

Orpheus and Eurydice

There once lived a musician named Orpheus, whose beautiful lyre playing would captivate all who heard it. His music was so powerful that it could turn bad men good and tame the wildest of beasts.



One day, Orpheus met the most beautiful woman he had ever seen. Her name was Eurydice and Orpheus was completely entranced by her charm and beauty and fell in love with her immediately. When Eurydice saw Orpheus playing his lyre, her heart melted and she too fell in love. They married at once and were blissfully happy together.



Eurydice was strolling through the woods one day when she stumbled over a log, landing with a thud on the ground. From beneath the log, a poisonous and deadly snake slid out and bit her. Its venom was so potent, she died instantly.

Orpheus was distraught when he heard the tragic news and inconsolable in his grief.

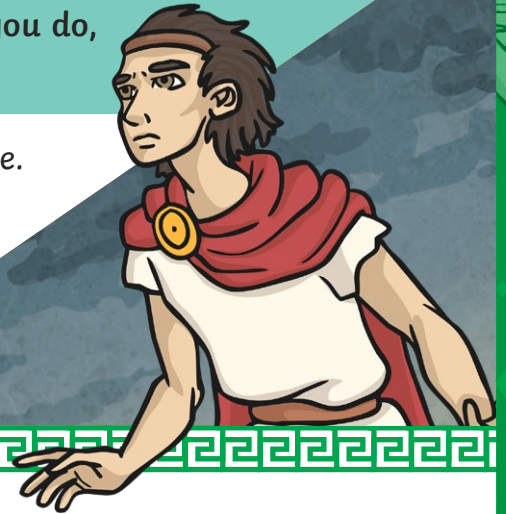
He played his lyre to help ease the pain and the music that emanated from his instrument was so haunting that it moved men, gods and even the plants and trees to tears.

Orpheus decided he must try to bring Eurydice back to him. He set out on a daring quest to find Hades, god of the underworld, to plead with him to return Eurydice to the human world.



"I will permit Eurydice to follow you out of the underworld on one condition. Whatever obstacles you encounter on your journey, you must not look back at your wife. If you do, she will remain here with me for eternity."

Orpheus did not hesitate in accepting the challenge. He was prepared to do anything to get his treasured wife back and if all he had to do was not look at Eurydice as she followed him out of the underworld, that would be easy!



Orpheus started on his voyage with hope in his heart and his beautiful Eurydice close behind him. Soon he came to a gigantic wooden door, chained shut. Lifting his lyre, his quick fingers played a magical tune and the chains burst off. The door swung open, allowing Orpheus to journey on. He longed to turn around to check on Eurydice but resisted.

Beyond the wooden door, Orpheus found himself inside a dank, dark room. The air was thick and stagnant. Orpheus felt his way along the moist, slimy walls, moving as quickly as he dared.



He became aware of heavy breathing and suddenly a deep, rumbling growl began to resonate off the walls, bursting into a deafening and thunderous roar.

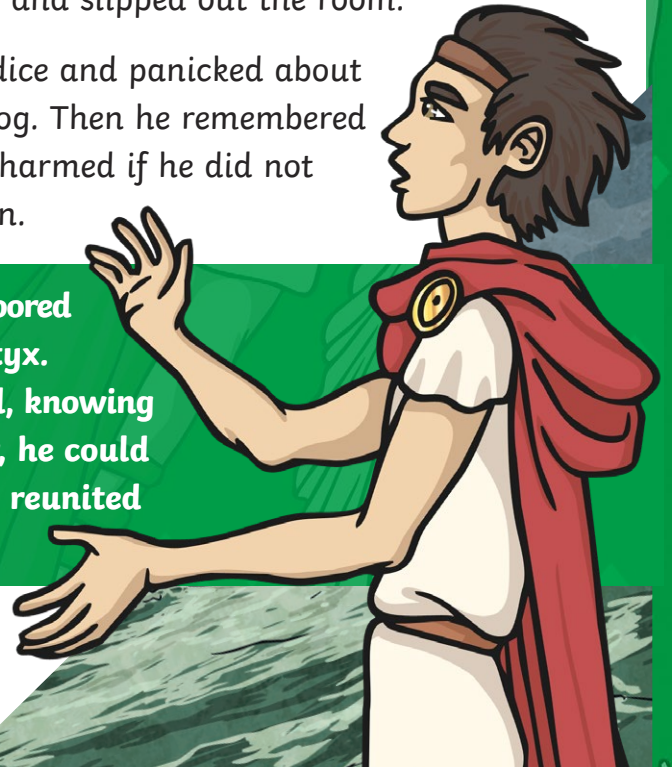
Orpheus' heart pounded as he began to make out the shape of a colossal three-headed dog looming over him menacingly. Orpheus recognised the beast to be Cerberus – Hades' grotesque hound.

