



Reading Guide



The Lightning Thief

by Rick Riordan



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INTRODUCTION

After twelve-year-old Percy Jackson is kicked out of his sixth boarding school, his mother lets him in on a wild family secret. Percy's father, whom he's never met, is actually a Greek god, and Percy is a demigod whose life is in serious jeopardy. When Percy arrives at Camp Half-Blood, a safe haven for demigods, he learns all is not well among the celestial beings. Zeus' lightning bolt is missing and Percy is the prime suspect. Together with his friends, Percy has ten days to locate the real thief and return the master lightning bolt to Zeus or else the gods will declare war on each other, ending life on earth.

The Lightning Thief is the first in a series of five books by Rick Riordan. Subsequent novels include *The Sea of Monsters*, *Titan's Curse*, *The Battle of the Labyrinth*, and *The Last Olympian*. A feature film called *Percy Jackson and the Olympians: The Lightning Thief* was released in 2010 and a sequel titled *Percy Jackson: Sea Of Monsters* came out in 2013.

As students read *The Lightning Thief*, ask them to think about the concept of destiny. Is the outcome of Percy Jackson's quest predetermined or is he in control of his own life path?

USING THIS READING GUIDE

This reading guide presents lessons to support the teaching of the novel *The Lightning Thief*. Organized by sections of grouped chapters, the lessons preview key vocabulary words and include close reading questions tied to the Common Core State Standards. The lessons identify a key passage in each section that will help you guide students through an exploration of the essential ideas, events, and character development in *The Lightning Thief*. This passage will also serve as the jumping off point from which students will engage in their own SyncTV-style group discussion.

Each section of the reading guide also includes a list of comparative texts provided in *The Lightning Thief* Full-text Unit on StudySync that go along with that section. For each comparative text, the reading guide includes important contextual notes and ideas for relating the text to *The Lightning Thief*.

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TEXT SECTIONS

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CHAPTERS 1-2: Percy Gets Expelled

A class field trip to the Metropolitan Museum of Art goes terribly awry and Percy is expelled from his private school. On his way home, Percy's friend Grover panics when Percy describes seeing three women knitting.

9

CHAPTERS 3-4: The Meaning of Family

Percy and his mother, Sally Jackson, escape from Percy's mean stepfather Gabe and travel to a beach house in Montauk. Grover arrives and together they try to get Percy to summer camp. The car crashes into a ditch and a Minotaur chases the three travelers.

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CHAPTERS 5-7: Welcome to Camp Half-Blood

The more Percy learns about the gods, demigods, and monsters at Camp Half-Blood, the less he understands about his own identity.

15

CHAPTERS 8-9: A Flag and a Quest

After two near-death encounters during a game of capture the flag, Percy learns his father's identity. Later, Chiron asks Percy to quest for Zeus' missing lightning bolt.

18

CHAPTERS 10-11: First Fights

Percy and his pals nearly die when they encounter the Furies on a city bus. After using their wits and Annabeth's magical cap to escape, they mistakenly seek refuge in Medusa's sculpture garden.

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- 21 **CHAPTERS 12-14: Westward by Train**
Percy and his friends take an Amtrak west towards the gates to the Underworld. At the top of the Gateway Arch in Saint Louis, Percy is attacked by the monster of monsters, Echidna, and her Chimera and must rely on his father to save him.
- 24 **CHAPTERS 15-17: Theme Parks, Casinos, and Water Beds**
After doing an errand for Ares at the Tunnel of Love, Percy, Grover, and Annabeth continue their journey west in the back of a truck. An overly friendly casino in Las Vegas nearly derails their entire quest, and, with only a day left until solstice, the trio must book it to get to the Underworld in time.
- 27 **CHAPTERS 18-19: The Underworld**
After bribing Charon, the security guard to the Underworld, crossing the River Styx, and sneaking past Cerberus, Percy discovers that the Zeus' master lightning bolt isn't the only godly possession that's gone missing and that there's much more to his quest than he suspected.
- 30 **CHAPTERS 20-22: Final Showdowns**
To conclude his quest, Percy must return the helm of darkness to Hades and the master lightning bolt to Zeus. In addition, he reports his suspicions about Kronos to the Olympic gods. When he returns to Camp Half-Blood, he remembers the final part of his prophecy and looks for the one who betrayed him.

CHAPTERS 1-2: Percy Gets Expelled

KEY PASSAGE | Chapter 1, Paragraphs 4-6

In this passage from the beginning of *The Lightning Thief*, our narrator, Percy Jackson, offers readers a direct and dire “warning” about the forthcoming events and passages in the novel. This warning doesn’t apply to “normal” kids who believe this story is fiction (it is, of course, but not to our narrator). He is jealous of their supposedly blissful ignorance. However, to readers who might recognize something from their own lives in the pages ahead, he ominously cautions: stop reading at once. According to Percy, if you identify with the story in any way, or suspect that it is more than just fantasy, you could be just like him. What this means isn’t exactly clear, only that if you’re just like him, “they” will soon come looking for you.

WHY IT’S KEY

Tone: The novel begins with Percy directly addressing the reader, a standard opening for Greek dramas, creating a connection to the novel’s context of Greek mythology. His warning entices the reader to discover exactly what kind of trouble he is talking about and just who “they” are. His tone is confiding and ominous, inviting the reader to accompany him in experiencing the betrayals and violence in the pages to come. The concluding line, “Don’t say I didn’t warn you,” both beckons and cautions the reader, saying both “Follow me” and “Proceed at your own risk.”

Character/Theme: Percy immediately tells the reader that he’s not normal and he wishes that he was. This theme—wanting to fit in and feel normal—develops throughout the novel. In addition, he implies that his story is dangerous and readers are at risk. Throughout *The Lightning Thief*, Percy discovers that new information is almost always followed by violence. In a way, the trope that “ignorance is bliss” is reinforced in Percy’s life, though ignorance would also mean certain death.

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Discussion Prompt: Reread the first page of *The Lightning Thief*. How do Percy's warnings set the reader up for trouble to come? Why do you think Rick Riordan opened the novel with this message of caution?

Standards: RL.6.1, RL.6.6; SL.6.1.A, SL.6.1.C, SL.6.1.D

VOCABULARY

eavesdropper

eaves•drop•per *noun*

A person who secretly listens in on private conversations.

