

Chapter Thirteen

Prophecy Fulfilled



What can you tell by reading the story?

1. What kinds of games were they playing at Larissa?
2. Who does Perseus meet at the games?

What can you tell by thinking about the story?

1. How would Perseus have learned the skills necessary to compete at these games?
2. Megapenthes says “our family was cursed with two brothers like Polydectes and none with the wisdom of Dictys.” How might this story have been different if his father had been more like Dictys?
3. How does the ending of this chapter fit in with the beginning of the story?

(Yes, he’s naked!)

The word “gymnasium” comes from the Greek word “gymnos” or “naked.” Greeks didn’t have gym shorts*, so, when it was time for athletic contests, they just stripped down to nothing. If it’s any comfort, the games were men-only events, not only as far as competitors are concerned, but in terms of audience as well. We’re not sure how that played out in the story of Atalanta, who was a great woman runner, but when the hunter, Actaeon, snuck a peek at the goddess Artemis as she bathed, she turned him into a stag and his own pack of hounds tore him to pieces. Greek women had a fairly strong model for modesty!

Meanwhile, we also see this root word in the botanical term “gymnosperm,” for seeds that are “naked” rather than encased in some kind of ovary. Those are called “angiosperms” because they are in a “vessel.”

All of this may well fall into the category of things you don’t bring up unless someone asks.

Response Key

What can you tell by reading the story?

1. They played military games, throwing javelins and discuses, boxing and wrestling and running races. These games were the source of the games revived in the late 19th century that have now become such a commercial enterprise that we are not permitted by a specially-enacted federal copyright law to mention their name here! (*No, we're not making that up.*) But you can say the name in class and discuss how the games have changed. In particular, pay attention to the modern pentathlon, which consists of pistol shooting, epee fencing, swimming, equestrian show jumping and cross country running. The web site for their national organization is at <http://usmpa.home.texas.net/> In winter, the biathlon consists of cross-country skiing and riflery.
2. Megapenthes is Dana's cousin -- her uncle's son. So he is Perseus' "first cousin once removed," but most people don't bother with that much formality. Certainly, Perseus wouldn't under these circumstances!

What can you tell by thinking about the story?

1. Remember that, as a young man, he received military training in Seriphos. Though Hermes laughed at his sword, he certainly would have been trained in a variety of military skills. Most competitors would not enter all events, of course, nor would they try to use discus, javelin and sword in battle. They'd concentrate on what they were best at. But heroes like Perseus, Achilles or Odysseus would enter all of these games, just as our modern athletic heroes may be successful at more than one sport! (Ask classmates to name athletes who play more than one sport. See if any of them have read biographies or articles about sports heroes and can talk about how they decided which sports to specialize in. Some great athletes failed at other sports. This is a good place to talk about making the most of your talents!)
2. If there had been no war over the throne of Argos, perhaps the immortals would not have been quite so angry with Acrisius. If Megapenthes's father had simply withdrawn, as Dictys did, there might have been no curse put on Acrisius, so he would have never locked up Dana or cast her into the ocean. On the other hand, where is Polydectes now? It takes two people to make a war, but evil is still evil, and, in the world of Greek myth, bad people don't get away with much, even if their mortal friends and relations forgive them!
3. The death of Acrisius was, indeed, foretold by the Oracle of Delphi. There is, in Greek tradition, an inevitability to events, as personified by The Fates, three sisters who spin, measure and then cut the threads of our lives. No-one can question their decisions, not even the mightiest of the Olympians. Next week, Dictys will provide some insight into the process that brought Perseus to this place, and where he needs to go next. Meanwhile, discussion of how his life was shaped by the oracle is certainly worth pursuing!

Family tree: Draw up a family tree, beginning with Acrisius and his brother. Show the relationship between Dana and Megapenthes. Talk about the difference in their ages: Megapenthes says that, when Dana and Perseus were cast into the sea, he was too young to ask questions about difficult topics. Now, he's nearly old enough to withdraw and let the younger men compete. (See what ages active athletes are in the various sports. How old do you suppose Perseus and Dana are? How old might that make Megapenthes? (*Why do you think Perseus was especially excited to meet his cousin?*))

Teachable moment: What would you say to Perseus? What must he be feeling, and how can his friends and relatives help him now? Is there anything reasonable that he could have done to prevent what happened? Be very careful in approaching this conversation, but remember, too, that people who have had horrible losses in accidents often want, and need, to talk about their experiences and their feelings.