

Vocabulary Words Derived from Greek and Roman Mythology

Quiz 1

1. Adonis (n.)

Origin—from Adonis, handsome youth loved by Aphrodite

Definition—very handsome young man

Ex.—Joanna’s old boyfriend wasn’t very handsome, but her new one is quite an Adonis.

2. Aegis (n.)

Origin—from aegis, protective shield of Zeus

Definition—shield or protection; sponsorship

Ex.—An international force under the aegis of the United Nations was sent to the troubled area.

3. Amazon (n.)

Origin—from the Amazons, mythological race of warrior women

Definition—tall, strong, bold woman

Ex.—The laborious work that pioneer women had to do would have challenged an Amazon.

4. Ambrosial (adj.)

Origin—from ambrosia, the “not mortal” food of the gods

Definition—extremely delicious; excellent

Ex.—The ambrosial aroma of the roast made me hungry.

5. Atlas (n.)

Origin—from Atlas, giant who supported the heavens on his shoulders

Definition—book of maps

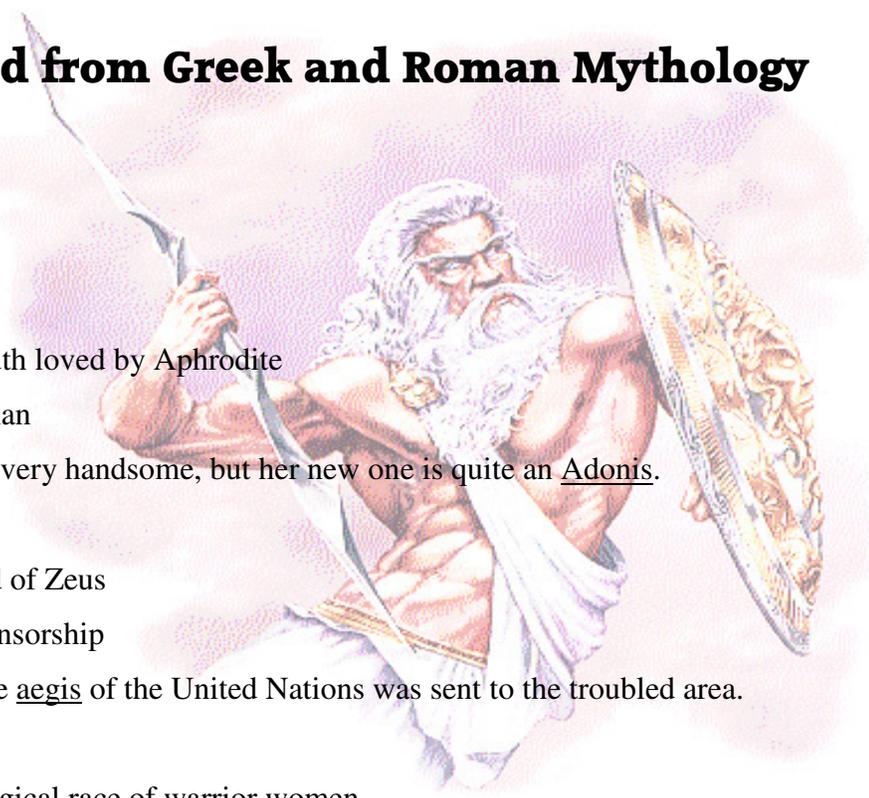
Ex.—For reliable information about national boundaries, consult an up-to-date atlas.

6. Auroral (adj.)

Origin—from Aurora, Roman goddess of the dawn

Definition—pertaining to or resembling dawn; rosy; radiant

Ex.—The darkness waned, and a faint auroral glow appeared in the east.



Quiz 2

7. Bacchanalian (adj.)

Origin—from Bacchus, Roman god of wine

Definition—jovial or wild with drunkenness

Ex.—Some fans celebrated the Iron Bowl with a bacchanalian party.

