

The Medusa Mythology Examination Committee

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The Medusa Mythology Exam Committee is proud to present the winners in its 2006 Achievement Awards Program. Achievement Awards winners were selected based on an overall score in the competition, which included a teacher recommendation, Medusa test score and points awarded an essay of not more than 250 words that addressed the topic, "Imagine that Eurystheus had demanded a thirteenth labor and tell that story." In the case of a tie in total points, the entry with the higher-scoring essay was ranked higher.

Congratulations to the 2006 Achievement Awards Winners:

\$750 Minerva Award – **Diana Lievsay**, Hidden Valley High School, Roanoke, VA (Ruth Cole, Teacher)

\$550 Apollo Award – **Arden Rogow-Bales**, Toronto French School, Toronto, Ontario (Michael Bales, Teacher)

\$300 Nike Award – **Mimi Lu**, Sydney Girls' High School, Sydney, Australia (Dorothy Healey, Teacher)

\$100 Musa Award – **Alexandra Perez**, Thomas Jefferson School for Science & Technology, Fairfax, VA (Christine Conklin, Teacher)

\$100 Musa Award – **Kelly Paul**, Conrad Weiser High School, Womeldorf, PA (Diane Rurode, Teacher)

\$100 Musa Award – **Philip Katz**, Crown Point High School, Crown Point, IN (Jeremy Walker, Teacher)

Each essay was read by a committee of classicists who scored it without seeing any information that could identify the writer or knowing what scores the other committee members had given it.

Copies of the top essays (which were not necessarily written by the students with the highest overall scores) are included here. They appear exactly as the students wrote them; we have not edited them for content or mechanics. All essays are reprinted with the permission of their respective authors.

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Essay I
by Diana Lievsay, Hidden Valley High School, Roanoke, Virginia

Hera was trying to kill me. Not that this was anything new, of course, but this attempt was even more obvious than the others. Not only had she charged her pet Eurystheus to send me back to Hades, but the task she had assigned me rather reminded me of poor Psyche. Maybe Hera and Aphrodite had gotten together.

Still, at least entering was easy. Cerberus slunk out of my way; he'd been a bit of a push over anyway, and whined softly, perhaps a little warning to Hades. The great god of the Underworld turned, and, giving me a petulant look, asked, "What now, Alcides?"

He did not look happy. I understood. After all, this was the second time that a mortal had intruded into his realm, and he hadn't had the chance to kill me yet. I didn't fancy a fate like Orpheus. "I need to speak with your queen, Rich One."

His mouth opened slightly: outraged, but to my luck the queen herself drifted out. "What might you want with me, Heracles? Surely you have performed your penance."

"Mm. Perhaps you remember the pomegranate?"

Of course she remembered it. I could see it on her face. Everyone knew the pomegranate. "Yes? What about it?"

"You wouldn't happen to know where it is, would you?"

Hades began to laugh, beckoning to the darkness behind him, "Go, Alcides. Find it yourself." He grasped Persephone by the shoulder, steering her back into the darkness.

I glared after him, but set my shoulders. I'd chased Artemis' deer, and I'd managed to find Geryon's cows. I could find this pomegranate.

Two days. Oh no, do not think that I found the cursed fruit in two days. That was all the time I had to return to Eurystheus with it. The coward dedicated it and sent it as a gift to her temple on the island of Samos. I hear there are relics there to this day.

Essay II
by Arden Rogow-Bales, Toronto French School, Toronto, Ontario

"Wait! Don't slam the —!"

Too late. The great brazen door of the throne room crashed against its frame, sending priceless Tirynian ware smashing to the floor. When the heavy steps beating time to an unearthly triple howl had faded, Eurystheus let go of the rim of the pithos in which he had taken refuge and reflected bitterly. He had hoped that the hero's death would eliminate a constant reminder of his undeserved crown. But now his glorious cousin was preparing to leave Tiryns, not a scratch the worse for twelve superhuman tasks and even a tussle with Death! "What height of glory can he not scale?" Eurystheus cried. "Well, now...hmm...height...scale ..."

