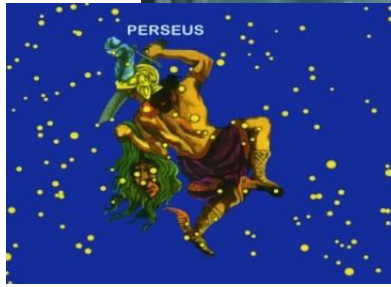


Perseus and the Gorgon

Chapter Five

The Cave of the Dragon's Mouth



Dark clouds swirled overhead as Perseus emerged from the forest. A flash of lightning streaked across the sky. Perseus was tired and cold but he kept going until he reached a slope of dark rocks – the Black Mountain.

Jagged stalactites hung from the entrance to a cave, like the fangs of some terrible beast. This was the Cave of the Dragon's Mouth. This was where Medusa lived. Perseus's grip tightened around his sword. He tried to stop himself from trembling as he stepped inside...

Ducking his head to avoid the stalactites, he went deeper into the cave. It grew colder and pale rays of light shining in from outside cast eerie shadows. In the gloom, strange shapes loomed up at him. They seemed to be statues of men, perfectly carved from the rock.

Perseus looked more closely. No, he realised with a horrible shiver... They *were* men. These were the brave warriors who had tried to kill Medusa. Each one had managed to track her down, only to be turned to stone by her evil glare. Frozen faces leered at him, caught at the moment they saw her, mouths open in silent screams, and eyes wide with terror.

At the heart of the cave, something moved. Quickly, Perseus hid behind one of the stone warriors. Hisses echoed around the cave, bouncing off the walls, growing louder and louder.

Don't look, Perseus told himself. Just don't look. If he dared a single glance at Medusa, he would be turned to stone too.

As he crouched behind the unlucky stone figure, the priest's words came back to him.

"... You can look at Medusa safely in the shield. Her reflection has no power."

Perseus raised his shield slowly in the direction of the hissing – and saw her at last.

He had heard stories about her, but none of them had prepared him for how monstrous the Gorgon truly was.

She had a long, worm-like body, jagged teeth, blood-red eyes and lethal-looking claws. Most grotesque of all, dozens of snakes writhed where her hair should have been, snapping, hissing and baring their vicious fangs. Suddenly, the snakes turned and stared at the exact place where Perseus was hiding.

They had seen him!

Perseus's heart raced as Medusa slithered closer. In his shield, he saw the snakes on her head wriggle and writhe.

"Warrior..." they hissed. "Look at ussss, warrior. Look at ussss and your troublessss will all be over."

No! Perseus thought again. If he looked at them, he'd be turned to stone. He had to act quickly and catch Medusa by surprise.



Gathering his courage, he burst from his hiding place. He held his shield up high and whirled his sword at the Gorgon.

However Medusa was too fast and too strong. Catching Perseus's arm, she flung him across the cave. Rocks tumbled from the walls, crashing down on Perseus as he fell to the floor.

Perseus tried to scramble up, but his legs were caught under the rocks. He couldn't reach his sword and in his shield, he saw Medusa approach.

"Look at ussss warrior," the snakes hissed.

"Look at usssssssssss."

Perseus stared at the hideous face in horror as it came ever closer.

The monster grasped Perseus's back, starting to roughly turn him around. Perseus tried to fight her but she had the strength of one hundred warriors.

At once, he shut his eyes. Feeling around, he found and grabbed hold of a rock and rammed the jagged edge into Medusa's hand.

Medusa gave a piercing scream.

Perseus twisted from her grasp. Then, careful to look only at the cave ceiling, he hurled the rock at a stalactite.

With a mighty crack, the stalactite broke off. It shot down towards Medusa, slicing straight through her neck and cutting her head from her body in seconds.

Perseus dragged himself back to his shield and held it up to see what had happened. There was the severed head's reflection. To his relief, the snakes still hissed and spat. He prayed they had kept their power to turn King Polydectes to stone.

Making sure he kept his eyes firmly shut, Perseus placed the head in his leather bag. He ached all over but there was no time to rest – he had to rescue his mother. Taking a deep breath, Perseus turned and staggered from the cave.



Perseus and the Gorgon

Chapter Five Worksheet



1. What is a stalactite?
2. What were the strange shapes that Perseus saw in the cave?
3. What advice (from the priest) did Perseus remember?
4. Write down three features of Medusa's appearance.
5. Which word tells us that the snakes were ugly?

6. Why was it difficult for Perseus to escape from Medusa?
7. In your own words, describe the way in which Perseus finally defeated Medusa.



Finished everything so far?



Imagine **you** are Perseus at this point in the story...

Write a paragraph describing your thoughts and feelings at this time.

Tip! You may find it helpful to use some of the words below:

victorious

exhausted

determined

fearful

anxious

nervous

