

Getting at Meaning

RECALLING

1. Explain the story of Heracles' birth. As an infant, how does Heracles prove that he is not a normal child?
2. In what subjects does Heracles excel as a boy? Summarize the incident with his music teacher.
3. How many of Heracles' twelve labors involve capturing animals? Briefly describe those labors.
4. Heracles is a slave to two people. Who are they? For what reasons does he become a slave?
5. How does Heracles free himself from his second period of slavery?
6. Trace the events that lead to Heracles' death.

INTERPRETING

7. Why does Eurystheus later require two additional labors for Heracles? How does Heracles feel about Eurystheus' change of plans?
8. Which goddess repeatedly tries to prevent Heracles from accomplishing his tasks? Why does she interfere?
9. Describe the labor of Heracles that seems most dangerous. Describe the labor that requires the most endurance.
10. Why does Deianeira put Nessus' blood on Heracles' shirt? What quality typical of human beings does she reveal? Do the gods and goddesses possess the same trait? Explain.
11. How does Zeus pay tribute to Heracles?
12. Revenge is a frequent theme in Greek myths. Find examples of this theme in "The Labors of Heracles."

CRITICAL THINKING: EVALUATING

13. In what ways does the character of Heracles seem exaggerated? What is the result of exaggerating a character's traits in a myth?

Developing Skills in Reading Literature

1. **Hero.** Heracles, like Theseus, is a demigod, or one who is half human and half god. In

what ways is Heracles godlike? In what ways is he human? What qualities does he possess besides his strength? Judging from Theseus and Heracles, what qualities did the ancient Greeks seem to admire most in their heroes?

2. **Myth.** Myths offer explanations for elements in nature and for the origins of customs and traditions. For example, the encounter with Prometheus explains "how rings first came into fashion." What other phenomena are explained by "The Labors of Heracles"?

Another characteristic of myths is that they tend to be violent. How is violence used in this myth? How is it used to develop Heracles as a mythological figure?

3. **Structure.** Structure is the way that a piece of literature is put together. This myth is actually a series of adventures, loosely tied together. How is the order of the adventures important? How does it build suspense?

4. **Irony.** Irony is a contrast between what is expected and what actually exists or happens. How is the death of Heracles ironic?

Developing Vocabulary

Borrowed Words. Many words have entered English from other languages. Using a dictionary, trace the origins of the following words from "The Labors of Heracles." For each word, write the current definition and the language that is the original source of the word.

mortal	lyre	vengeance
shield	chariot	battlement
olive	dapple	pyre
vulture	trophy	archer

Developing Writing Skills

1. **Writing an Analysis.** In a five paragraph essay, discuss the qualities that ancient Greeks appear to have admired most in their heroes. Use examples from "Theseus" and "The Labors of Heracles" to back up what you say.

Begin by reviewing the two myths. Make a prewriting list of the heroic traits that each hero

displays. Include examples and quotations that illustrate these traits. Then select three traits from your notes. In your first draft, devote one body paragraph to each trait, illustrating the trait with examples and quotations from the myths. Also write an introduction and a conclusion.

➤ Refer to Handbook: How To Write About Literature on pages 782–792 for additional help with this assignment.

2. Combining Narration and Description. Create yet another labor for Heracles, one that he could perform between any two of the labors described in the story or after all of those labors have been completed. Use your imagination to make up characters, settings, and creatures.

Once you have a general idea of the imaginary task, make prewriting notes about the setting, characters, and events. Include vivid details that appeal to the senses. Arrange the events in chronological order. Then write the first draft, including dialogue if possible.

As you revise, make sure that your story flows smoothly and logically. Add colorful details and descriptions if necessary. Also make sure that Heracles' actions are consistent with his character. For additional suggestions on revising, refer to pages 788–790 in the writing handbook.

3. Supporting an Opinion. As Heracles works on his tasks, which characters treat him fairly and which ones treat him unfairly? Make a list of the characters in your prewriting notes and record your opinion of each character's behavior toward Heracles. Develop your notes into two well written paragraphs, one dealing with characters who are fair, the other dealing with characters who are unfair. Cite details from the myth, such as events and quotations, to support your conclusions.



B I O G R A P H Y

Robert Graves (1895–1985) grew up in London, England, and studied at Oxford University until the outbreak of World War I. His experiences in the war became the basis for much of his early poetry. Graves published over twenty-five volumes of poetry, but he is best known for his prose writing. Because of his classical education, he could translate from French, Spanish, Latin, and Greek, and many of his books are based on Greek and Roman history and legend. His novel, *I, Claudius*, was adapted for a popular British television series. Although Graves was primarily a writer and scholar, he also achieved the distinction of winning an Olympic medal. For many years he made his home on the island of Majorca.