My little sister, the eavesdropper, stood right outside the door and listened to us plan her surprise party.

solstice

sol•stice *noun*

The two times a year when the sun is farthest from the celestial equator

The winter solstice is the shortest day of the year.

dyslexic

dys•lex•ic *adjective*

Having a disorder that makes interpreting words and letters difficult in reading or writing,

We knew she was dyslexic when she kept writing letters backwards.

probation

pro•ba•tion *noun*

A period of testing, often after a disciplinary action, during which a person must be on his or her best behavior

Because of my poor report card, my mother put me on probation until I brought my grades up.

scythe

scythe *noun*

A curved blade often used for cutting grass or wheat

Before tractors, many farmers used a knife or a scythe to harvest their crops.

hallucinate

hal•lu•ci•nate *verb*

To perceive something that isn't there

When lost in the desert, explorers have been known to hallucinate images of lakes.

CLOSE READ

QUESTION 1: How does the author imply that *The Lightning Thief* is not a work of fiction, and why?

Sample Answer: The author has Percy feel envy for any reader who believes that the story he's about to tell didn't really happen. Percy wishes the story weren't true, but he knows it is. The author uses suspense to hook the reader into a believable sense of danger.

Standards: RL.6.1

QUESTION 2: Why is Percy nervous about his field trip to the Metropolitan Museum of Art?

Sample Answer: He's had bad experiences on field trips in the past. In fifth grade he accidentally shot the school bus with a Revolutionary War Cannon, and in fourth grade he pressed the wrong lever while his class was on a catwalk, and they all fell into the

Marine World shark tank.

Standards: RL.6.1

QUESTION 3: What expectations does Mr. Brunner have of Percy? Why does Percy think these expectations are unfair?

Sample Answer: Mr. Brunner wants Percy to be more accomplished than all the other students and to learn how to apply lessons about Greek and Roman gods to his own life. Percy thinks this is unfair, since he has dyslexia and ADHD.

Standards: RL.6.1

QUESTION 4: In the first half of Chapter 1, what details let us know that Mrs. Dodd is dangerous?

Sample Answer: Mrs. Dodd often sends Percy to after-school detention. She has an evil look in her eyes. She materializes rather than walks. Mrs. Dodd also loves Nancy Bobofit, a student who seems set on making Percy's life difficult.

Standards: RL.6.1

QUESTION 5: How does Percy feel when he learns he won't get invited back to Yancy?

Sample Answer: He's homesick and glad that he'll see his mother again, but he also anticipates missing the view of the Hudson River, his friend Grover, and his Latin teacher, Mr. Brunner.

Standards: RL.6.1

CHAPTERS 3-4: The Meaning of Family

KEY PASSAGE | Chapter 3, Paragraphs 5-6

In this passage, Percy Jackson pauses to tell us a little bit of backstory of about his mother, Sally, before she makes her official entrance as a character in the story. Percy's love and devotion to his mother are unmistakably clear. He introduces her as the best person in the world, and goes on to lament that the greatest people often have the worst luck in life. Following this, Percy launches into an inventory of his mother's misfortunes, including the death of her parents at a young age, her less-than-loving relationship with the uncle who raised her, and all the work and effort she put into saving up for college—only to be left penniless and alone after she was forced to care for her uncle until his death.

WHY IT'S KEY

Theme: Luck is an important theme in *The Lightning Thief*, and like Percy, Sally Jackson doesn't have a lot of it, including during her childhood and young adulthood. On the other hand, luck is not the only force at play in *The Lightning Thief*. Parental influence and parental absence have a huge impact on a child's life. This passage establishes the bond of ill fortune and love between mother and son—succinctly expressed in Percy's belief that "the best people have the rottenest luck." These two themes, luck and love, will also drive the plot of the novel.

Character: Percy is clearly devoted to his mother, and her bad luck has made him a little angry on her behalf, but he is more protective than angry, which shows his good heart. This works both ways. Despite being orphaned, neglected by her uncle, and then quitting school, Sally Jackson has maintained a positive attitude, and her devotion to her son is evident. As the "human" side of Percy's parental combination, Sally's kind and empathic nature balances the element of supernatural power supplied by Percy's father.

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Discussion Prompt: What role does luck play in Percy's life and to what extent is his luck similar or different than his mother's? Do you agree with Percy's theory that the best people have the worst luck? Why or why not?

Standards: RL.6.1, RL.6.3; SL.6.1.A, SL.6.1.C, SL.6.1.D

VOCABULARY

lumber

lum•ber *verb*

To walk with a slow, heavy step

The football player's cleats echoed as he lumbered down the hallway.

talon

ta•lon *noun*

A claw, usually belonging to a bird of prey

The bald eagle has four talons on each foot.

lanolin

la•no•lin *noun*

A fatty oil found in sheep's wool, often used in ointments and lotions

Lanolin is quite effective at treating rashes and burns.

holographic

ho•lo•gra•phic *adjective*

Appearing as a three-dimensional image produced by light

The museum exhibit featured a holographic robot that you could walk around—and through.

minion

min•ion *noun*

Someone of little importance whose job is to serve a powerful boss

Running errands for the general, I felt like nothing more than his minion.

CLOSE READ

QUESTION 1: What characteristics do Percy and his mother have in common? How do they differ?

Sample Answer: Both Percy and Sally are hard workers with good hearts who have been victims of consistently bad luck. Percy has inherited certain supernatural powers from his father that his mother doesn't have.

Standards: RL.6.1

QUESTION 2: What new information do you learn about Percy's father in these two chapters?

Sample Answer: He was tall, handsome, powerful, kind, and gentle. He left on an ocean voyage before Percy was born, and he never returned.

Standards: RL.6.1

QUESTION 3: How does Sally Jackson indicate her independence from Gabe?

Sample Answer: She eats blue food. She keeps her maiden name, Jackson. She takes Percy to Montauk and leaves Gabe behind.

Standards: RL.6.1

QUESTION 4: What obstacles does Percy face on his way to camp? What do these obstacles suggest about Percy's identity?

Sample Answer: There's a terrible storm; the car goes into a ditch; and a Minotaur chases Percy. Percy seems to have powerful enemies who can manipulate the weather and employ monsters to aid them.