8. Cassandra (n.)

Origin—from Cassandra, given the power of prophecy by Apollo

Definition—one who prophesies doom or disaster; pessimist

Ex.—Many say we will lose, but the coach urged us to pay no attention to those Cassandras.

9. Chimerical (adj.)

Origin—from the Chimera, fire-breathing monster with a lion's head, goat's body, and serpent's tail

Definition—fantastic; unreal; impossible; absurd

Ex.—At first Robert Fulton's plans for his steamboat were seen as chimerical nonsense.



10. Draconian (adj.)

Origin—from Draco, Athenian lawmaker who had a harsh code of laws

Definition—cruel; harsh; severe; ironhanded

Ex.—The victors in the war imposed Draconian restrictions on their slaves.

11. Echolalia (n.)

Origin—from Echo, maiden who loved Narcissus. He rejected her and she pined away until nothing was left of her but her voice.

Definition—automatic and immediate repetition

Ex.—The echolalia of infants is part of the process by which they learn to speak.

12. Elysian (adj.)

Origin—from Elysium, mythological paradise where after death the blessed (mortals favored by the gods) dwell

Definition—delightful; blissful; heavenly

Ex.—Students yearn for the Elysian leisure of summer vacation.

Quiz 3

13. Eristic (adj.)

Origin—from Eris, goddess of discord

Definition—prone to controversy; argumentative

Ex.—It is difficult to reach an agreement with anyone who has an eristic temperament.

14. Fauna (n.)

Origin—from Faunus, Roman god of animals

Definition—animal life; animals of a particular region or period

Ex.—Careless use of pesticides threatened to remove the bald eagle from our nation's fauna.

15. Flora (n.)

Origin—from Flora, Roman goddess of flowers

Definition—plant life; plants of a particular region or period

Ex.—Pollution is harming not only the residents in the city but also its flora and fauna.

16. Forum (n.)

Origin—from forum, place of assembly for judicial/public business in an ancient Roman city

Definition—medium or place for open discussion and expression of ideas

Ex.—A dictatorship permits no forum where ideas can be openly and freely discussed.

17. Hector (v.)

Origin—from Hector, bravest of the Trojans

Definition—intimidate with threats; bully

Ex.—The sheriff refused to turn the suspect over to the hectoring mob.

18. Herculean (adj.)

Origin—from Hercules, a hero of superhuman strength

Definition—very difficult; requiring great strength

Ex.—Among the herculean tasks confronting our nation is the rebuilding of roads and bridges.



Quiz 4

19. Hermetic (adj.)

Origin—from Hermes, Zeus’ swift messenger; Greek name for Thoth, Egyptian god who was the inventor of a magic seal to keep a vessel airtight

Definition—airtight; secret; magical; mysterious

Ex.—To get a pill from a new bottle, you must break the hermetic seal.

20. Iridescent (adj.)

Origin—from Iris, goddess of the rainbow

Definition—having colors like the rainbow

Ex.—Children enjoy blowing iridescent soap bubbles.

21. Jovial (adj.)

Origin—from Jove (Jupiter), king of the Roman gods

Definition—jolly; merry; good-humored

Ex.—Our jovial host entertained us with amusing stories about her family.

22. Labyrinthine (adj.)

Origin—from Labyrinth, a fabled maze in Crete

Definition—full of confusing passageways; intricate; complicated

Ex.—Out-of-towners may easily lose their way in New York City’s labyrinthine subway passages.

23. Laconic (adj.)

Origin—from Lakonikos, meaning “Spartan.”

Definition—using words sparingly; terse; concise

Ex.—All I received in response to my request was the laconic reply, “Wait.”

24. Lethargic (adj.)

Origin—from Lethe, river in Hades whose water, when drunk caused forgetfulness of the past

Definition—unnaturally drowsy; sluggish; dull

Ex.—For several hours after the operation, the patient was lethargic due to the anesthetic.



