

Greek Myth and Myth Retelling: Differences in Adolescent Engagement

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ABSTRACT

Fiction improves empathetic ability, and increased engagement amplifies these benefits. Readers adopt different types of engagement for fiction and non fiction, but ancient Greek myths are neither. This study provides insights from qualitative interviews of 36 adolescents (aged from 13 to 19) attending a suburban public high school about the differences between engagement in Greek myths versus young adult Greek myth retellings. Using thematic analysis on interview transcripts, differences between the two were found in amount of description, character attachment, reaction to character struggle, effect of prior knowledge, and effect of predictability. The results indicated that the myth retelling used, an excerpt from *The Lightning Thief* by Rick Riordan, allowed for greater emotional engagement through empathy because of their plot and character based nature, but this also meant that prior knowledge and the ability to predict the next plot event significantly decreased engagement. Further research should investigate the best way to introduce and contextualize myths and how to best incorporate young adult fantasy Greek myth retellings in the classroom to allow for maximum depth of adolescent engagement, paving way for greater multiperspectivity and empathy among the growing generation.

INTRODUCTION

Empathy fosters multiperspectivity and promotes an understanding of diverse viewpoints, societal issues, and cultural diversity, and it is of increasing importance (Budke et al., 2025). Reading fiction enhances empathetic ability, especially when readers are deeply engaged (Johnson, 2012; Mar et al., 2006; as cited in Topic, 2021). Ancient Greek mythology tells stories of human nature in a multifaceted and morally complex way (Lefkowitz, 1985; Segal, 1971), and these myths are continuously being adapted and retold. The difference in adolescent engagement with modern retellings versus the original myth is understudied—an area this research sought to examine.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Reading and Engagement

Book reading during adolescence improves emotional vocabulary (Dylman et al., 2020, as cited in Santi et al., 2025), wellbeing (Currie et al., 2025; Sun et al., 2024), and Theory of Mind (referring to a person's ability to understand their own and other peoples' mental states) (Van Der Kleij et al., 2022). Santi et al. (2025) conducted semi-structured interviews where participants provided examples of how reading fictional stories deepened their understanding of real-life individuals and what made them resonate with characters. Using the six steps of thematic analysis outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), Santi et al. (2025) concluded that adolescent readers are able to transfer empathy skills gained from reading into real-life situations.

Regarding reading engagement, narrative engagement is defined as the interplay of four aspects: narrative understanding (perceiving the story as coherent and understanding the events within it), attentional focus (concentration on the content), narrative presence (the sense of being immersed in the narrative), and emotional engagement (the reader's emotional response to the characters, categorized into "empathy," feeling the same emotion as the character, and "sympathy," feeling a different emotion from those of the characters) (Busselle & Bilandzic, 2009). Readers engage differently depending on the genre of the reading material. Bal and Veltkamp (2013), using nonfiction as a control, found emotional transportation (narrative presence and emotional engagement) enhances readers' subsequent empathetic capability, highlighting a difference in engagement between genres. Kidd and Castano (2013) found that reading literary fiction improves theory of mind compared to popular fiction. Brock and Green (2000) found that readers with greater narrative engagement tend to evaluate characters more positively, thereby allowing a greater influence of the source material on them (Bal & Veltkamp, 2013).

Ancient Myths

The definition of ancient myth, as a term, concept, and a field of study, is notoriously difficult to pinpoint, ambiguous, and contested (Gentile, 2011). They have been defined as narratives that carry ideologies, sacred narratives that explain the beginning of the universe and humanity, and a form of art whose universal truths are lived out again and again (Gentile (2011). In this sense, ancient myths are neither fiction or nonfiction.

Though ancient, Greek myths present enduring relevance to modern day challenges. Olivadese and Dindo (2025) utilized Homer's *Odyssey*, for example, the foundational concept of *xenia* (hospitality), to construct modern "slow tourism" frameworks.

More importantly, Greek myths provide accurate depictions of human nature (Lefkowitz, 1985; Segal, 1971) and contain universal ideas that have persisted across centuries and cultures (Aryn et al., 2024). These stories present compelling themes that are particularly valuable for adolescents, whether through its original text or modern retellings. Because different genres engage readers in unique ways, investigating how adolescent readers empathize with original myths versus contemporary retellings would fill a vital gap in literary research.

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Ancient Myths and Their Modern Retellings

Ancient myths are constantly being adapted into modern stories (Aryn et al., 2024). According to Lee (2016), original works and adaptations are inherently different. Therefore, it is worth comparing the two as separate entities. Hassan and Nayel (2024) performed this when they analyzed the evolution of Medusa and Medea in Lashof's *Medusa's Tale* and Carr's *By the Bog of Cats* respectively. They concluded that Carr and Lashof's depiction of Medusa and Medea deepen feelings and actions of their characters and challenge oversimplification of female characters, yet still retain the same complexity as the ancient Medusa and Medea. Lovatt (2009), on the other hand, comparing many children's retellings of Greek myths, stated that authors have a difficult time balancing the removal of violence with keeping the stories the same. Such studies have not examined the differences in engagement between the retold versus original myth. This is worth looking at because increased engagement results in greater impact, empathy in the reader, and attitude change (Bal & Veltkamp, 2013). Nor have they added the adolescent perspective into their consideration or specifically looked at young adult retellings, which do not need as many restrictions as children's media but still differ from adult media.

The Importance of Adolescents

Involving adolescents in research about reading and myths is important. According to Adams and Berzonsky (2003), Blakemore and Frith (2005), and Goswami (2007), as cited in Nikolajeva (2014), adolescence is both a critical period of identity formation and chaotic phase of human life because of underdeveloped skills such as perspective taking due to strong emotions, decision-making, and information synthesis. Even more, research has found that because adolescents are even more susceptible to social influences, they may adopt polarized beliefs in order to affirm their social identity (Lutterbach & Beelmann, 2025). Young adult literature has the role of reflecting and shaping this process (Nikolajeva, 2014). Therefore, this research aimed to answer the question: To what extent do adolescents aged 13 to 19 experience the four aspects of narrative engagement (narrative understanding, attentional focus, narrative presence, emotional engagement) differently when reading Greek myths versus young adult fantasy Greek myth retellings?

METHODS

This was an experimental qualitative interview study using thematic analysis investigating the differences between adolescent engagement while reading a young adult fantasy retelling, an excerpt from *The Lightning Thief* by Rick Riordan (see Appendix A), and the original Greek myth, an excerpt of *D'Aulaire's Book of Greek Myths* by Edgar Parin d'Aulaire and Ingri Parin d'Aulaire (see Appendix B).

Participants

Data collection consisted of a total of 36 adolescents aged 13-18, and was held at a public suburban high school. Participants were primarily Asian ($n=25$, 69.44%) and female ($n=24$, 66.67%), with a mean age of 16.31. There were also 10 White participants and one American Indian participant.