Standards: RL.6.1

COMPARATIVE TEXTS

Text: *Black, White & Jewish: The Autobiography Of A Shifting Self* by Rebecca Walker

Compare to: Chapter 3 of *The Lightning Thief*

Connection: In *Black, White & Jewish: The Autobiography Of A Shifting Self*, Rebecca Walker tells her life story, paying particular attention to her own sense of identity. As a biracial woman in a society obsessed with race, Walker writes honestly about feeling neither Jewish nor Black enough for either side of her family. Similarly, in *The Lightning Thief*, Percy Jackson considers his own heritage as a Half-Blood and struggles to understand just what this means.

Text: *Medusa's Gaze And Vampire's Bite: The Science of Monsters* by Matt Kaplan

Compare to: Chapter 4 of *The Lightning Thief*

Connection: Even though monsters are notoriously scary, in *Medusa's Gaze And Vampire's Bite: The Science of Monsters*, Matt Kaplan considers the many ways we're drawn to them. "Terrible as they may be," he writes, "we cannot help looking ever closer, parting the fingers that are covering our eyes." In *The Lightning Thief*, Percy Jackson often finds himself under attack. Though Grover believes Percy attracts monsters, Percy is also enticed by them.

CHAPTERS 5-7: Welcome To Camp Half-Blood

KEY PASSAGE | Chapter 7, Paragraphs 98-99

This passage consists of a brief exchange between Percy and Luke, who serves as Percy's counselor in the Hermes cabin at Camp Half-Blood, where Percy is now staying. Camp Half-Blood is a safe haven for Percy and others like him—demigods—allowing Percy finally to discover who he is and what sets him apart from the rest of the “normal” kids. Prior to this passage, Percy had been asking Luke a series of questions, and here, he asks Luke his final question, about insinuations from two other campers, one a bully and one a friend, that he might be “Big Three material” or even “the one.” Annabeth, the friend, suggested that he see the Oracle for clarification, but Percy is confused. Luke's response to all this is dismissive, voicing his displeasure for these supposed prophecies.

WHY IT'S KEY

Theme: Percy is still struggling with his confused identity as the child of a human and a still undetermined god. Played out in Camp Half-Blood, this theme of identity takes the form of competition over which god one is related to, including Zeus, Poseidon, and Hades—the Big Three. Meanwhile, Annabeth is waiting for “the one” new arrival who is fated to lead her on a quest, according to the Oracle. This illustrates the theme of fate in the lives of the “half-bloods,” in which certain outcomes are determined by personal behavior and free will, but other events are determined by fate or revealed in prophecies from the Oracle.

Character: Luke's evasive reply to Percy's question reveals the ambivalent reaction the demigods have to prophecies—rewarding them with good tidings, crushing them with bad news, and altogether leaving them feeling powerless to control their destiny. Meanwhile, different campers' characters are defined by their relationship to the hierarchy of power. Clarisse uses “The Big Three” to insult Percy; Annabeth pins her hopes on prophecies; Luke resents the way they erode free will; and Percy is trying to figure out if any of this can shed light on who he is.

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Discussion Prompt: Why do you think Luke hates prophecies? Would you want to have advance knowledge of events? Why or why not? How might prophecies impact the lives of half-bloods? Use examples from the text in your discussion.

Standards: RL.6.1, RL.6.2; SL.6.1.A, SL.6.1.C, SL.6.1.D

VOCABULARY

reverently

re•ver•ent•ly *adverb*

In a manner expressing deep respect

The violinist spoke reverently of her first music teacher.

recoil

re•coil *verb*

To rapidly move away from something; to back up swiftly

The girl recoiled in disgust after peeking into the witch's cauldron.

Minotaur

mi•no•taur *proper noun*

A Greek mythological monster that is half-man and half-bull

The Minotaur lurked in the center of a great labyrinth, feasting on young Athenians.

cherub

cher•ub *noun*

A small winged angel

The baby's rosy cheeks and chubby belly reminded his mother of cherubs she'd seen in old paintings.

pseudonym

pseu•do•nym *noun*

A false name used to mask one's identity

To protect her privacy, the author published all her work under a pseudonym.

immortal

im•mor•tal *adjective*

Living forever; never dying

She often wished that she could be immortal and witness the changes from century to century.

CLOSE READ

QUESTION 1: Why does Clarisse compare Percy to “the Big Three”? How does it make Percy feel?

Sample Answer: Clarisse is belittling Percy by suggesting he is far from sharing the elite qualities of Zeus, Poseidon, and Hades. Percy feels not only insulted but confused, because it seems to contradict Annabeth's supposition that he is “the one” who will make a quest possible.

Standards: RL.6.1

QUESTION 2: Why is Percy so surprised when he learns Mr. D's true identity?

Sample Answer: Mr. D is in fact Dionysus, but he doesn't look or act like a god. He's small and round and he complains a lot. In addition, he's on probation, not allowed to drink, and forced to spend another century at Camp Half-Blood before he goes home to Mount Olympus.

Standards: RL.6.1

QUESTION 3: Why are Grover’s credentials in jeopardy? What was he supposed to do to protect Percy and what actually happened?

Sample Answer: Grover was supposed to protect Percy at his boarding school and bring him safely to Camp Half-Blood. Instead, Grover lost Percy in New York City, and Percy brought Grover, who was unconscious, into the camp.

Standards: RL.6.1

QUESTION 4: Many of the “campers” had similar experiences in the regular world before arriving at Camp Half-Blood. What characteristics do the half-bloods share and why?

Sample Answer: Many of them were kicked out of several schools and share diagnoses for ADHD and dyslexia because they see too much and their brains are designed to read Ancient Greek.

Standards: RL.6.1

QUESTION 5: What initiation rite does Percy face at Camp Half-Blood? Based on what happens, what can you infer about Percy?

Sample Answer: Clarisse tries to put Percy’s head in the toilet, but the water arcs out of the toilet and hits Clarisse and her friends, knocking them over. Percy seems to have special power over water.

Standards: RL.6.1

COMPARATIVE TEXTS

Text: *Instinct: The Power to Unleash Your Inborn Drive* by T.D. Jakes

Compare to: Chapter 6 of *The Lightning Thief*

Connection: In his book *Instinct: The Power to Unleash Your Inborn Drive*, author T.D. Jakes argues that personal success and ability lie within our DNA. Recognizing and pursuing instinct, he believes, is the key to self-fulfillment. As Percy Jackson continues to interact with other Half-Bloods in *The Lightning Thief*, he frequently surprises himself with abilities he wasn’t aware he had. Harnessing his talents, however, may require not just instinct but also practice and care.