As quick as a flash, Orpheus grabbed his lyre and, with trembling hands, began to play a soothing melody. At once, the beastly dog was pacified and dropped to the ground, mesmerised by the serene music. Soon he was snoring, and Orpheus crept nervously over his monstrous paws and slipped out the room.

In his terror, Orpheus forgot about Eurydice and panicked about whether she had also made it past the dog. Then he remembered Hades' words: Eurydice would follow, unharmed if he did not look back, and he managed to calm down.

In the distance, Orpheus saw two boats moored on the inky black waters of the River Styx. He climbed into the first boat and set sail, knowing that once he had sailed across the river, he could pass back into the mortal world and be reunited with his beautiful wife again.

Orpheus could hear Eurydice following in the second boat and smiled, knowing he had nearly succeeded in his quest.



Suddenly, a huge wave appeared from nowhere and crashed against the boat, knocking Orpheus to the deck. Slick, black hands began to grab at him and pull him towards the murky waters. He scrambled for his instrument and managed to strum out a single note with one free hand. At once, the hands relaxed and the waters calmed. Orpheus' music was the saviour once more!

Orpheus strained to hear Eurydice behind him but there was only silence. Had the hands taken Eurydice? Where was her boat?

In despair, Orpheus turned around without thinking to look for her. Eurydice was there! Sailing towards him, she waved, filling his heart with elation. Then it happened. Eurydice's boat plunged downwards, below the water and in a heartbeat, she was gone.

Eurydice had been lost to him for a second time. Orpheus had almost succeeded but his foolishness had cost him profoundly. He would never forgive himself and played bitter, sombre music mourning her death for the rest of his days.

Questions

1. How do we know that Orpheus' music was so powerful? Give **two** reasons.
 1. _____
 2. _____
2. What made Orpheus fall in love with Eurydice when he saw her? List **two** things.
 - _____
 - _____
3. Find and copy one word which shows that the snake's venom was powerful.

4. Number the events from 1–5 to show the order that they happened in the story. The first one has been done for you.
 - ☐ Slick, black hands began to grab at Orpheus and pull him towards the murky waters.
 - ☐ Orpheus' quick fingers played a magical tune and the chains burst off.
 - ☐ Orpheus crept nervously over Cerberus' monstrous paws and slipped out the room.
 - ☐ In despair, Orpheus turned around without thinking to look for her.
 - ☒ 1 Orpheus set out on a daring quest to find Hades, to plead with him to return Eurydice to the human world.
5. How do we know that Cerberus was frightening? Use evidence from the text to explain your answer.

6. Describe how you would feel and what you would do if you were Orpheus and could not hear Eurydice following behind you in the boat.

7. Draw **four** lines to match the type of music Orpheus played with the different events in the story.

Orpheus played his lyre to help ease his pain.

His music was disturbing.

Orpheus played his lyre to Hades to plead with him to return Eurydice to the human world.

His music was haunting.

Orpheus played a melody for Cerberus.

His music was bitter and sombre.

Orpheus was devastated and would never forgive himself.

His music was soothing.