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Ethical Considerations

This research was approved by the Institutional Review Board. All students volunteered to participate. They and their parents/guardians were informed of study procedures and signed a consent form modeled after the examples of Smith College. (see Appendices C, D, and E). In the case that participants experienced negative and uncomfortable psychological emotions due to mentions of fictional death and/or violence in the reading excerpts, the high school counseling department was made available.

Participant names were replaced with participant numbers for quotes used in this paper. All digital materials (audio records and transcripts) were saved in a password-protected Google Drive folder and will be kept for three years before destruction.

Description of Instruments

Interview questions modified from Buselle and Bilandzic (2009, p. 337) were used (see Appendix F) to assess participant's perception of understanding. This questionnaire was used because it synthesized material from Brock and Green (2000), Cohen (2001), Kim and Biocca (1997), Appel et al. (2002) to have four distinguished categories: narrative understanding, attentional focus, narrative presence, and emotional engagement. Because of these distinctions, these four concepts could be isolated and focused on individually.

Interviews were audio-recorded through Vocaroo, a fully online audio recording website accessible on school-issued Chromebooks. In order to elicit as much elaboration as possible, I maintained a conversational and open atmosphere and presented active and engaged listening (nodding, eye contact) for all participants.

In addition to these open-ended questions, multiple choice questions (see Appendices G and H) regarding the two excerpts, were given to participants. The first four questions were demographic questions. Scores were used to assess the participants' understanding of the passage, not their perception of understanding which was gathered from the open-ended questions.

Procedure

After Institutional Review Board approval, data gathering began through Genesis recruitment forms, where participants and their parents signed informed consent forms. Two weeks after a participant consented, they participated in the experiment. Participants were randomly chosen for one of two groups. The first group (Group 1) listened to an audiobook narration of *The Lightning Thief* by Rick Riordan and was given a printed copy to follow along. This was done to ensure delivery consistency so that participants were reading the material, not just skimming which may have yielded inaccurate results. The excerpt, the scene involving Medusa and the main characters at a garden emporium, was chosen for its ability to be isolated from the rest of the story and its parallels with the ancient myth of Medusa. *The Lightning Thief* is the most popular (defined as most reviewed on Goodreads, the world's largest online book reviewing platform) young adult Greek myth retelling. Its popularity cements it as a standard of young adult fantasy Greek myth retellings, and therefore the results were most applicable.

Then, participants answered a short multiple choice understanding check provided on Google Forms to ensure they understood the text before answering open ended interview questions. The purpose of this understanding check is to see whether participants truly understood the excerpt, not just their perception of whether they understood it. In the Google Form for *The Lightning Thief* understanding check, the first few questions were demographic questions assessing age, race, ethnicity, and gender.

The second group (Group 2) first listened to an audiobook narration of the Medusa myth, excerpted from *D'Aulaire's Book of Greek Myths* by Edgar Parin d'Aulaire and Ingri Parin d'Aulaire, chosen for its reputation as a starting book of myths, with a paper copy to follow along. Similar to the first group, participants then answered a multiple choice understanding check administered on Google Forms after the same demographic questions. Then, participants answered the open ended interview questions, which were the same for both groups. Data gathering occurred in-person and on school grounds in a teacher-supervised and quiet environment, and required 15 minutes for each participant.

Data Analysis

After data were gathered through the structured qualitative interview, transcripts were analyzed using the six steps of thematic analysis outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). First, interviews were hand-transcribed, and initial patterns and ideas were noted. Then, participant answers to each interview question were summarized semantically with short, descriptive phrases, otherwise known as codes. The codes for the two experimental groups were compared. Differences that emerged were grouped into themes. Then, these themes were reviewed for internal consistency and distinctiveness from other themes by grouping together all text segments tied to each theme and checking that the quotes were cohesive for each theme and did not overlap with other themes. When necessary, themes were merged or discarded. Reflexive journaling (a written record of the researcher's subjective thoughts and decisions as they interpreted the data) was used for transparency. Participant responses were categorized based on the correspondence of their codes to the themes. Theme frequency indicated how many participants total responded to interview questions in a way that supported the theme. If a participant supported a theme multiple times while answering different questions, this was only counted once.

Santi et al. (2025) also used thematic analysis to find themes in the transcripts of their interviews with adolescents on how they perceived empathy and reading. Both Santi et al. and this study aimed to determine themes from interviews regarding adolescent opinions and elaboration.

RESULTS

Five themes emerged upon thematic analysis of the interview transcripts to address different adolescent engagement while reading myth retellings and the original myth excerpts: (1) effect of description; (2) character attachment; (3) reaction to character struggle; (4) effect of prior knowledge; (5) effect of predictability. Table 1 illustrates the themes and their frequency.

Table 1

Differences in Adolescent Engagement with Fantasy Myth Retelling versus Myth: Themes

Theme title	Example quote from Group 1	Frequency, <i>n</i> (%) of Group 1	Example quote from Group 2	Frequency, <i>n</i> (%) of Group 2
Effect of description	“I think it means that the author does a very good job of immersing the reader in the story and describing scenes with enough detail for the reader to be able to like picture and visualize the story in their mind. 3b Yeah! I would say so.” (Participant 9)	9 (50%)	“Because it’s just a lot of descriptions maybe, like it’s just describing a lot of things at once, and I was just kind of, I found it difficult to focus on all of those details at once and kind of put them together.” (Participant 10)	3 (16.67%)
Character attachment	“No, I think since it’s like a little bit longer and you can stay with the characters and it wasn’t just facts, I think it was pretty easy to stay attached.” (Participant 29) “I think it was just like the characters ‘cause I didn’t know them in the beginning but I think like in the middle I understood what was going on.” (Participant 5)	6 (33.33%)	“Since these—there’s a lot of—the story span huge, like large numbers, of years, like you don’t feel that great of a connection to each of these different characters. And especially because the point of view keeps switching.” (Participant 12)	3 (16.67%)

Theme title	Example quote from Group 1	Frequency, <i>n</i> (%) of Group 1	Example quote from Group 2	Frequency, <i>n</i> (%) of Group 2
Reaction to character struggle	“Uh I was feeling very tense from like the dramatic part when they were like trying to defeat Medusa, and that was like very intense. 4b* I think they were feeling the same thing as me, because it was like a very dangerous time.” (Participant 27)	13 (72%)	“Um I think when Danae’s father seals her away, I thought that was a bit unfair. 4b* Um. From my knowledge of the time period, she probably felt that it was unfair, but also I guess she, I assumed that, the character kind of felt, ‘it is what it is,’ like she accepts her fate, because that’s a major theme in Greek mythology. 4c* Um I felt kind of angry for her, I felt that it was unjust, unfair, just because she was born a certain way, she gets her rights stripped away from her.” (Participant 16)	4 (22%)
Effect of prior knowledge	“[Were you also feeling scared?] Umm a little, I mean I have already read it, but like I would’ve been a little scared if I was reading for the first time.” (Participant 9)	5 (27.78%)	“Um I was confused about, kind of from the start I was like, ‘Oh who are these people, where really are they?’ Because I know a few of them, like I know Zeus and Posiedon, but then I didn’t really know who the other people were. And then um yeah, I didn’t really know about their powers, maybe that	4 (25.00%)