CHAPTERS 8-9: A Flag And A Quest

KEY PASSAGE | Chapter 9, Paragraph 2

In this passage, Percy reflects on his new living situation. He has been moved to Cabin 3 after the discovery that he is the son of Poseidon, one of the “Big Three” Greek gods (along with Zeus and Hades). Just as Percy had grown accustomed to a certain routine and status at Camp Half-Blood, this revelation turns everything on its head. Now living alone, he has plenty of space for all his stuff, not to mention the freedom to do whatever he wants, whenever he wants. However, all this freedom and space leave him with a brand new problem: he is entirely miserable all by himself.

WHY IT’S KEY

Character: Revealed as the only son of Poseidon, one of the “Big Three,” Percy now has no peers in Camp Half-Blood. He has gone from the society of the lowest rank of campers, “undetermined,” to the privileged solitude of the top rank. Although Percy’s status is raised, he finds it’s lonely at the top, and potentially dangerous. Still, Percy’s loneliness might make his alliances with fellow campers such as Annabeth and Luke stronger. Alternatively, his high position could provoke jealousy and even betrayal. Alone in his cabin, Percy feels like an outsider with no one to help him or keep him safe. This new status requires Percy to grow up, an endeavor he’s not entirely excited about.

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Discussion Prompt: What are the pros and cons of being the son of Poseidon? How does Percy respond to his new status? How do the other campers react? Is he in a better or worse position than previously, when he was a visitor in the Hermes cabin? Explain.

Standards: RL.6.1, RL.6.3; SL.6.1.A, SL.6.1.C, SL.6.1.D

VOCABULARY

resent

re•sent verb

To feel anger or bitterness towards a person or circumstance

I resented my mother for forbidding me from attending the school dance.

hilt

hilt noun

The handle of a sword or knife

It's important that sword fighters grip the hilt firmly.

honorary

ho•nor•ar•y adjective

Symbolic; ceremonial

Though she had never graduated from college, the renowned painter received an honorary degree, acknowledging her accomplishments.

appraise

ap•raise verb

To assess the value of a person or thing

The jeweler appraised my grandmother's rings and informed her of their value.

venomous

ven•o•mous adjective

Full of hatred and bad wishes

Malcolm gave his babysitter a venomous look when she told him to get ready for bed.

CLOSE READ

QUESTION 1: How do the other campers feel about Percy and why? What clue signals that Percy had better be careful?

Sample Answer: The Ares campers, particularly Clarisse, hate Percy because he embarrassed them. Luke and Annabeth seem to like Percy. The presence of the hellhound indicates that Percy has an enemy inside the camp.

Standards: RL.6.1

QUESTION 2: In chapter 8, what clues indicate the identity of Percy's father?

Sample Answer: Percy beats Luke in a sword fight after pouring ice water on his head. When Percy is pushed in the creek during capture the flag, he regains his strength and beats Clarisse and the other Ares campers.

Standards: RL.6.1

QUESTION 3: Why are Poseidon and Zeus fighting? What does their fight have to do with Percy?

Sample Answer: Zeus is missing his master lightning bolt, and he believes that Percy stole it for Poseidon. Zeus wants Poseidon to return the bolt and Poseidon wants Zeus to apologize for calling him a thief.

Standards: RL.6.1

QUESTION 4: Why doesn't Chiron tell Percy where he thinks the lightning bolt is?

Sample Answer: Chiron is afraid that Percy won't accept the quest if he learns that Chiron thinks the lightning bolt is in the underworld.

Standards: RL.6.1

COMPARATIVE TEXTS

Text: *The Lost City of Z: A Tale of Deadly Obsession in the Amazon* by David Grann

Compare to: Chapter 9 of *The Lightning Thief*

Connection: In *The Lost City of Z*, David Grann chronicles his journey through the Amazon in search of a legendary and mythical city. Like Percy Jackson in *The Lightning Thief*, Grann follows in the footsteps of previous explorers who've tried and failed to achieve a near-impossible goal.

Text: *Blood, Toil, Tears and Sweat* by Winston Churchill

Compare to: Chapter 9 of *The Lightning Thief*

Connection: In 1939, Great Britain found itself at war with Germany after the Nazi invasion of Poland. Hitler's army was raging across Europe, and British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain was forced to resign. Winston Churchill took over as Prime Minister. Like the characters in *The Lightning Thief*, who are determined to beat the odds and find Zeus' lightning bolt, in this speech before Parliament in May 1940, Churchill resolves to win the war by whatever means necessary.

CHAPTERS 10-11: First Fights

KEY PASSAGE | Chapter 10, Paragraphs 101-102

In this passage, Percy pauses at the outset of his quest to discuss his true motivations. The disappearance of Zeus' lightning bolt has led to a fight between Zeus and Poseidon—and now that Poseidon has claimed Percy as his son, the young demigod is the prime suspect in the theft. Now, along with Annabeth and Grover, Percy has boarded a bus to the entrance to the Underworld to find the missing lightning bolt and clear Poseidon of guilt before a massive war erupts. Speaking candidly, Percy isn't motivated so much by retrieving the lightning bolt or restoring peace between the gods: his resentment towards Poseidon for abandoning him makes him feel conflicted about helping his father now that he needs him. No, the true motivation for Percy's quest to the Underworld is to rescue his mom from Hades, and he is determined to get her back.

WHY IT'S KEY

Character: Percy's motivation for agreeing to the quest is personal rather than heroic: he loves his mom. He's not interested in preventing the biggest war in human history between Zeus and Poseidon. He resents Poseidon for failing to be a responsible father and a responsible partner to his mom. In a way, Percy responds more to his human side than his mythological side.

Theme: Percy is conflicted between his loyalty to his mom, the only parent who's supported and protected him, and the expectations put on him for being Poseidon's son. He never asked to be a demigod, and he never received any kind of support from Poseidon. Furthermore, because of his father, Percy is accused of stealing Zeus' lightning bolt and must intercede to prevent a world war. The theme of identity is becoming more polarized as the stakes rise. It goes beyond mother vs. father. The human side of Percy—his love for his mortal mom and his resentment of Poseidon's failures, which don't seem to register as failures to the god—seems to be victimized by his Olympian side. Yet he can only solve his human problems by succeeding as a hero.

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Discussion Prompt: Discuss what Percy's mixed feelings about the quest show about the problems of being a demigod. Compare his motivations with those of Annabeth and Grover. What later events in the novel might result from Percy's feelings, and why?

