

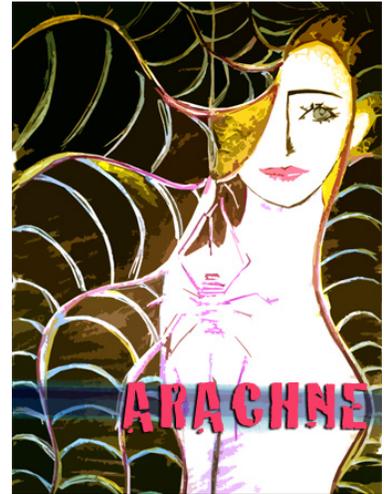


Arachne

by Sam Yarabek

Things To Know/ Things To Think About

Like many Greek myths, Arachne is a story that is constantly retold, and as a result, reinvented. Although many of the renditions are very similar, each version emphasizes different aspects of the original myth. Geared towards younger readers, the “Books That Grow” version of Arachne highlights the moral dimension of the story, but prunes it of the more sinister details found in Ovid’s account. In Ovid’s version, for example, Athena is impossibly vengeful and devoid of compassion, and Arachne ultimately kills herself.



At its heart, Arachne is a story about pride and human limitation. An incredibly talented Weaver, Arachne is a young girl who feeds on the praise of her patrons. Eventually, youth and inexperience, coupled with consciousness of her superb gifts, causes Arachne to boast that her weaving is better even than Athena’s. Hearing the boast from Olympus, not a minute is lost before Athena suddenly materializes, gray eyed, with her war-like visage. Athena gives Arachne an opportunity to retract her boast, but when she reasserts her claim, Athena challenges her to a weaving competition, with Zeus as the judge. The rules of the competition stipulate that the declared loser will never be able to weave with loom, spindle or distaff. Although Arachne performs admirably, Athena uses the sky as her loom, and all of the natural world as her materials, to produce a canvas so glorious and terrible that onlookers begin to weep. Arachne, conscious of her defeat, sulks away dejected. In a rare moment of godly compassion, Athena takes pity on Arachne’s unhappiness, and changes her form so she that will be able to weave without spindle or loom. Thus, Arachne becomes the first Arachnid. This piece is perfect as part of an introduction to myths, folktales and fables, particularly those designed for a younger audience. In addition, this piece also works well as part of a lesson on creation stories, and can be used to help inspire students to write their own creation myths.

Standards Addressed:

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.1

Quote accurately from a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.2

Determine a theme of a story, drama, or poem from details in the text, including how characters in a story or drama respond to challenges or how the speaker in a poem reflects upon a topic; summarize the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.4

Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative language such as metaphors and similes.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.9

Compare and contrast stories in the same genre (e.g., mysteries and adventure stories) on their approaches to similar themes and topics.

Before Reading

1. Based on your own experiences, how would you distinguish between being “confident” and being “prideful”? In your opinion, how are these two similar? How are they different?

During Reading

1. Based on the reading, what reason does Athena give for challenging Arachne to a weaving competition? Use examples from the text to support your answer. (CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.1)
2. In the opening paragraph of the story, the author describes Arachne’s hair as “shimmering like streams of gold.” What kind of literacy device is being used here? And why might the author choose this particular language to describe Arachne’s hair? (CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.4)

After Reading

1. As part of her agreement with Athena, Arachne agrees that if she loses the weaving contest, she may never pick up a loom or spindle again. Although Athena takes pity on her, Arachne still has to be punished in some shape or form. What quality is Arachne being punished for, and why does Athena find it so distasteful?
(CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.2)

Connections In Text

1. Compare “Arachne” to another creation myth, either in the Books That Grow library or elsewhere. Drawing on these myths for inspiration, write your own creation myth to explain the origins of an animal, place, invention, or anything else of your choosing.
(CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.9)

Further Readings

For Teachers:

<http://www.collaborativelearning.org/arachne.pdf>

Provides teachers with a number of engaging activities to supplement instruction on Arachne.