8. Compare and contrast the music that Orpheus played at **two** different points in the story. Why did it change?

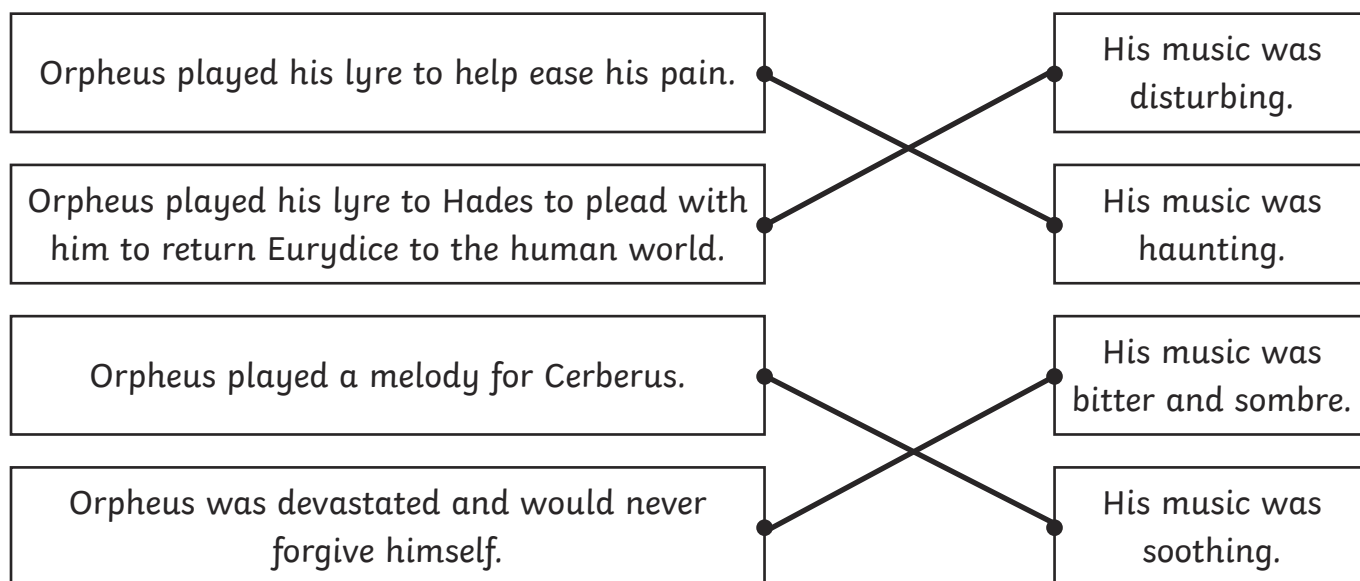
9. Orpheus faced three obstacles on his journey out of the underworld. What were these obstacles? Which do you think was the most challenging and why?

10. Was Orpheus' quest really that difficult? Explain your answer in detail.

Answers

1. How do we know that Orpheus' music was so powerful? Give **two** reasons.
 - It could turn bad man good.
 - It could tame the wildest of beasts.
2. What made Orpheus fall in love with Eurydice when he saw her? List **two** things.
 - Her charm.
 - Her beauty.
3. Find and copy one word which shows that the snake's venom was powerful.
potent
4. Number the events from 1–5 to show the order that they happened in the story. The first one has been done for you.
 - 4** Slick, black hands began to grab at Orpheus and pull him towards the murky waters.
 - 2** Orpheus' quick fingers played a magical tune and the chains burst off.
 - 3** Orpheus crept nervously over Cerberus' monstrous paws and slipped out the room.
 - 5** In despair, Orpheus turned around without thinking to look for her.
 - 1** Orpheus set out on a daring quest to find Hades, to plead with him to return Eurydice to the human world.
5. How do we know that Cerberus was frightening? Use evidence from the text to explain your answer.
Pupils' own responses, such as: We know that Cerberus was frightening because it describes him as being a colossal three-headed dog that loomed over Orpheus menacingly. He is also described as a grotesque hound with monstrous paws.
6. Describe how you would feel and what you would do if you were Orpheus and could not hear Eurydice following behind you in the boat.
Pupils' own responses, such as: I would be worried about Eurydice's safety and tempted to turn around to look to see if she were safe. I would not turn around, however, as I would remember Hades' words that Eurydice would follow unharmed if I did not look back.

7. Draw **four** lines to match the type of music Orpheus played with the different events in the story.



8. Compare and contrast the music that Orpheus played at **two** different points in the story. Why did it change?

Pupils' own responses, such as: Orpheus played beautiful, enchanting music at the beginning compared to bitter, sombre music at the end. It changed because his mood changed from being happy and in love at the beginning to sad and lonely at the end.

9. Orpheus faced three obstacles on his journey out of the underworld. What were these obstacles? Which do you think was the most challenging and why?

Pupils' own responses, such as: The first obstacle was a huge wooden door chained shut. The next was a dank, dark room with Cerberus (Hades' grotesque, three-headed hound) guarding it. The final obstacle was "slick black hands and arms" formed from the inky waters of the river Styx attacking him.

I think the most challenging was the slick black hands pulling him down because he was being physically attacked by something and could barely reach for his lyre to try and play music to calm the waters.

10. Was Orpheus' quest really that difficult? Explain your answer in detail.

Pupils' own responses, such as: In theory, Orpheus' quest was easy because all he had to do was not turn back to look at Eurydice. However, when he was faced with the different obstacles and was worried about Eurydice's safety, he couldn't resist turning around to check that she was unharmed.