Standards: RL.6.1, RL.6.3; SL.6.1A, SL.6.1C, SL.6.1D

VOCABULARY

bronco

bron•co *noun*

A half-tamed or wild horse

Good luck trying to put a saddle on that wild bronco.

patron

pa•tron *noun*

A person who supports another person, organization, or cause

My mother was a loyal patron of the hospital and sent monthly checks to the gift fund.

disposable

dis•pos•a•ble *adjective*

Designed to be used once and thrown away; expendable

On nights he was too tired to do dishes, my father would serve us meals on disposable paper plates.

molten

mol•ten *adjective*

Liquefied by heat

The molten lava oozed down the hill toward the cabin.

reinforcements

re•in•force•ments *noun*

Extra people or equipment that supplement or strengthen the present number

The other side had us outnumbered in the snowball fight until we got reinforcements.

CLOSE READ

QUESTION 1: In Percy's estimation, how has Poseidon fallen short as a father?

Sample Answer: Poseidon failed to visit Percy, failed to send child-support checks to Sally, failed to provide her with help, and only claims Percy as his son because he needs a hero to retrieve Zeus' bolt.

Standards: RL.6.1

QUESTION 2: Why aren't humans in *The Lightning Thief* more aware of the activities of the gods?

Sample Answer: Chiron tells Percy that when divine elements mix with mortal elements, mist is created, which obscures human view. Humans are also good at coming up with explanations to explain strange events.

Standards: RL.6.1

QUESTION 3: What was life like before the Age of The West?

Sample Answer: Percy would be at Zeus' mercy if he flew through the sky using Luke's magic sneakers.

Standards: RL.6.1

QUESTION 4: Besides saving the world, what other reasons does Annabeth have to go on the quest?

Sample Answer: After surviving the Furies, Annabeth admits that she doesn't want Percy to die because this is her only chance to see the world. Otherwise, she has to stay on Half-Blood Hill or with her father.

Standards: RL.6.1

QUESTION 5: Before her identity is revealed, what clues indicate that Medusa is up to no good?

Sample Answer: She lures the children in with food. She is startled by Annabeth and knows Annabeth's name without being told. The statues are far too lifelike. Medusa's head is covered to conceal the snakes that make up her hair.

Standards: RL.6.1

COMPARATIVE TEXTS

Text: *Heroes Every Child Should Know: Perseus* by Hamilton Wright Mabie

Compare to: Chapter 11 of *The Lightning Thief*

Connection: Perseus, the son of a mortal woman named Danaë and Zeus, the king of the gods, faces challenges from the day he is born. As a young man, Perseus is visited by the goddess Athena, who has chosen him for the task of killing her bitter enemy Medusa, whose gaze will turn a beholder to stone. Perseus is all too willing to take on the mission, even if it means dying in the process. Percy Jackson, hero of *The Lightning Thief*, has similarities to his near-namesake as well as key differences.

Text: "Perseus" by Robert Hayden

Compare to: Chapter 11 of *The Lightning Thief*

Connection: Widely acclaimed for his poetry about the black historical experience, Robert Hayden was the first African-American to serve as Consultant in Poetry to the Library of Congress. Here, Hayden uses a modified sonnet (fourteen lines) to offer a new perspective on the Greek mythical hero Perseus. Gazing down on the severed head Medusa, the snake-haired Gorgon, Perseus has a moment of self-reflection, and acknowledges his powerful and dangerous "thirst...to destroy." Does Percy Jackson have his own moments of self-awareness in *The Lightning Thief*?

CHAPTERS 12-14: Westward by Train

KEY PASSAGE | Chapter 13, Paragraph 136

In this passage, Echidna, the Mother of Monsters, presents Percy with a little dare after attacking him at the top of the St. Louis Gateway Arch. Prior to this, Echidna's monstrous son, Chimera, blasted a hole in the observation deck through which Percy's sword has fallen—all the way down to the Mississippi River. Echidna dares Percy to retrieve the sword from the river, some six hundred feet below, to prove that he is really the son of Poseidon, the god of water. According to Echidna's logic, if Percy is really Poseidon's son, he should have no fear of the water below, because his father and his powers will supposedly protect him.

WHY IT'S KEY

Character: Pitted against Echidna, the mother of all monsters, Percy is forced to put to the test his father's flawed sense of responsibility for his own child. He has no choice but to take up Echidna's challenge and trust Poseidon. Throwing himself at the doubtful mercy of his father may be Percy's most heroic deed so far.

Theme: If Percy jumps, he'll fall to his death unless the water rescues him. In order to live, Percy must trust his father, a god whom he was disavowing earlier in the day. The theme of trust forms a bridge between Percy's human disappointment with Poseidon and his decision to rely on his father. It's time for Poseidon to show a little humanity.

Tone/Character: Echidna's tone is mocking. She doesn't appear to believe that Percy is Poseidon's son. On the other hand, if she didn't think Percy was a demigod, she'd have no reason to attack him in the first place. Like many a villain, she is committing the mistake of overconfidence, or hubris, which trips up heroes and villains alike. Witches should know better than to indulge in a triumphant cackle or, in this case, to propose a dare. She could finish Percy off when Percy is defenseless, but she overplays her hand by daring Percy to embrace his father in a literal trust-fall. Ironically, she is working against her own evil purposes by putting Percy's fate in his own hands. Perhaps she doesn't want to succeed too easily.

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Discussion Prompt: At the top of the Gateway Arch, Echidna challenges Percy to “*prove his bloodline*.” How do Percy’s feelings about Poseidon evolve over the course of these chapters? Use specific examples from the novel in your answer. In what ways does Poseidon fulfill the role of father? How does he fail at fatherhood? What factors limit the ways he can father Percy?

Standards: RL.6.1, RL.6.3; SL.6.1.A, SL.6.1.C, SL.6.1.D

VOCABULARY

pillage

pil • lage *verb*

To violently rob a place

The soldiers captured the king and pillaged the castle.

petrification

pet•ri•fi•ca•tion *noun*

The process of turning a living thing into stone

Fossils are formed by slow petrification.

abyss

a•byss *noun*

An endless pit; a very deep hole in the ground

We stood at the edge of the cliff and gazed into the abyss.

token

to • ken *noun*

An object that represents a feeling, moment, person, or place.