Theme title	Example quote from Group 1	Frequency, <i>n</i> (%) of Group 1	Example quote from Group 2	Frequency, <i>n</i> (%) of Group 2
			would help.” (Participant 10)	
			“I think I did [contextualize the cultures of Greek people] while reading. Sometimes I remembered other stories, concepts I had heard about. I have taken AP Latin before and I have taken courses that involve Greek mythology.” (Participant 8)	
Effect of predictability	“I think that knowing what was about to happen, not even from what I previously read, just like predicting what would happen, kind of took away from the tension a little bit.” (Participant 35)	5 (27.78%)		

Note. Total number of participants: *N*=36, number of *The Lightning Thief* readers (Group 1): *n*=18, number of *D’Aulaire’s Book of Greek Myths* readers (Group 2): *n*=18.

*The following participant quotation was in response to a follow up question. See Appendix F for list of interview questions and follow up questions.

Theme 1: Effect of Description

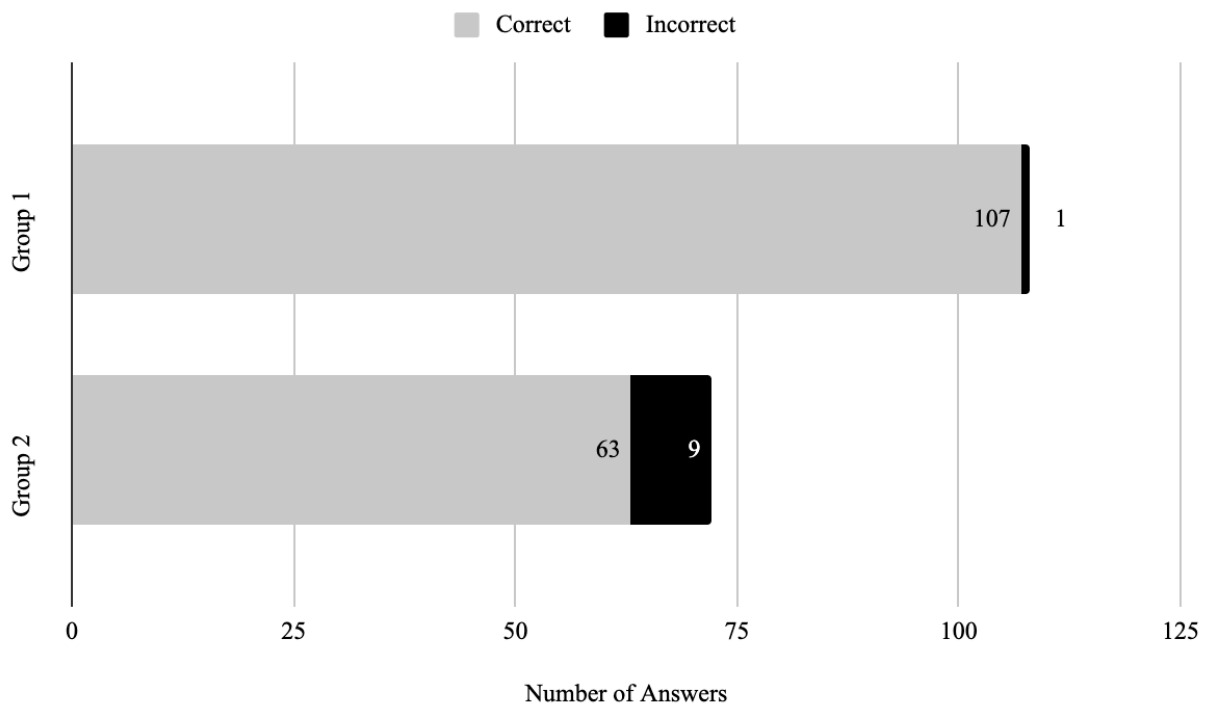
Nine of Group 1 ($n=18$) reflected that Riordan's description allowed them to visualize the characters and setting, which for many, was how they defined narrative presence for themselves. None of Group 1 stated that they had difficulty visualizing.

Among Group 2 ($n=18$), while six were able to visualize characters and settings, 12 were not. Three of 18 readers even said that the amount of description negatively impacted their narrative understanding, as the many details were hard to put together.

From the results of the check for understanding quiz questions, Group 1 had 107 correct answers of the total 108 answers (six questions x 18 readers), and Group 2 had 63 correct answers of the total of 72 answers (four questions x 18 readers). Figure 1 highlights these differences in accuracy. Group 2 saw an order of magnitude higher ratio of incorrect to correct answers ($9/63 = 14.3\%$) than Group 1 ($1/107 = 0.9\%$). This indicates a gap in narrative understanding between the two texts which may be attributable to the difference in effect of description.

Figure 1

Check for Understanding Accuracy Differences



Theme 2: Character Attachment

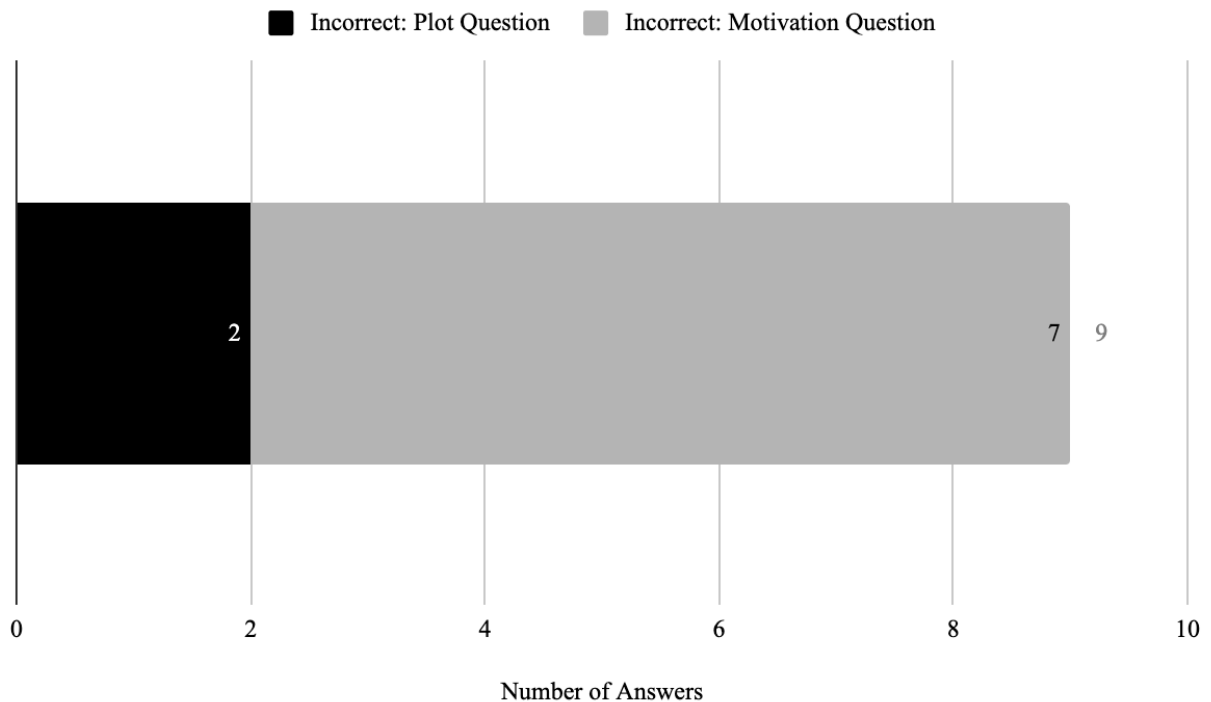
The myth retelling passage, *The Lightning Thief* revolves around four characters whose actions contributed to the plot, while original myth passage, the *D'Aulaire's Book of Greek Myths* has 15 characters, spanning multiple generations. Three Group 2 readers found it difficult to keep track of the characters, leading to further decreased narrative understanding. For example, a participant stated: “I would say that at one point I was like wait—because there’s so many generations I had to sit there and ask like—like make sure I’m keeping order of what went on.” (Participant 6)