Outside the palace, a page boy ran up to Heracles with a note and tugged on the tail of his lion skin. The hero read over the clay shard, sighed, and headed for the city's northern gate. Sacking Troy would have to wait: since Athena had lent him the rattle he had used to flush out the Stympalian birds, Eurystheus had now seen fit to discount that labor as well. As a thirteenth task, Heracles was to scale Mount Olympus, the home of the gods, and bring back a flask of divine nectar. Sending Cerberus back to the underworld with a clap on his prickly rump, the son of Zeus walked away into the falling night, his club over his shoulder. Unwilling to rest, he raised his bow and pointed it at the sky, crying, "Selene! Your brother Helios once lent me his cup! Now light my path for me, or I will bring you down to earth with an arrow!" Terrified, the moon immediately sent Iris to fetch her brother's crown and donned it, casting sunlight across the sleeping lands.

As dawn broke, Heracles was walking around Olympus, puzzled. The mountain rose sheer into the sky and disappeared among the clouds, a faint rainbow glow giving the sole indication of its peak. Suddenly inspired, he raised his hands to the sky and called out, "Father Zeus! Send me stones, as when I fought the Ligurians!" He gathered up a few of the rocks that fell and began hewing steps and handholds into the mountain with them. After climbing the steep face for thirteen days and nights, he finally reached the summit's gate and collapsed, exhausted. When he awoke, he found himself in a golden throne room at the feet of Zeus, bright with lightning.

"My son," his father said gently, "I am proud of you. No god, not even Hera, could now deny that you deserve to dwell among us. Your time here has not yet come, for great deeds and great suffering still lie ahead; but when you feel the fires of death, know that you will see me again. Now go free, my son: you have fully expiated your murder-guilt." Heracles nodded, and turned to leave. "Wait!" cried Zeus. "Don't slam the —!"

Essay III

by Mimi Lu, Sidney Girls' High School, Sydney, Australia

Iris' incandescent arch trembled precariously under Hercules, as his mud-incased boots sullied its virginal beauty. The night itself seemed to hold its breath as the mellow, mournful counterpoints of the Koronides began to languidly strum the air, announcing their approach. Suddenly, Hercules fired two infallible arrows in rapid succession. The sister comets emitted a simultaneous spark, their tails flailing indignantly, their song momentarily floundering as his arrows embedded themselves in their vulnerable underbellies. But helplessly, they resumed their predestined trajectories and the rope Hercules had secured around his waist tightened. With an abrupt lurch, our mighty hero was unceremoniously launched into a realm not yet pioneered by mortals: space.

The veiled moon goddess had already rushed to her beloved Endymion, her silvery chariot leaving behind a stream of pearly-white dust, as if the notes of the Koronides' dirge had become visible. Rushing forward, Hercules hurriedly bound the luminous, pulsating orb and with a shuddering wrench, he pulled the moon out of its socket, and only the amber outline where it had singed Uranus' cloak remained. "Hera and her pathetic minion shall have their moon!" Hercules shouted in triumph to his impassive, stellar audience.

But just before the earth was plunged into the apathetic, ruthless empire of darkness, Selene had shrieked for her brothers and sisters, utterly enraged by the audacity of the mortal who dared perform such sacrilege. The cosmic army, having already been alerted by Hera as soon as she had surreptitiously whispered her poisonous words to Eurystheus, descended upon Hercules, unanimous in their ostentatious brilliance, unique in the myriad of shapes and forms they assumed. First there was Helios brandishing his scorching whip, from which miniature fireworks incessantly sprouted. Formidable Astraios and the monstrous Hecatoncheires, followed, and even the Pleiades and rosy Eos joined in the fray. However, Amphytrion had taught Hercules too well, and with flawless ease, Hercules escaped their fiery wrath unscathed on his fantastic chariot. But on the pale, waxy surface of the moon, dreadful lesions began to form, inadvertently bearing the brunt of the fury of the divinities of the heavens.

Thus Hercules arrived at Tiryns, pursued by this extraterrestrial hoard. "Take it back, take it back! I surrender!" a familiar, shrill voice arose above the tumultuous multitude, as the sky rained fire and laid waste to the kingdom. And so, relinquishing the reins to Selene respectfully, Hercules disembarked from his precarious perch and began to assist the civilians to salvage the remains of their devastated city. As for Selene, she mourned her ravaged home in a passive silence, but it is said, that every so often, overcome by an impulsive fit of bitterness, she shields the soft, luminous rays from caressing the Earth, to reproach and remind Man of his incorrigible follies.