

Words from Mythology

Name: _____

Date: _____

Score: ____ / 10



Quick Review

Some English words and phrases come from old myths and stories. Knowing the original story is a shortcut to the meaning — for example, an "Achilles' heel" is one weak spot in someone who is otherwise strong.

PART 1 — READ

Read the passage. Then answer the questions.

Coach's Speech

Before the championship game, Coach Halsey gathered the team in the locker room. "Tonight we are facing a Herculean task," she said. "Their center is six feet tall, and their defense has not lost a game all year."

She drew a circle on the whiteboard. "But every strong team has an Achilles' heel. Theirs is the second quarter — they slow down right after their first water break. That is our window."

Some of the players grinned. Others looked worried. Coach Halsey pointed at the worried faces. "Don't open a Pandora's box of doubts in your own head," she said. "You have trained for this. When the buzzer sounds, you play like the Olympians you are."

PART 2 — PRACTICE

Use the passage and what you know about myths to answer each question.

1. When Coach Halsey says the team faces a "Herculean task," she means the job is —
 - A. quick and clever, full of small tricks.
 - B. very large and difficult, but possible with great effort.
 - C. constantly changing from one minute to the next.
 - D. all about glory and showing off for the crowd.
2. In the passage, the phrase "Achilles' heel" means —
 - A. one small weakness in a person or thing that is otherwise strong.
 - B. a long, difficult journey across the world.
 - C. trouble that spreads everywhere once it is released.
 - D. a gift that hides danger inside it.



3. When Coach says, "Don't open a Pandora's box of doubts," she is warning the players NOT to —
- A. search and search for the one true answer.
 - B. leave a single weakness inside an otherwise strong plan.
 - C. accept a gift that might hide trouble inside it.
 - D. let loose a flood of worries that, once started, is hard to stop.
4. When Coach calls her players "Olympians," she means they are —
- A. travelers from very far away.
 - B. people whose every project turns to gold.
 - C. skilled athletes performing at the highest level.
 - D. people who care only about their own scores.
5. Read this sentence: "My grandmother's moods are mercurial — happy one minute, quiet the next." The word mercurial comes from the Roman god Mercury, who moved very quickly. Mercurial here means —
- A. always cheerful and warm.
 - B. quick to change from one mood to another.
 - C. steady and very slow to react.
 - D. huge and powerful, like a giant.
6. If a story warns a team to beware a "Trojan" gift, it is warning that the gift might —
- A. look like a kind offer but actually carry hidden trouble inside it.
 - B. be enormous and far too heavy for anyone to lift.
 - C. have the power to turn anything it touches into gold.
 - D. be the one item that can break through a strong defense.
7. Use the word odyssey in a sentence of your own. Hint: an odyssey is a long, hard journey, named after the hero Odysseus who took ten years to get home.
- _____
- _____
8. Which sentence uses the word narcissistic CORRECTLY? (Narcissus was a youth in a myth who fell in love with his own reflection.)
- A. The narcissistic flowers grew in a neat row along the garden path.
 - B. My older brother is so narcissistic — he gave me the last cookie at lunch.
 - C. She is so narcissistic that she takes a hundred photos of herself each day and turns every conversation back to herself.
 - D. The narcissistic storm flooded all the streets in less than an hour.



9. A news story calls a giant ship a "titanic vessel." The word titanic comes from the Titans, huge powerful beings in Greek myth. Titanic here means —

- A. old and very slow to move.
- B. hidden and full of dangerous secrets.
- C. doomed to sink before it reaches its first port.
- D. enormous in size and powerful in force.

10. Which phrase BEST describes someone with the "Midas touch"? (In the myth, King Midas turned everything he touched into gold.)

- A. A person who turns every plan into a problem.
- B. A person whose projects almost always succeed.
- C. A person who only cares about gold and money.
- D. A person whose ideas spread quickly through a town.



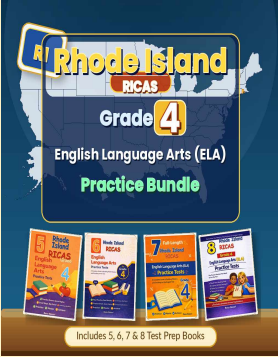
Answer Keys

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| Explanations | |
|--------------|---|
| 1. B | Hercules was a Greek hero famous for finishing twelve enormous labors — "Herculean" means requiring great strength or effort. A describes "Odyssean" cleverness; C describes "mercurial" change; D describes "narcissistic" self-focus — all real allusion meanings, but not this one. |
| 2. A | In the myth, Achilles was strong everywhere except his heel — the phrase means a single weakness. B is the meaning of "odyssey"; C is "Pandora's box"; D is the "Trojan horse" — all real allusion meanings. |
| 3. D | In the myth, Pandora opened a forbidden box and let out many troubles. A is Odyssey-style searching; B is an Achilles' heel; C is a Trojan horse — all real allusions, but not Pandora's box. |
| 4. C | The word comes from Mount Olympus and the Olympic Games — a compliment meaning elite and skilled. A leans on "Odyssean" travel; B is the "Midas touch"; D is "narcissistic" self-focus. |
| 5. B | Mercury was the swift messenger god, so mercurial means quick to change. A is plausible if you only see the "happy" half; C is the OPPOSITE; D borrows from the Titans (titanic). |
| 6. A | In the Trojan Horse story, soldiers hid inside a giant wooden "gift" — "Trojan" warns of a hidden trap. B borrows from "titanic"; C is "Midas"; D mixes in "Achilles' heel". |
| 7. | Answer: Strong answers use "odyssey" to mean a long, eventful journey, ideally with one obstacle: e.g., "Our family vacation turned into an odyssey when the car broke down twice and we had to take three different trains to get home." Also acceptable: any sentence where the journey is clearly LONG or full of trouble (a school field trip that took all day with three flat tires, a move across the country). NOT acceptable: "I went on an odyssey to the kitchen" (too short — misses the meaning); a sentence using odyssey to mean a person, a place, or a song; or a sentence that does not actually use the word "odyssey" in it. Accept any sentence that uses odyssey to mean a long, eventful journey. |
| 8. C | Narcissistic means too focused on oneself — C matches Narcissus and his reflection exactly. A is a surface trap (narcissus is also a flower name); B is the OPPOSITE (sharing); D misuses the word to mean "intense." |
| 9. D | Titan = giant; titanic = of giant size or force. A and B are plausible but unrelated; C is a real-world association with the famous ship Titanic, not the meaning of the WORD itself. |
| 10. B | The Midas touch is shorthand for almost magical success at every project tried. A is the OPPOSITE; C is a literal/surface trap (gold = money obsession); D blends in a different allusion (mercurial spread). |



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