

# Chapter Six

## The Gray Sisters



What can you tell by reading the story?

1. How did Perseus know about the Gray Sisters?
2. Why didn't the Gray Sisters chase him instead of helping him?
3. The Gray Sisters didn't want to help Perseus, so they gave him a small riddle to solve. What was it?

What can you tell by thinking about the story?

1. Why was it easy for Perseus to solve the riddle of the Gray Sisters and to find the Garden of the Hesperides?
2. In what other way does Perseus show that he is clever?

**Sneaking up on the Gray Sisters:** (An outdoor game!) Let three students be the Gray Sisters. Give them a ball to pass back and forth. Only the Gray Sister with the ball against her (or his) forehead can open her eyes -- the other two have to keep their eyes closed, and all three must close their eyes while passing the ball. The other students try to sneak up to tag the Gray Sister with the ball, but they all have to freeze until the Gray Sisters are passing the eye. Anyone moving when one of the Gray Sisters can see is out of the game! The one who tags the Gray Sister with the ball wins and becomes a Gray Sister for the next game. (Yes, it's a variation of "Red Light, Green Light.")

## Response Key

### What can you tell by reading the story?

1. Hermes told him. What did Hermes tell Perseus about the Gray Sisters? He described them and their cave, and he explained about the eye and tooth. He also warned Perseus not to let the Gray Sisters get hold of him!
2. They couldn't see -- he had their eye! So, if they wanted their eye back, they were going to have to tell him what he wanted to know. Then, when he was ready to leave, he left the eye where they could find it, but not before searching for a few moments. That way, he'd be gone before they could see to chase him.
3. They told him to "chase Apollo until he's through running." But Perseus was clever enough to solve that simple riddle! (See our Teachable Moment.)

### What can you tell by thinking about the story?

1. Remember, Perseus is a fisherman. A farmer would be familiar with the path of the sun, but a fisherman even moreso: In the days before the invention of the compass, fishermen needed to know the skies, because that was the way they steered their boats. (He would also need to know the stars for nighttime navigation -- that will come up later!)
2. Perseus is careful to follow Hermes' advice in dealing with the Gray Sisters, but he also shows some of his own cleverness: When one of the Gray Sisters says she'll give him the information if he gives them back the eye, he laughs at the idea. In Chapter Four, we saw how Perseus could be tricked into losing his temper and making a foolish promise, but here we see that he is not always so easy to trick.

### Teachable moment: Greek Cosmology

Greek scientists and mathematicians devoted a great deal of thought to the structure of the universe, and it's wrong to oversimplify their view of the cosmos. But the groundbreaking work of mathematicians like Ptolemy, Euclid and Archimedes was well after the legendary times of Greek mythology. In fact, all three of those men lived at least for a time in Alexandria, Egypt, which means they were born after Alexander (a student of Plato) had brought that part of North Africa under Greek rule and replaced Egyptian rulers with the Greek line that ended with Cleopatra. And, to go forward a few hundred years from Alexander, although we don't think of Cleopatra and Julius Caesar living in modern times, they represent the halfway point between our times and those in which the story of Perseus arose. This is a very old story!

Ancient Greeks thought of the heavens as something of an inverted bowl over the earth, with Atlas bearing it up as his eternal punishment for having opposed Zeus in the war between the Titans and the Olympians. It is not entirely clear to what extent the Greeks thought of these matters in terms of myth and in terms of science, but their stories included the chariot of the sun in which Apollo each day went from East to West. It is this route that Perseus follows in order to discover the place where heaven and earth meet, and the giant Atlas dwells.

As the Greeks became more scientific, they laid down the basis for a theory of the cosmos that, by the early Middle Ages, saw the earth as the center of a series of concentric globes: The "Celestial Spheres." It was assumed that the heavens were perfect and that imperfection only existed on the earth. How surprised they would have been, if they could have seen the moon rocks brought back by the modern Apollo's "chariot," and found that they were very much like the rocks on earth!