With many more characters, Group 2 readers expressed being less invested in each one. Since each character had their own motivations, this led to decreased narrative understanding regarding the different motives of the characters. For example, a participant stated: “Yeah [I had a hard time understanding] because like, there’s a lot of different characters, especially with their all different goals.” (Participant 12)

In Group 2’s check for understanding questions (Appendix H), questions 1 and 2 asked readers to identify character motivations, and questions 3 and 4 asked readers to identify plot points. The scores (Figure 2) reflect how Group 2 had more trouble understanding character motives than plot. More incorrect answers came from questions regarding character motives.

Figure 2

Incorrect Plot versus Motivation Based Questions in Group 2 Check for Understanding



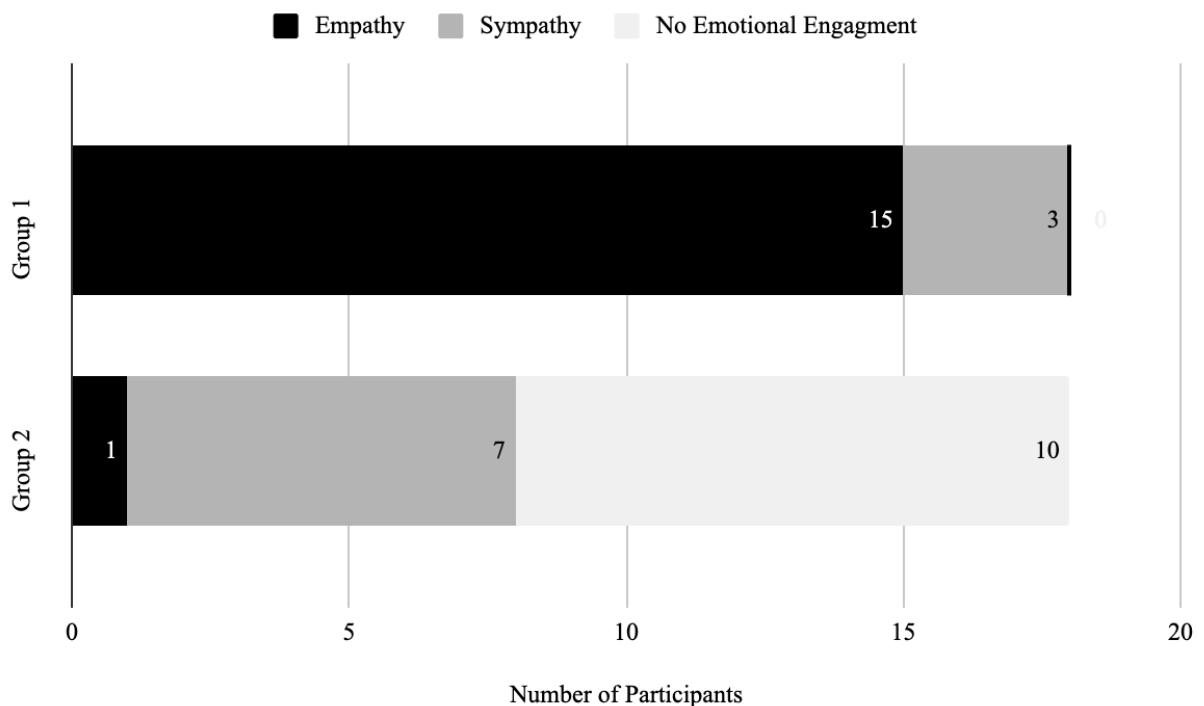
On the other hand, while many (12 of 18) of Group 1 reported never having trouble understanding the story or a character's motives, of the six who did, five said that it was only in the beginning, due to not knowing the characters enough, which resolved itself by the middle of the excerpt.

Theme 3: Reaction to Character Struggle

On the whole, Group 1 felt more emotions towards the characters than Group 2 (18 of 18 versus eight of 18, respectively). Of Group 1, 13 of 18 empathised with the characters at moments of high tension. They reported feeling fear, anxiety, and suspense along with the characters. On the other hand, of Group 2 readers that did report feeling an emotion outside their daily emotions (the eight of 18), seven felt sympathy while only one felt empathy. Of the eight Group 2 readers that felt emotions, four felt pity for the characters during moments of tension. Figure 3 demonstrates the greater amount of both emotional engagement and empathy in Group 1 compared to Group 2.

Figure 3

Different Emotional Engagement in Group 1 versus Group 2: Sympathy versus Empathy



Note. Of Group 1, 13 of 18 felt empathy during moments of tension while two felt empathy during other moments. All were emotionally engaged.

Thus, a difference in engagement between the two texts emerged in the amount of emotional engagement, amount of sympathy versus empathy, and reaction to character struggle.

