

Greek God Worship

The Ancient Greeks were a pious bunch. They worshipped their gods wholeheartedly and built temples and statues in their honour. They believed in twelve gods and goddesses, who often appeared in their myths and legends. Some of the most famous Greek stories involved their deities.

We owe a lot of what we know about Greek gods to a writer named Homer. He was a famous storyteller who wrote two tales called The Iliad and The Odyssey. He is the first person that we know of who wrote about the twelve Olympians. Unlike in some other religions, the Greeks believed that their gods looked like humans, not animals. They also thought that their gods were fallible. This means that they weren't perfect.

The twelve Olympians were said to live in a palace atop Mount Olympus. They had special powers and were responsible for different parts of Greek life. By praying to their gods, the Greeks hoped to be able to control how their lives went.

Zeus was the most powerful of all the gods. He was the leader and was married to Hera. He controlled the sky and the weather, particularly thunder. He was famous for his honesty. In Greek mythology, he punished many gods and heroes for their dishonesty. Hera was much calmer. She was the goddess of women and family. Some of the earliest temples were built in her honour.

Hades was a particularly important god. He was Zeus's brother and the guardian of the Underworld. He usually lived in that dark realm rather than amongst the clouds of Mount Olympus. He was responsible for allowing people into the afterlife and was protected by his three-headed dog, Cerberus. Even the other gods feared Hades! He stole Persephone away from her parents, Zeus and Demeter. In Greek mythology, this led to the seasons and the weather.

One of the most lasting Greek goddesses was Athena. She was in charge of wisdom, skill and war. Greek legends say that she taught the first humans how to survive and

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protected Greek heroes in war. She was one of Zeus's daughters. She was so important that the Greek capital, Athens, was named after her.

In the story, the city was named Cecropia after a half-man, half-snake creature called Cecrops. The gods wanted to name it after themselves, and Athena and Poseidon fought for the honour. Each decided to give Cecrops a gift to persuade him. Poseidon, the god of the sea, promised that there would always be water in the city. Unfortunately, it was salty sea water! Athena planted a seed in the ground, which became an olive tree. Cecrops preferred her gift, and the city was named after her.

RETRIEVAL FOCUS

1. How many Greek Olympians were there?
2. Who was the most important god?
3. Which god were they married to?
4. Which Greek character did Hades kidnap?
5. Who originally built Athens?

VIPERS QUESTIONS

V Which word in the first paragraph means "very religious"?

S Why didn't the creator of Athens choose Poseidon's gift?

I Why did the other gods fear Hades?

V Find and copy a word that means "on top of".

I Why might soldiers have prayed to Athena?

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