices I have to make in order to communicate what I want for each character. But I am constantly revising and rewriting as well, so the two are not far apart in my process.

What is your writing process like?

With this particular project, there was a lot of research. I began research on each project using my trusty copy of Edith Hamilton's "Mythology." After selecting each character, I went online and read multiple articles about that character. Fortunately there are several sites that include translations of the original literature. I read these as well, not necessarily the entire epic as in "The Iliad," "The Odyssey," or "Antigone," but key passages in which the character appears. As I read each of these different resources, I took copious notes. I would then digest all this research for a while. Finally, I began to write each monologue. I am an aural writer, so as I wrote, I would read aloud what I had written. There was, of course, a lot of editing and revising as I worked through the process. I also kept in mind the companion piece to each monologue where appropriate so that the two complementary pieces could be performed independently or together. This process was repeated for each character included in the script. Needless to say, the writing of "Myth-o-logues" took several months as I worked on it on and off while teaching and dealing with family and other responsibilities.

What engages you about playwriting?

Writing this script not only transported me back to many of the stories I read and enjoyed growing up, but also exposed me to many more stories and characters with which I was not familiar. The process of not only reviewing but learning new things thoroughly engaged me. I would hope that as students perform these monologues, they would be challenged to explore and widen their own knowledge and understanding that they too might enjoy the learning experience.