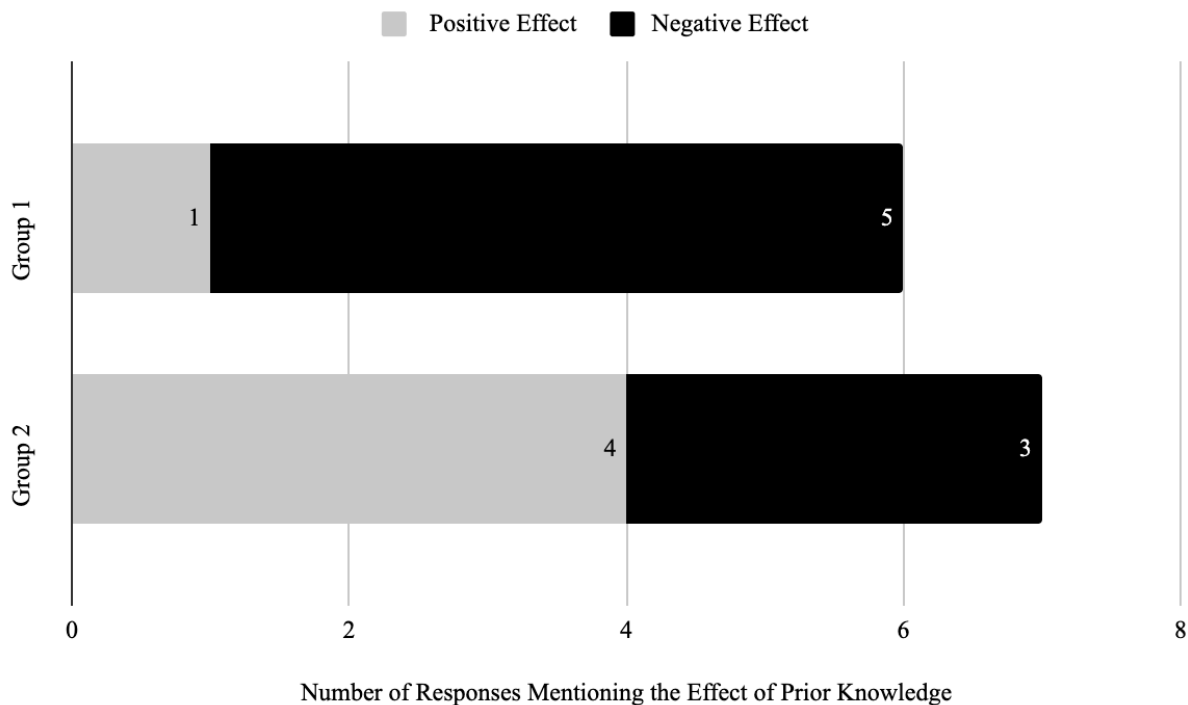
Theme 4: Effect of Prior Knowledge

While both groups experienced both narrative understanding benefits because of prior knowledge of their respective assigned reading, two Group 2 readers expressed that they wished they had greater prior knowledge of the different gods, which would have helped their narrative understanding and attentional focus, whereas zero Group 1 readers expressed this.

In addition, for Group 2, there seemed to be a delicate balance between enough prior knowledge to increase narrative understanding and attentional focus and too much prior knowledge which decreased attentional focus because of excess familiarity, as shown in Figure 4. For example, one participant stated: “I didn’t know some of the beginning, which was why it was captivating me, but because I already know it, towards the end I was zoning out” (Participant 30). Conversely, other participants felt the opposite:

I’m like very familiar with Perseus’s story, [...] so I think the stuff with the king and the daughters, that was probably the part I was the least familiar with, which led me to not understanding it as well [...] so I started wandering here. Then I came back and then began to understand what was going on again out of familiarity. (Participant 14)

Figure 4
Comparing Positive and Negative Effects of Prior Knowledge



Note. Of the four mentioned positive effects of prior knowledge for Group 2, three benefited narrative understanding, while one benefited narrative presence; all three of the mentioned negative effects of prior knowledge lowered attentional focus. The one mentioned positive effect of prior knowledge in Group 1 benefited narrative understanding; of the five mentioned negative effects, two lowered attentional focus, two lowered narrative presence, and one lowered emotional engagement. Twelve Group 1 readers and 11 Group 2 readers did not mention any effect of prior knowledge.

Further, prior knowledge even resulted in Group 2 making connections from other myths and sources to the myth of Medusa. Two readers stated that this helped bring them inside the world of the story or led to a feeling of pleasant surprise at the connection.

But before, I didn't know who Danaus was, but I've heard about Danaids, like the 49 sisters who had to carry water in the underworld, but I didn't know their origin story, so I was like surprised. (Participant 26)

On the other hand, any prior knowledge seemed to negatively affect attentional focus, narrative presence, and emotional engagement for Group 1.

Um I think [being inside the story] means to be fully immersed in like the plot, and not only the plot but also the characters, in a way that makes you feel as though you can't put it down. 3b Umm I think no? But only because I have read this before. Like if I—like if this was something I had never seen before, and I was more interested in knowing the characters, and I didn't know the story of Medusa, I think this would have been really interesting to me. (Participant 11)

Thus, prior knowledge negatively affected all but narrative understanding for Group 1, whereas the right amount of prior knowledge benefited narrative understanding, attentional focus, and narrative presence for Group 2, as shown in Figure 4.

Theme 5: Effect of Predictability

Five readers of Group 1 mentioned that the story's predictability negatively affected their attentional focus and emotional engagement. Two readers found the reveal of Aunty Em's identity too predictable and drawn out, while two found the outcome of the battle too predictable, and one reader mentioned general predictability. One reader even specified how the predictability made them feel negative emotions such as frustration and annoyance, stating, "I guess I was feeling a little annoyed that Percy wasn't able to catch on, because I think it was pretty obvious." (Participant 19)

I think it was towards the middle of the battle scene around where Percy realizes what's going wrong [...] and I think that killed the suspense for me because I kind of knew what was going to happen after that point, like they were going to fight and they were going to win. (Participant 1)

Conversely, no Group 2 reader ever mentioned predictability. Thus, another difference between adolescent engagement between retelling in *The Lightning Thief* and the original myth in *D'Aulaire's Book of Greek Myths* is the negative effect of predictability on attentional focus and emotional engagement for the former, and the lack thereof for the latter.

DISCUSSION

This study examined the differences in adolescent engagement while reading a fantasy Greek myth retelling versus the original myth. The findings across the five themes indicate that adolescents reading the fantasy retelling of the Medusa myth (*The Lightning Thief*, Group 1) had a higher degree of narrative understanding and emotional engagement than those reading the original myth (*D'Aulaire's Book of Greek Myths*, Group 2). The data analysis indicates that this difference stems from the retelling's effective description and low or no requirement of prior knowledge for readers to engage deeply.

In contrast, two readers in Group 2 reported confusion due to lack of enough background information about the different Greek gods. This indicates that there is a baseline of prior knowledge that original myth readers benefit from having. This mirrors Lee (2016)'s finding that students usually watch the movie adaptation to understand the general plot and characters, before reading the book to deeply understand character motives (Lee, 2016). The myth retelling *The Lightning Thief* in this study parallels the movie adaptation and the *D'Aulaire's Book of Greek Myths* excerpt parallels the book.

However, the fact that prior knowledge or predicting the next plot point inhibited overall engagement for Group 1 indicates that *The Lightning Thief* relies more on plot dynamics and characters to engage readers. For Group 2, prior knowledge sometimes resulted in greater attentional focus and narrative presence. It suggests that contextualizing the myth and understanding its significance to other myths plays a role in adolescent engagement with the original myth.