Quiz 5

25. Lucullan (adj.)

Origin—from Lucullus, Roman host who gave lavish banquets

Definition—sumptuous; luxurious

Ex.—Many Thanksgiving dinners are Lucullan feasts.

26. Marathon (n.)

Origin—from Marathon, where Greeks defeated Persian invaders in 490 BC. Pheidippides raced to Athens with news of the victory.

Definition—1. long-distance foot-race of 26 miles 385 yards

2. an endurance contest

Ex.—Runners from all over the world compete in the Boston marathon.

27. Martial (adj.)

Origin—from Mars, god of war

Definition—warlike; pertaining to war

Ex.—The Helvetians were a martial people who tried to conquer southern Gaul.

28. Mentor (n.)

Origin—from Mentor, to whom Odysseus entrusted the education of his son

Definition—1. wise and trusted advisor 2. tutor; coach

Ex.—The retiring supervisor decided to stay on for a month as a mentor to her successor.

29. Mercurial (adj.)

Origin—from Mercury, the Roman Hermes

Definition—1. quick; vivacious; active; lively 2. unstable; subject to rapid and unpredictable mood changes

Ex.—Her mercurial disposition causes her to quickly go from friendliness to hostility.

30. Myrmidon (n.)

Origin—from the Myrmidons, martial tribe that accompanied Achilles

Definition—obedient and unquestioning follower

Ex.—Hitler's myrmidons were the SS, who would execute his orders.



Quiz 6

31. Narcissistic (adj.)

Origin—from Narcissus, a young man who fell in love with his own image, which led to his death

Definition—in love with oneself; egocentric

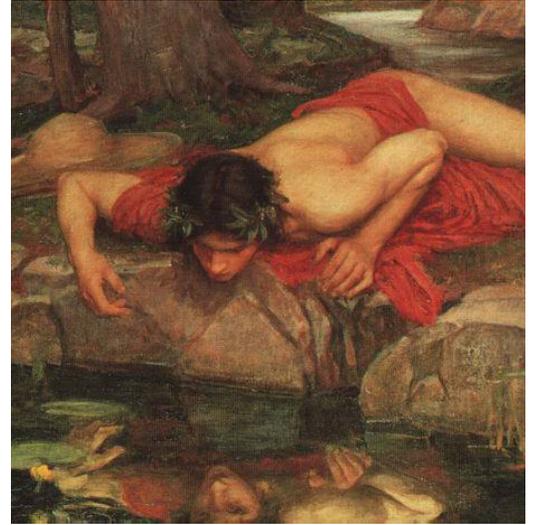
Ex.—Narcissistic people tend to see no desirable qualities in others.

32. Nectar (n.)

Origin—from nectar, the “death-overcoming” drink that made the gods immortal

Definition—something exceptionally delicious to drink

Ex.—The juice of those mangoes is like nectar.



33. Nemesis (n.)

Origin—from Nemesis, goddess of vengeance

Definition—1. due punishment for evil deeds. 2. one who inflicts such punishment

Ex.—Napoleon crushed many opponents but Wellington was his nemesis.

34. Odyssey (n.)

Origin—from the *Odyssey*, epic poem dealing with Odysseus’ ten years of wandering after the Trojan War

Definition—long series of wanderings or travels

Ex.—A travel agent will plan our odyssey to places of interest around the world.

35. Olympian (adj.)

Origin—from Mt. Olympus, the home of the gods in Greece

Definition—1.majestic; godlike 2.having to do with the Olympic games

Ex.—Chief executive officers are given offices and staffs that are equal with their Olympian responsibilities.

36. Paeon (n.)

Origin—from paeon, hymn in praise of Apollo, god of deliverance

Definition—song or hymn of praise, joy, or triumph

Ex.—When the crisis was resolved, people danced in the streets and sang paeans of joy.

Quiz 7

37. Palladium (n.)

Origin—from Pallas Athena, statue of the goddess which prevented the fall of Troy until it was stolen from the city

Definition—safeguard; protection

Ex.—The little girl fell asleep clutching her palladium, a worn ragdoll.

