

Chapter Three

Polydectes



What can you tell by reading the story?

1. How did working as a fisherman cause Perseus's body to change as he grew up?
2. What kinds of foods did Perseus, Dana, Dictys and Thalia eat?
3. Dictys taught Perseus to fish. What other training did Perseus receive?
4. Did Perseus enjoy having Polydectes come to visit?
5. Why did Thalia have to teach Dana how to cook, keep a garden and do other work?

What can you tell by thinking about the story?

1. Why do Thalia and the other women sing songs and play games while they do their work?
2. Why does Dictys insist that Perseus help pull the boat up on land and hang the nets to dry, even when there is an emergency?
3. Why does Dana tell Perseus to listen to what Dictys recommends doing?

Let's talk about it: When they heard the king's order, Dictys felt that praying to Athena would solve the problem. As she rode away in the chariot, Dana told Perseus to wait. Now that you've heard the Captain of the Guard's news, do you think Perseus was right to ignore their advice?
(*Note to Teachers: In case you need to be told, Dictys and Dana are both pretty smart folks.*)

Response Key

What can you tell by reading the story?

1. Perseus grew larger and stronger -- he gains strong arms, a broad chest and powerful legs. (This offers potential for discussion of physical fitness, changes of puberty)
2. Thalia teaches Dana to bake bread and make cheese and yogurt from goat's milk, so they probably also drank the milk. They tend a vegetable garden and pick olives. Dictys catches fish for them, and he also took two tender young goats to the temple, so they also ate meat. (Discussion of nutrition as well as comparing ethnic foods.)
3. He participated in military training with the other young men. (More discussion of physical fitness; also discussion of national service and the responsibilities of citizens to their countries. Remember that national service touches on some religious objections, and not just from pacifists.)
4. Nobody enjoyed having Polydectes come to visit: Each visit cast a chill over the cottage. In addition, Polydectes used to look at Dana in a way that made Perseus uncomfortable. (See "Teachable Moments.")
5. She was imprisoned in the dungeon during the years she naturally would have learned these things. Note that Homer describes the princess Nausicaa of Phaeacia as doing laundry with her handmaidens when she discovers Ulysses cast up on the beach; Royal daughters were apparently not exempted from normal chores in ancient Greece!

What can you tell by thinking about the story?

1. There was no television, radio or other forms of entertainment in ancient Greece, so people had to provide their own amusement. To this day, women in certain cultures, particularly in the Near East and Far East, maintain a close culture of music, games and other art forms that is worth exploring. Certain chores lent themselves to group activities, others were more solitary. A day of laundry by the riverside could be a lot of fun, despite the hard work, so it was good to make arrangements to all do it on the same day! (And it's worth noting that Dictys and Perseus were not simply sitting in a boat with fishing rods and cold drinks -- Everybody worked pretty hard back then!)
2. First, because it needs to be done. The boat and nets are critical to earning a living and must be maintained. Second, it gives them a chance to calm down before doing something foolish. Sometimes maintaining your routine can help you keep your head in times of crisis, or help you deal with grief. Dictys recognizes that it's important for Perseus not to run off and do something foolish right now, so he insists that he help with their usual daily chores, and he also sets an example of calmness. (Follow up question: Do you think Dictys is worried? Well, of course he is!)
3. Like Dictys, Dana recognizes that Perseus is young and impetuous, and that he could put himself in serious harm if he does something foolish right now. She's hoping Dictys can keep her son safe while the crisis works itself out.

Teachable moment (Sexual safety): You may wish to venture into the uncomfortable feelings Perseus has when Polydectes smiles at Dana. Obviously, there are several important, very sensitive directions for that discussion to go. Concern for his mother's safety around the sexual predator, King Polydectes, is a primary motivation for Perseus in all versions of this legend.