Gerrig (1993, as cited in Topic, 2021) found that fiction structurally reflects the goal-oriented nature of human experience, and Gardener (2004, as cited in Topic, 2021) notes that fiction prioritizes characters and their interactions over the information-heavy nature of non-fiction. This draws parallels between the *D'Aulaire's Book of Greek Myths* excerpt and nonfiction. However, the fact that a lack of prior knowledge lessened attentional focus for *D'Aulaire's Book of Greek Myths* readers suggests that ancient myths are, to some extent, outcome based, although to a lesser degree than the retelling *The Lightning Thief*. This structural variance ultimately affected readers' emotional engagement.

Quantitatively, *The Lightning Thief* readers empathised with characters far more than *D'Aulaire's Book of Greek Myths* readers (15 empathising readers versus one). This gap may be attributable to the difference in character density (15 in the original myth versus four in the retelling). This outcome reflects Slovic's (2013, as cited in Bal & Veltkamp, 2013) concept of psychic numbing, which states that narratives

centered on one/few identifiable individuals evoke stronger reader emotions than those about large groups of people.

The difference in character focus also shaped how Group 1 and 2 reacted to character struggle versus Group 2. Group 2 readers expressed injustice for the character Danae's prophecy-driven exile by her father. This suggests that Greek myths with a strong aspect of fate may lead readers to perceive that characters have no control over their destiny, and therefore feel pity for their fates rather than tension over their next decision and how it will play out. Conversely, Group 1 perceived that characters had agency over their futures and therefore empathised with them. Thus, the data indicate that Group 2 saw *D'Aulaire's Book of Greek Myths* excerpt characters more as moving parts that evoke an overall theme and sympathised with them from a distance. This ties back with the idea that the *D'Aulaire's Book of Greek Myths* excerpt centers less around characters and plot, and more around contextualization and broader themes outside of single stories.

This suggests that the *D'Aulaire's Book of Greek Myths* excerpt is a mix of fiction and non-fiction. Seale (1975, as cited in Heyne, 1987) states that the difference between the two lies in the reader's reaction. For example, if a reader begins reading believing they are reading a fictional story, they look for dramatic plot twists and flourishes; if a reader believes they are reading a real story, they form analytical questions and ask for supplementary information. Under this metric, *D'Aulaire's Book of Greek Myths* excerpt falls under non-fiction. However, the basis of fiction is its factual inadequacy, or its base in characters that have never existed (Heyne, 1987), which does not apply to this excerpt.

Ultimately, differences in engagement between these two forms of the same story demonstrate that myths and myth retellings are distinct textual forms, similar to how Lee (2016) states that movies and their adaptations are inherently different works of art and must be treated as such.

Methodological Generalizability

It is worth considering that certain aspects of these results can be generalized to the genres as whole, whereas others are specific to the selected texts used in this study.

Theme 1 (the effect of description) reflects a feature (description) unique to *The Lightning Thief* and the *D'Aulaire's Book of Greek Myths* excerpt, not their respective genres. Similarly, the character density is also specific to the chosen excerpts. Although Greek myths exist in the same world and often feature characters with interconnecting lineages, certain versions of myths may not include the histories of each character, meaning that character amount is dependent on the version. Therefore, Theme 2, character attachment, is not generalizable to the genres as a whole.

On the other hand, Theme 3 (reaction to character struggle), is partially generalizable. The aspect of fate is common in many Greek myths, not just the excerpt used in this study. This suggests that readers of Greek myths may still remain distant from characters. However, the data from this study are not sufficient

to conclude that distant sympathy with character struggle came solely from the fatalistic aspect. Textual variables such as prose style, particularly in battle scenes, may also have influenced this emotional distance.

Theme 4 (effect of prior knowledge), is also partially generalizable. The interconnected world of Greek mythology means that a reader's prior knowledge will naturally facilitate rewarding intertextual connections. However, the finding that prior knowledge negatively impacted *The Lightning Thief* readers cannot be confidently generalized to all young adult myth retellings. Therefore, this study supports that adolescent engagement with Greek myths is based on contextualizing and connection to other concepts, but cannot conclude that all Greek myth retellings are very plot and character based.

Theme 5 (effect of predictability), is not generalizable. Predictability in *The Lightning Thief* does not guarantee that adolescents will find all modern myth retellings predictable, nor does the data support that ancient myths are universally unpredictable.

In conclusion, these findings suggest that, unlike *The Lightning Thief* excerpt, ancient myths are fundamentally context-driven narratives and therefore require a higher baseline of prior knowledge for deep adolescent engagement. Because of the fatalistic concept and the emphasis on larger themes, ancient myths may evoke sympathy instead of direct empathy for characters. However, when readers have the right amount of background knowledge, ancient myths allow adolescent readers to draw rewarding connections across broader thematic material, increasing engagement.

LIMITATIONS

Although the sample size (N=36) for the research was well above the average sample size for qualitative interview sample sizes (N=17) (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022), the sample had an overrepresentation of females ($n=24$, 66.67%). Since females have superior empathetic ability compared to males in questionnaire methods (Pang et al., 2023), and reading comprehension (Logan & Johnson, 2009), this overrepresentation may have inflated the narrative understanding and emotional engagement scores. Nevertheless, this was delimited by the fact that participants were randomly sorted into the two experimental groups, allowing for an even distribution of females and males. Because this study sought to find the differences in engagement between the two groups, the overall overrepresentation of females did not significantly impede results.

Additionally, participants were never asked whether they had previously read or known of their assigned reading (*The Lightning Thief* or *D'Aulaire's Book of Greek Myths*), and their level of familiarity. All information related to prior knowledge was from participants volunteering it. Therefore, the effect of prior knowledge may have been exaggerated as only people who experienced a strong effect would mention it.

Errors may have risen from the thematic analysis process. Only one researcher analyzed the interview transcripts. Thus, less salient themes may have been presented instead of the most salient ones. Nevertheless, this was delimited by use of reflexive journaling.

IMPLICATIONS

This research provides insights into the differences in how description, character attachment, reaction to character struggle, prior knowledge, and predictability affect how adolescents engage with young adult fantasy myth retellings versus the original ancient myths. This indicates that there are differences between engagement between myth retellings and original myths, similar to how there are differences in non-fiction and fiction with empathy and emotional engagement (Bal & Veltkamp, 2013). The *D'Aulaire's Book of Greek Myths* Medusa excerpt emotionally engaged readers in a way more similar to non-fiction, as there was emotional engagement, but it was not empathy.

Additionally, there are implications for educators. The fact that several *D'Aulaire's Book of Greek Myths* readers in this study report wishing they had background knowledge on the different gods demonstrate that teachers should review the different gods and goddesses prior to reading myths to facilitate greater narrative understanding. Furthermore, the finding that Greek myths are heavily reliant on contextualization and prior knowledge of other Greek myths and culture suggest that teachers must also educate their students on ancient culture as well in order to create a curriculum for maximum perspective taking skill building.