38. Panic (n.)

Origin—from Pan, rural god whose unexpected shout would terrify.

Definition—sudden, overpowering terror

Ex.—Panic ensued when someone yelled, “Fire!” in the theater.

39. Philippic (n.)

Origin—from Philippics, orations by Demosthenes denouncing King Philip of Macedon

Definition—tirade; bitter denunciation

Ex.—In an hour-long philippic, the legislator denounced the lobbyists who opposed her bill.

40. Plutocratic (adj.)

Origin—from Plutus, god of wealth

Definition—having great influence because of one’s wealth

Ex.—Owning 51% of the company, three plutocratic investors decided its policies.

41. Procrustean (adj.)

Origin—from Procrustes, villain who made people fit the length of his bed, either stretching them or cutting off their legs

Definition—cruel or inflexible in enforcing conformity

Ex.—The judge dispensed a procrustean kind of justice, imposing a \$5000 fine on anyone who was arrested.

42. Protean (n.)

Origin—from Proteus, sea god who could easily change shape to avoid capture

Definition—variable; readily assuming different shapes or forms

Ex.—The amoeba, a protean organism, continually changes its shape.



Quiz 8

43. Pyrrhic (adj.)

Origin—from Pyrrhus, who suffered enormous losses in a “victory” over the Romans

Definition—ruinous; gained at too great a cost

Ex.—We won, but it was a pyrrhic victory; our leading scorer broke her leg and has to sit out the rest of the season.

44. Saturnine (adj.)

Origin—from Saturn, who alchemists and astrologers associate with the metal lead

Definition—heavy; dull; gloomy; morose (ant. of mercurial)

Ex.—The assistant was a saturnine scholar who rarely smiled.

45. Siren (n.)

Origin—from the Sirens, whose sweet singing lured mariners to their destruction on the rocks

Definition—1. dangerous, attractive woman 2. apparatus for sounding loud warnings

Ex.—The enemy employed a bilingual siren as a spy.

46. Solon (n.)

Origin—from Solon, noted Athenian lawgiver

Definition—legislator; wise lawgiver

Ex.—The solons are back for the opening of the legislative season.

47. Spartan (adj.)

Origin—from Sparta, whose citizens pursued these traits

Definition—marked by simplicity and avoidance of comfort; marked by self-discipline, bravery and ability to endure pain

Ex.—We were offered Spartan accommodations; the rooms had no beds, just mats on the floor.

48. Stentorian (adj.)

Origin—from Stentor, herald whose voice was as loud as fifty voices

Definition—very loud

Ex.—Speak softly; you don’t need a stentorian voice to be heard in this small room.



Quiz 9

49. Stygian (adj.)

Origin—from Styx, river of the lower world leading into Hades

Definition—infernal; especially dark; gloomy

Ex.—A power failure plunged the city into Stygian blackness.

50. Tantalize (v.)

Origin—from Tantalus, kept hungry and thirsty in Hades with food and water just beyond his reach

Definition—excite a hope but prevent its fulfillment; tease

Ex.—We removed the dessert from the table so as not to tantalize our friend who was dieting.



51. Terpsichorean (adj.)

Origin—from Terpsichore, muse of dancing

Definition—pertaining to dancing

Ex.—The reviewers applauded the ballet troupe for its terpsichorean artistry.

52. Thespian (n.)

Origin—from Thespis, father of Greek drama

Definition—pertaining to drama or acting

Ex.—Shakespeare was not only a playwright but also a thespian.

53. Titanic (adj.)

Origin—from the Titans, lawless, powerful giants defeated by Zeus

Definition—of enormous strength, size, or power

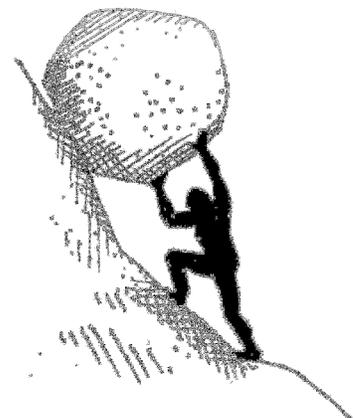
Ex.—By a titanic effort, our football team defeated Good Hope.