The bride and groom exchanged rings as tokens of their commitment to one another.

plummet

plum • met *verb*

To fall quickly; to drop

The skydiver plummeted towards the earth.

CLOSE READ

QUESTION 1: What does Echidna mean by the line Prove your *bloodline*?

Sample Answer: Echidna is daring Percy to prove that he is indeed Poseidon’s son—that he shares Poseidon’s bloodline, or family relationship.

Standards: RL.6.1

QUESTION 2: Why does Grover want to become a searcher? What does he hope to achieve?

Sample Answer: He wants to find the god Pan, who was rumored to have died 2,000 years ago. Although no other searcher has ever returned, Grover wants to awaken Pan so that Pan can protect the satyrs and all the wild places of the earth.

Standards: RL.6.1

QUESTION 3: How does Annabeth feel about her father? Use words and phrases from the text in your answer.

Sample Answer: If Annabeth could, she'd "leave him to rot." Since she arrived on his doorstep in a golden cradle, he "talked about [her] arrival as if it were the most inconvenient thing that ever happened to him." He remarried when Annabeth was five, and his new wife didn't let Annabeth play with her children. Annabeth ran away at the age of seven.

Standards: RL.6.1

QUESTION 4: What does Grover mean when he says, "there's something strange going on with this quest" on page 191?

Sample Answer: The Furies weren't as aggressive with Percy as Grover and Annabeth expected them to be. They seem to be looking for an object rather than being intent on killing Percy.

Standards: RL.6.1

QUESTION 5: In addition to monsters, who else is pursuing Percy, and why?

Sample Answer: After Sally's disappearance, Gabe reported Percy to the cops. He's suspected for causing a bus accident (when he fought the Furies) and also for blowing up the Gateway Arch.

Standards: RL.6.1

COMPARATIVE TEXTS

Text: *Travels With Charley* by John Steinbeck

Compare to: Chapter 14 of *The Lightning Thief*

Connection: In 1960, author John Steinbeck set out on a long road trip with his poodle, Charley, in order to reacquaint himself with the land and people he wrote about. Like Percy Jackson in *The Lightning Thief*, Steinbeck travels across America. In this excerpt from his Pulitzer Prize winning book *Travels With Charley*, Steinbeck shares observations from his journey.

CHAPTERS 15-17: Theme Parks, Casinos, and Water Beds

KEY PASSAGE | Chapter 17, Paragraph 37

In this passage, Percy shares his confusion and uncertainty surrounding the true nature of his quest. He's been troubled by a dream he had the night in the truck, in which a voice mentioned not one but two objects—though the nature of these objects, along with other important details from the dream, is unclear. Percy can't help but feel there's some important information just out of his grasp that would make everything make sense; he compares it the feeling he sometimes has when reading common words that he's nevertheless unable to decipher (Percy, you might recall, is dyslexic). As he considers his quest further, he begins to doubt that an impending confrontation with Hades will solve the problem, suspecting something even more sinister at hand.

WHY IT'S KEY

Character: In this passage, Percy demonstrates several character traits—his intuition, determination, and stubbornness—as well as his dyslexia. Once again, his intuition is telling him that something is wrong, but this time he doesn't quite know what that something is. Although previously Percy has ignored his “gut feelings,” he's learning to trust his instincts, even when he doesn't entirely understand their source. The question is, are these gut feelings human traits from his mother's side or a heightened super-awareness from his father Poseidon's side?

Plot: Percy only has one day left to complete his quest, but he fears there's more to his journey than he knows. With limited time, Percy is worried that there's a greater danger than Hades at play, and unless he can figure out what the danger is, his quest, along with the entire world, is doomed. To maintain the chase, or the puzzle, the author reveals a larger mystery at work. As Percy approaches what he thinks is the end of his quest, the author turns the tables: Percy is being manipulated in a bigger game.

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Discussion Prompt: As he gets closer to the Underworld and to the solstice, what concerns does Percy have about his quest? What do his gut feelings tell him that his role-playing as hero has disguised? How do his human and supernatural sides work together?

Standards: RL.6.1 RL.6.2; SL.6.1.A, SL.6.1.C, SL.6.1.D

VOCABULARY

trance

trance *noun*

Daze; stupor; semi-conscious state of mind
She strolled through the museum without looking at any of the exhibits, as if in a trance.

corral

cor•ral *verb*

To gather and organize people, animals, or things
The angry teacher corralled her unruly students onto the bus.

barricade

bar•ri•cade *noun*

A barrier used to prevent entry
The child built a barricade of stuffed animals around her bed to keep the monsters away.

metamorphosis

me•ta•mor•pho•sis *noun*

Transformation; a change of form from one shape, object, or living thing to another
The princess's kiss caused the frog's metamorphosis back into a prince.

mournful

mourn•ful *adjective*

Feeling sad; regretful; sorrowful
Tears streamed down my mother's face every time she heard that mournful song.

fugitive

fu•gi•tive *noun*

A hiding person; a person on the run from jail or other persecution
Little did we know, the hitchhiker we picked up was actually a fugitive fleeing the law!

CLOSE READ

QUESTION 1: What does Percy sense intuitively as he is about to confront Hades about the missing bolt?

Sample Answer: He senses that Hades is not the real villain and that there is a larger conspiracy at work.

Standards: RL.6.1

QUESTION 2: What does Luke tell Percy through Iris-Messaging? Why does Percy withhold this information from his friends?

Sample Answer: Luke says the campers at Half-Blood Hill heard about the Zeus–Poseidon fight and are taking sides. He also suggests that whoever took the master bolt had to be invisible, which implicates Annabeth. Percy doesn't always like Annabeth, but he has trusted her, up until now. Whether or not it's true, Luke's observation could have consequences for Percy's and Annabeth's friendship.

Standards: RL.6.1

QUESTION 3: How does Ares feel about the United States?

Sample Answer: He likes it because it's wild. He says it's the "best place since Sparta" after he threatens a waitress with a knife.

Standards: RL.6.1

QUESTION 4: What does Annabeth mean when she says, "Even strength has to bow to wisdom sometimes"?

Sample Answer: Annabeth is explaining to Percy why a god like Ares would need the assistance of demigods. Though Ares is strong and aggressive, his powers are uneven and he's not particularly smart. Annabeth, daughter of Athena, is quite intelligent.

Standards: RL.6.1

QUESTION 5: How do Luke, Annabeth, and Grover go "way back"? How are they linked by a fourth character?