There are also implications for adolescents themselves. The distinct differences between the excerpts of the myth Medusa from *The Lightning Thief* and *D'Aulaire's Book of Greek Myths* emphasize how the two are separate works. Supported by Lee (2016), adolescents should remember that understanding one adaptation does not mean that they have understood the other. As Greek myths are constantly being adapted (Aryn et al., 2024), this finding encourages adolescents to continue branching out and reading.

There are implications for future research. The best way to incorporate the modern retellings to enrich understanding should be a point of study. Many teachers teach Greek mythology parallel to readings of other western classical literature (Jeffrey, 1969). Frauenfelder (2005) reported that asking his college students to compare modern movies to Greek myths they had been learning about allowed them to connect the cultural importance of the movie to the myth. Future research could investigate how young adult modern retellings such as *The Lightning Thief* could also allow students to connect myths with modern works.

Additionally, the fact that readers of the original myth in this study found the description more difficult to visualize raises questions about how adolescent engagement would differ between original myths and retellings of different media, such as animations or movies, where viewers do not have to visualize based on description.

Lastly, *The Lightning Thief* only partially represents young adult Greek myth fantasy retellings, because it has its own distinctive writing style, characters, and plot. The short excerpt used in this study from *The Lightning Thief* holds even less representation. It is necessary that future research repeat this study with other myths and retellings to see the extent these results hold true, where they differ, and why.

CONCLUSION

This study provides findings on how adolescents engagement differs between Greek myths and Greek myth fantasy retellings: adolescents require less prior knowledge to engage deeply with retellings. With substantial characters and plot, myth retellings also allow for greater emotional engagement through empathy, but this also means that prior knowledge and the ability to predict the next plot event significantly decreases engagement. Greek myths (with their timeless depictions of human nature), their infinitely many retellings, and how to best spread their knowledge, are vital areas for future research, especially in a time when understanding humans is increasing in difficulty. Further research should investigate the best way to introduce and contextualize myths and how to best incorporate young adult fantasy Greek myth retellings in the classroom to allow for maximum depth of adolescent engagement, paving way for greater multiperspectivity and empathy among the growing generation.

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Appendix A: *The Lightning Thief* by Rick Riordan Excerpt

Our hostess disappeared behind the snack counter and started cooking. Before we knew it, she'd brought us plastic trays heaped with double cheeseburgers, vanilla shakes, and XXL servings of French Fries.

I was halfway through my burger before I remembered to breathe.

Annabeth slurped her shake.

Grover picked at the fries, and eyed the tray's waxed paper liner as if he might go for that, but he still looked too nervous to eat.

"What's that hissing noise?" he asked.

I listened, but didn't hear anything. Annabeth shook her head.

"Hissing?" Auntie Em asked. "Perhaps you hear the deep-fryer oil. You have keen ears, Grover."

"I take vitamins. For my ears."

"That's admirable," she said. "But please, relax."

Auntie Em ate nothing. She hadn't taken off her headress, even to cook, and now she sat forward and interlaced her fingers and watched us eat. It was a little unsettling, having someone stare at me when I couldn't see her face, but I was feeling satisfied after the burger, and a little sleepy, and I figured the least I could do was try to make small talk with our hostess.

"So, you sell gnomes," I said, trying to sound interested.

"Oh, yes," Auntie Em said. "And animals. And people. Anything for the garden. Custom orders. Statuary is very popular, you know."

"A lot of business on this road?"

"Not so much, no. Since the highway was built . . . most cars, they do not go this way now. I must cherish every customer I get."

My neck tingled, as if somebody else was looking at me. I turned, but it was just a statue of a young girl holding an Easter basket. The detail was incredible, much better than you see in most garden statues. But something was wrong with her face. It looked as if she were startled, or even terrified.

"Ah," Auntie Em said sadly. "You notice some of my creations do not turn out well. They are marred. They do not sell. The face is the hardest to get right. Always the face."

"You make these statues yourself?" I asked.

"Oh, yes. Once upon a time, I had two sisters to help me in the business, but they have passed on, and Auntie Em is alone. I have only my statues. This is why I make them, you see. They are my company." The sadness in her voice sounded so deep and so real that I couldn't help feeling sorry for her.

Annabeth had stopped eating. She sat forward and said, "Two sisters?"

"It's a terrible story," Aunty Em said. "Not one for children, really. You see, Annabeth, a bad woman was jealous of me, long ago, when I was young. I had a . . . a boyfriend, you know, and this bad woman was determined to break us apart. She caused a terrible accident. My sisters stayed by me. They shared my bad fortune as long as they could, but eventually they passed on. They faded away. I alone have survived, but at a price. Such a price."

I wasn't sure what she meant, but I felt bad for her. My eyelids kept getting heavier, my full stomach making me sleepy. Poor old lady. Who would want to hurt somebody so nice?

"Percy?" Annabeth was shaking me to get my attention.

"Maybe we should go. I mean, the ringmaster will be waiting."

She sounded tense. I wasn't sure why. Grover was eating the waxed paper off the tray now, but if Aunty Em found that strange, she didn't say anything.

"Such beautiful gray eyes," Aunty Em told Annabeth again. "My, yes, it has been a long time since I've seen gray eyes like those."

She reached out as if to stroke Annabeth's cheek, but Annabeth stood up abruptly.

"We really should go."

"Yes!" Grover swallowed his waxed paper and stood up. "The ringmaster is waiting! Right!"

I didn't want to leave. I felt full and content. Aunty Em was so nice. I wanted to stay with her a while.

"Please, dears," Aunty Em pleaded. "I so rarely get to be with children. Before you go, won't you at least sit for a pose?"

"A pose?" Annabeth asked warily.

"A photograph. I will use it to model a new statue set. Children are so popular, you see. Everyone loves children."

Annabeth shifted her weight from foot to foot. "I don't think we can, ma'am. Come on, Percy—"

"Sure we can," I said. I was irritated with Annabeth for being so bossy, so rude to an old lady who'd just fed us for free. "It's just a photo, Annabeth. What's the harm?"

"Yes, Annabeth," the woman purred. "No harm."

I could tell Annabeth didn't like it, but she allowed Aunty Em to lead us back out the front door, into the garden of statues.

Aunty Em directed us to a park bench next to the stone satyr. "Now," she said, "I'll just position you correctly. The young girl in the middle, I think, and the two young gentlemen on either side."

"Not much light for a photo," I remarked.

"Oh, enough," Aunty Em said. "Enough for us to see each other, yes?"

"Where's your camera?" Grover asked.

Aunty Em stepped back, as if to admire the shot. "Now, the face is the most difficult. Can you smile for me please, everyone? A large smile?"