54. Sisyphean (adj.)

Origin—from Sisyphus, sinner condemned to an eternity of rolling a boulder uphill then watching it roll back down again

Definition—endlessly laborious; useless; futile

Ex.—The patients' lack of education and the high cost of medicine make health care a Sisyphean task.



Quiz 10

54. Lycanthrope (n.)

Origin—from Lycaeon, who sacrificed one of his children to Zeus and was turned into a wolf as punishment

Definition—a werewolf

Ex.—The horror movie was full of lycanthropes, vampires, and demons.



55. Calliope (n.)

Origin—from Calliope, the Greek muse of epic poetry

Definition—A musical instrument that produces sound by sending steam or compressed air through large whistles

Ex.—Every time I hear calliope music, I think of the circus.

56. Mnemonic (adj.)

Origin—from Mnemosyne, the goddess of memory

Definition—A device, such as a formula or rhyme, used as an aid in remembering

Ex.—I can only remember the names of the Great Lakes by using the mnemonic HOMES.

58. Atlantean (adj.)

Origin—from the Atlas, a Titan who had great strength

Definition—having great strength

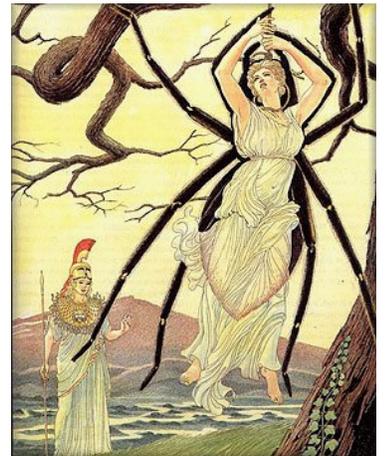
Ex.—The man won the contest due to his Atlantean strength.

59. Arachnid (n.)

Origin—from Arachne, a great weaver who Athena turned into a spider

Definition—an eight-legged insect-like creature, such as a spider, scorpion, or tick

Ex.—I am afraid of any type of arachnid.



60. Chaos (n.)

Origin—from Chaos (Khaos), the first of the Protogenoi and the god of the air

Definition—great disorder or confusion

Ex.—The desk was a chaos of papers and unopened letters.

Quiz 11

61. Euthanasia (n.)

Origin—from Thanatos, the Greek daemon personification of Death

Definition—act of causing death painlessly, so as to end suffering

Ex.—Advocates of "mercy killing," insist that many doctors practice euthanasia.

62. Hypnosis (n.)

Origin—from Hypnos, the Greek personification of sleep

Definition—a trancelike condition in which the subject is in a state of altered consciousness and responds to the suggestions of the hypnotist

Ex.—The entertainer used hypnosis on his audience members to make them do funny things.

63. Zeal (n.)

Origin—from Zelos, god of great enthusiasm

Definition—intense enthusiasm; devotion; fervor

Ex.—The zeal of the cheering section helped motivate our football team to win the state championship.

64. Chronology

Origin—from Chronos, Greek primordial god of time

Definition—the arrangement of events in their order of occurrence of time

Ex.—Please show the chronology of the founding of the 13 colonies on your timeline.

65. Halcyon (adj.)

Origin—from Alcyone, daughter of Atlas

Definition—tranquil, happy, idyllic; usually with nostalgic reference to earlier times

Ex.—The halcyon days of youth are spent in carefree play.

66. Nocturnal (adj.)

Origin—from Nyx, primordial goddess of the night

Definition—of, relating to, or occurring in the night

Ex.—Owls are nocturnal and hunt at night.