Sample Answer: The first time Grover searched for a half-blood, he encountered Zeus' daughter Thalia, traveling with Luke and Annabeth. Although he was instructed to get Thalia back to Half-Blood Hill, he decided he couldn't leave Luke and Annabeth behind. The Kindly Ones came and Thalia sacrifices herself to save the others. She turned into a pine tree, and her compatriots made it back to camp safely.

Standards: RL.6.1

COMPARATIVE TEXTS

Text: *How Animals Grieve* by Barbara J. King

Compare to: Chapter 16 of *The Lightning Thief*

Connection: In *How Animals Grieve*, Barbara J. King uses case studies and deep analysis to prove that not only can animals feel emotions, many also grieve. During his quest, Percy finds himself interacting more and more with the non-human world—monsters, gods, and animals. Grover reveals more of his goat-side, and together with Grover and Annabeth, Percy frees three mistreated wild animals from the back of a truck. For both King and Percy, their compassion grows as they interact more deeply with the animal world.

CHAPTERS 18-19: The Underworld

KEY PASSAGE | Chapter 19, Paragraph 142

In this passage, Percy is completely befuddled by the sudden appearance of the master bolt in his backpack. Leading up to this moment, Percy has finally confronted Hades in the Underworld, and Hades has insisted Percy return the 'helm of darkness' or face the consequences. When Hades tells Percy that the master bolt is in his backpack, Percy is eager to prove his innocence—but when he opens the backpack, he is speechless. Unable to fathom how the master bolt had ended up in his backpack, Percy tries to reason with the shocking turn of events. He initially believes Hades is playing a cruel prank on him, but over the course of this passage he comes to realize that the fighting among the 'Big Three' gods must have been engineered by a more sinister, unknown participant. But whom? Who gave him the backpack, and who put the master bolt inside?

WHY IT'S KEY

Plot: In this passage, Percy tries to think through the accusations that Hades is hurling at him: that he has stolen Hades' helm of darkness, and that he has Zeus' master bolt in his possession, which does turn out to be the case. Although this is not the first time Percy feels that "the world turned sideways," he has learned to rely on his intuition and not accept events based just on appearances. Not only has Percy been played, so have the three most powerful gods. If any possibility exists for Percy to fulfill his quest, he needs to discover what mastermind set this up.

Character/Tone: Even though Percy is in a terrible situation, incriminated by Hades and caught with Zeus' lightning bolt, his thoughts remain practical. Logic and clear thinking aid Percy. Rather than lashing out at these accusations, he tries to discern who is responsible and how he can intervene. When he first meets Hades, he finds the audacity to greet him as "Uncle," which Hades regards as sheer arrogance, but Percy has the courage and shrewdness to meet Hades as the son of Poseidon. He has learned that he gains an advantage by taking an active role, rather than being the passive victim of a conspiracy. In so doing, he draws on his mother's survival instincts as well as his father's entitlement.

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Discussion Prompt: Who do you think is responsible for Zeus' missing lightning bolt and Hades' missing helm? What strategies or skills will Percy need to combat this person or god? Based on the text, what can you infer about Percy's adversary? What kind of power does he or she hold (or wish to hold)?

Standards: RL.6.1, RL.6.2; SL.6.1.A, SL.6.1.C, SL.6.1.D

VOCABULARY

barge

barge *noun*

A large, flat-bottomed cargo boat

We picnicked on the riverbank and watched the barges go by.

ghoul

ghoul *noun*

A demon who robs graves and eats corpses

On Halloween, my uncle told us a scary story about encountering a ghoul in a cemetery.

eon

e•on *noun*

A very long span of time; a billion years

As far I was concerned, my sixteenth birthday was eons away.

veer

veer *verb*

To change direction; swerve

I veered off the road to avoid hitting a deer.

ultimatum

ul•ti•ma•tum *noun*

A final demand; a last condition

After seeing my report card, my mother gave me an ultimatum: either improve my grades or give up my smart phone.

CLOSE READ

QUESTION 1: Why doesn't Hades tell the other gods about the missing helm of darkness? What does this tell you about Hades' status among the other Olympic gods?

Sample Answer: As god of the Underworld, Hades is not exactly a popular god. He doesn't think the other gods would help him if he did tell them his helm had gone missing. Strategically, it wouldn't be wise to let others know that he lost possession of "the most powerful weapon of fear."

Standards: RL.6.1

QUESTION 2: What must Percy, Annabeth, and Grover do in order to get from the DOA Recording Studios to the Underworld?

Sample Answer: They must bribe Charon, the security guard, with gold drachmas and then cross the River Styx, where they encounter Cerberus, the three-headed dog who guards the gates to the Underworld. To get past Cerberus, Annabeth must make him sit and stay, and she rewards him with a red rubber ball.

Standards: RL.6.1

QUESTION 3: According to Percy, why is Annabeth able to tame Cerberus?

Sample Answer: Everyone, including monsters in the Underworld, needs a little attention now and then.

Standards: RL.6.1

QUESTION 4: Where is the best place to be in the Underworld, and how does one get there?

Sample Answer: The Isles of Blest are located on a lake in the center of the Elysium Fields. In order to get there, a person has to be reborn three times and, for each life, achieve Elysium.

Standards: RL.6.1

COMPARATIVE TEXTS

Text: *Enrique's Journey* by Sonia Nazario

Compare to: Chapter 19 of *The Lightning Thief*

Connection: In the Pulitzer Prize-winning book *Enrique's Journey*, Sonia Nazario tells the true story of Lourdes, a mother who leaves Honduras and immigrates to the United States in order to provide more money for her family, and Enrique, the five-year-old son she leaves behind. Eleven years after Lourdes leaves, Enrique risks his life to find her. In *The Lightning Thief*, Percy, too, journeys in search of his mother, a woman who sacrificed everything for his survival.

CHAPTERS 20-22: Final Showdowns

KEY PASSAGE | Chapter 21, Paragraphs 174-176

In this passage, Sally Jackson explains to her son Percy why she doesn't just leave Smelly Gabe and live at the bottom of the ocean with Percy's true father, Poseidon. She tells him that she needs to live her life on her own, and not rely on help from either Poseidon or Percy. She believes that Percy will understand, and she tells him that his quest to the Underworld has served as a reminder of this important truth. Preparing to return to Camp Half-Blood for the summer, Percy accepts her decision, but as they overhear the sounds of one of Gabe's poker games in living room, Percy adds that he'll leave the box containing Medusa's Head, should his mother ever feel threatened.

WHY IT'S KEY

Character: The mother/son family traits are revealed in this passage. Even though Sally's quest to free herself from Gabe is more domestic than Percy's quest to find the master bolt, it's no less challenging. Like Percy, she must do it on her own, without help from the gods, including her own son. Sally speaks to Percy as an equal. Although she's his mother, she respects him and demonstrates this by explaining her decision and her values.

Theme: Sally draws a line between human solutions and mythological ones. Even though Percy has Medusa's head in the box he received from Poseidon and can use it to turn Gabe to stone, Sally stops him. Like Percy, she needs to make her own choices and doesn't want to live under anyone else's protection. She accepts that the consequences of her actions are her own. Percy leaves the box behind so that Sally can use it, should she choose. (When she later writes to Percy about selling a sculpture of a poker player and starting a new life in New York, readers can draw their own conclusions.)

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Discussion Prompt: Compare Percy's quest in *The Lightning Thief* with Sally's quest. How are they similar and different? How does each character follow the belief, *If my life is going to mean anything, I have to live it myself*? What does "living one's life by oneself" mean to you?

Standards: RL.6.1, RL.6.3; SL.6.1.A, SL.6.1.C, SL.6.1.D

VOCABULARY

impede

im•pede *verb*

Delay; hamper; prevent

The flat tire impeded our arrival.

reconciliation

re•con•cil•i•a•tion *noun*

When two or more parties resume friendly relationships after a disagreement; restoring compatibility

Fortunately, the mediation session I attended with my former best friend ended in reconciliation.

commotion

com•mo•tion *noun*

Disturbance; tumult; uproar

The party was so loud that the neighbors called the police to complain about the commotion.

custody

cus•to•dy *noun*

Guardianship of someone or something; protective care

After her parent's death, the orphan's grandmother took custody of the girl.

precariouly

pre•car•i•ous•ly *adverb*

Dangerously; haphazardly

The little boy leaned precariously out over the guardrail so that he could get a better look at the canyon below.

CLOSE READ

QUESTION 1: How does Percy's mom react to his solution for dealing with Gabe, and why?

Sample Answer: Sally rejects Percy's idea of turning Gabe to stone with Medusa's mask because she needs to deal with her problems by herself without the intercession of mythological help.

Standards: RL.6.1

QUESTION 2: How does Ares reveal that he's taking commands from someone else?

Sample Answer: He goes into a kind of trance when talking to Percy, as if waiting for someone to give him answers. He also says he doesn't have dreams of the pit, even though no one has mentioned the pit.

Standards: RL.6.1

QUESTION 3: Why doesn't Ares kill Percy?

Sample Answer: Although Ares is angry enough to kill Percy, a more powerful force—presumably whatever is inside the pit—tells Ares to let Percy go. This is indicated by a heavy darkness which descends from the sky and an earthquake that sets police cars on fire.

Standards: RL.6.1

QUESTION 4: How do reporters rewrite Percy's story after he defeats Ares? What does this retelling indicate about human nature?

Sample Answer: The reporters recast Percy as a victim, kidnapped by an older man. The struggle on the bus was his attempt to escape his captor, and the explosion at the Gateway Arch was also attributed to the older man. Percy fought his kidnapper in a gunfight on the beach, but the kidnapper fled after a gas main exploded during an earthquake. This ludicrous story shows how humans will interpret and rewrite events to coincide with their interpretation of reality.

Standards: RL.6.1

QUESTION 5: Based on Percy's and Poseidon's interaction at Mount Olympus, what can you infer about Poseidon's true feelings for Percy?

Sample Answer: Poseidon is sorry that Percy was born, because the life of a hero is always tragic. On the other hand, Poseidon is also proud of how well Percy did on his quest, and he claims Percy as his "true son."

Standards: RL.6.1

COMPARATIVE TEXTS

Text: *This Boy's Life* by Tobias Wolff

Compare to: Chapter 21 of *The Lightning Thief*

Connection: In this excerpt from his memoir *This Boy's Life*, renowned storyteller Tobias Wolff recounts childhood adventures and mishaps as he and his mother move from place to place, in search of a stable and happier life. Estranged from his father, Toby tries his best to understand his mother's boyfriend, Roy, a controlling man who makes the foreboding promise to "hold no grudges as long as [Toby's] mother walked the line." Like Toby, Percy Jackson in *The Lightning Thief* often finds himself witness to his mother's mistreatment at the hands of his stepfather, Gabe.

Text: *The Gospel According to Luke* by Revised Standard Version Bible

Compare to: Chapter 22 of *The Lightning Thief*

Connection: The story of Judas Iscariot betraying Jesus as told in *The Gospel of Luke* has captured the imaginations of countless artists, composers, and writers. Though primarily interested in Greek mythology, Rick Riordan, author of *The Lightning Thief*, references aspects of this biblical tale when Percy Jackson, son of the god Poseidon, is betrayed by Luke.

WRITE TO REVISIT

ARGUMENTATIVE WRITING

Prompt: Pick a moment in *The Lightning Thief* when Perseus must overcome his own misgivings, poor judgment, or ignorance. Then, in an essay of 300-400 words, compare Perseus' inner battles to the inner battles presented in one or more of the supplemental texts in the Literature-based Unit. What mental preparation is needed to achieve a goal or win a fight? How can a character's thoughts work against him or her?

Standards: RL.6.1, RL.6.3; RI.6.1, RI.6.3; W.6.1.A, W.6.1.B, W.6.1.C, W.6.4, W.6.5, W.6.9.A

NARRATIVE WRITING

Prompt: The same story can be told in different styles and formats. For instance, compare [this painting](#) of the encounter between Perseus and Medusa with [this cartoon](#). Then consider how you would retell the story of Perseus Jackson. Pick a chapter or dramatic event from *The Lightning Thief* and rewrite it as a poem, story, graphic novel, comic strip, or play. Decide which elements of the story to focus on, where and when the myth will be set, whose perspective you'll write from (maybe even the perspective of the antagonist), and how your characters speak and think. The length of this assignment will vary depending on which format you choose.

Standards: RL.6.1, RL.6.3; W.6.3.A, W.6.3.B, W.6.3.C, W.6.3.D



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