Quiz 12

67. Zephyr (n.)

Origin—from Zephyr, the Greek god of the West Wind

Definition—a gentle breeze

Ex.—The sun shone and the wind died down to little more than a zephyr.

68. Oracle (n.)

Origin—from Oracle, (1) a person through whom a deity is believed to speak (2) a shrine in which a deity reveals hidden knowledge

Definition—a person of great knowledge or wisdom

Ex.—I will go ask the oracle what I should do when I need help.

69. Achilles heel (n.)

Origin—from Achilles, ancient Greek hero whose only vulnerable spot on his body was his heel

Definition—a weak, vulnerable spot

Ex.—Cookie Monster's Achilles heel is cookies.

70. Psychology (n.)

Origin—from Psyche, a maiden made immortal and married to Cupid

Definition—the science dealing with the mind and mental and emotional processes

Ex.—We studied the human brain in my psychology class.



71. Harpy (n.)

Origin—from Harpy, loathsome, voracious monster with the head and trunk of a woman and the tail, wings, and talons of a bird

Definition—a scolding, nagging, bad-tempered woman

Ex.—The actress played a shrill harpy who hounded her sister into ending the affair.

72. Fury (n.)

Origin—from the Furies, three terrible winged goddesses with serpentine hair, who punish doers of unavenged crimes

Definition—violent anger; rage

Ex.—Jacob erupted in fury when Sam accused him of lying.

Quiz 13

73. Insomnia (n.)

Origin—from Somnus, god of sleep

Definition— the inability to sleep

Ex.—She suffers from insomnia and is extremely tired all day.

74. Cornucopia (n.)

Origin—from the horn that may have been that of a goat which the infant Zeus drank from

Definition—an abundance; “horn of plenty”

Ex.—The website proved to be a cornucopia of information on my research paper topic.



75. Somnambulism (n.)

Origin—from Somnus, god of sleep

Definition—the act of sleepwalking

Ex.—My sister suffers from somnambulism, so we’ve started locking her bedroom door at night so she can’t injure herself.

76. Venerate (v.)

Origin—from Venus, Roman goddess of love

Definition—to look upon with feelings of deep respect

Ex.—Fidel Castro remains more a venerated national father figure than a typical Marxist dictator.



77. Volcano (n.)

Origin—from Vulcan, god of fire

Definition—vent in earth's crust that ejects lava

Ex.—The exploding volcano destroyed the entire city.

78. Muse (n.)

Origin—from Muses, the 9 daughters of Zeus who inspire the creation of literature and the arts

Definition—(1)a source of inspiration (2)a deep meditation

Ex.—In Paris, he hoped to rediscover his poetic muse.

Quiz 14

79. Fortune (n.)

Origin—from Fortuna, goddess of luck

Definition— (1)good luck; success; prosperity (2)wealth

Ex.—(1)They each had the bad fortune to marry the wrong person. (2)Jasper lost his entire fortune at the casino.

80. Argus-eyed (adj.)

Origin—from Argus, a giant with 100 eyes

Definition—keenly observant; vigilant

Ex.—The landmine was immediately spotted by the Argus-eyed Marine.

81. Fate (n.)

Origin—from the Fates, three goddesses that determined the course of human life

Definition—final, inevitable outcome; destiny

Ex.—Death is the eventual fate of all mankind.

82. Typhoon (n.)

Origin—from Typhon, the most deadly monster of Greek mythology

Definition—a violent tropical cyclone originating in the West Pacific

Ex.—The typhoon that occurred last year in Taiwan killed thousands.

83. Vestal (adj.)

Origin—from Vesta, goddess of the hearth, home, and family

Definition—chaste; pure; stainless; virtuous

Ex.—Nuns are very vestal women.

84. Morphine (n.)

Origin—from Morpheus, the god of dreams

Definition—a highly potent narcotic derived from opium and used in medicine to relieve pain

Ex.—The patient was given morphine to ease his pain.