Grover glanced at the cement satyr next to him, and mumbled, "That sure does look like Uncle Ferdinand."

"Grover," Aunty Em chastised, "look this way, dear."

She still had no camera in her hands.

"Percy—" Annabeth said.

Some instinct warned me to listen to Annabeth, but I was fighting the sleepy feeling, the comfortable lull that came from the food and the old lady's voice.

"I will just be a moment," Aunty Em said. "You know, I can't see you very well in this cursed veil...."

"Percy, something's wrong," Annabeth insisted.

"Wrong?" Aunty Em said, reaching up to undo the wrap around her head. "Not at all, dear. I have such noble company tonight. What could be wrong?"

"That is Uncle Ferdinand!" Grover gasped.

"Look away from her!" Annabeth shouted. She whipped her Yankees cap onto her head and vanished. Her invisible hands pushed Grover and me both off the bench.

I was on the ground, looking at Aunt Em's sandaled feet.

I could hear Grover scrambling off in one direction, Annabeth in another. But I was too dazed to move.

Then I heard a strange, rasping sound above me. My eyes rose to Aunty Em's hands, which had turned gnarled and warty, with sharp bronze talons for fingernails.

I almost looked higher, but somewhere off to my left Annabeth screamed, "No! Don't!"

More rasping—the sound of tiny snakes, right above me, from . . . from about where Aunty Em's head would be.

"Run!" Grover bleated. I heard him racing across the gravel, yelling, "Maia!" to kick-start his flying sneakers.

I couldn't move. I stared at Aunty Em's gnarled claws, and tried to fight the groggy trance the old woman had put me in.

"Such a pity to destroy a handsome young face," she told me soothingly. "Stay with me, Percy. All you have to do is look up."

I fought the urge to obey. Instead I looked to one side and saw one of those glass spheres people put in gardens—a gazing ball. I could see Aunty Em's dark reflection in the orange glass; her headdress was gone, revealing her face as a shimmering pale circle. Her hair was moving, writhing like serpents.

Aunty Em.

Aunty "M."

How could I have been so stupid?

Think, I told myself. How did Medusa die in the myth?

But I couldn't think. Something told me that in the myth Medusa had been asleep when she was attacked by my namesake, Perseus. She wasn't anywhere near asleep now. If she wanted, she could take those talons right now and rake open my face.

"The Gray-Eyed One did this to me, Percy," Medusa said, and she didn't sound anything like a monster. Her voice invited me to look up, to sympathize with a poor old grandmother. "Annabeth's mother, the cursed Athena, turned me from a beautiful woman into this."

"Don't listen to her!" Annabeth's voice shouted, somewhere in the statuary. "Run, Percy!"

"Silence!" Medusa snarled. Then her voice modulated back to a comforting purr. "You see why I must destroy the girl, Percy. She is my enemy's daughter. I shall crush her statue to dust. But you, dear Percy, you need not suffer."

"No," I muttered. I tried to make my legs move.

"Do you really want to help the gods?" Medusa asked. "Do you understand what awaits you on this foolish quest, Percy? What will happen if you reach the Underworld? Do not be a pawn of the Olympians, my dear. You would be better off as a statue. Less pain. Less pain."

"Percy!" Behind me, I heard a buzzing sound, like a two-hundred-pound hummingbird in a nosedive. Grover yelled, "Duck!"

I turned, and there he was in the night sky, flying in from twelve o'clock with his winged shoes fluttering, Grover, holding a tree branch the size of a baseball bat. His eyes were shut tight, his head twitched from side to side. He was navigating by ears and nose alone.

"Duck!" he yelled again. "I'll get her!"

That finally jolted me into action. Knowing Grover, I was sure he'd miss Medusa and nail me. I dove to one side.

Thwack!

At first I figured it was the sound of Grover hitting a tree. Then Medusa roared with rage.

"You miserable satyr," she snarled. "I'll add you to my collection!"

"That was for Uncle Ferdinand!" Grover yelled back.

I scrambled away and hid in the statuary while Grover swooped down for another pass.

Ker-whack!

"Arrgh!" Medusa yelled, her snake-hair hissing and spitting.

Right next to me, Annabeth's voice said, "Percy!"

I jumped so high my feet nearly cleared a garden gnome. "Jeez! Don't do that!"

Annabeth took off her Yankees cap and became visible. "You have to cut her head off."

"What? Are you crazy? Let's get out of here."

"Medusa is a menace. She's evil. I'd kill her myself, but . . ." Annabeth swallowed, as if she were about to make a difficult admission. "But you've got the better weapon. Besides, I'd never get close to her. She'd slice me to bits because of my mother. You—you've got a chance."

"What? I can't—"

"Look, do you want her turning more innocent people into statues?"

She pointed to a pair of statue lovers, a man and a woman with their arms around each other, turned to stone by the monster.

Annabeth grabbed a green gazing ball from a nearby pedestal. "A polished shield would be better."

She studied the sphere critically. "The convexity will cause some distortion. The reflection's size should be off by a factor of—"

"Would you speak English?"

"I am!" She tossed me the glass ball. "Just look at her in the glass. Never look at her directly."

"Hey, guys!" Grover yelled somewhere above us. "I think she's unconscious!"

"Rooooaaarr!"

"Maybe not," Grover corrected. He went in for another pass with the tree branch.

"Hurry," Annabeth told me. "Grover's got a great nose, but he'll eventually crash."

I took out my pen and uncapped it. The bronze blade of Riptide elongated in my hand.

I followed the hissing and spitting sounds of Medusa's hair.

I kept my eyes locked on the gazing ball so I would only glimpse Medusa's reflection, not the real thing. Then, in the green tinted glass, I saw her.

Grover was coming in for another turn at bat, but this time he flew a little too low. Medusa grabbed the stick and pulled him off course. He tumbled through the air and crashed into the arms of a stone grizzly bear with a painful "Ummphh!"

Medusa was about to lunge at him when I yelled, "Hey!"

I advanced on her, which wasn't easy, holding a sword and a glass ball. If she charged, I'd have a hard time defending myself.

But she let me approach—twenty feet, ten feet.

I could see the reflection of her face now. Surely it wasn't really that ugly. The green swirls of the gazing ball must be distorting it, making it look worse.

"You wouldn't harm an old woman, Percy," she crooned. "I know you wouldn't."

I hesitated, fascinated by the face I saw reflected in the glass—the eyes that seemed to burn straight through the green tint, making my arms go weak.

From the cement grizzly, Grover moaned, "Percy, don't listen to her!"

Medusa cackled. "Too late."

She lunged at me with her talons.

I slashed up with my sword, heard a sickening shlock!, then a hiss like wind rushing out of a cavern—the sound of a monster disintegrating.

Something fell to the ground next to my foot. It took all my willpower not to look. I could feel warm ooze soaking into my sock, little dying snake heads tugging at my shoelaces.

"Oh, yuck," Grover said. His eyes were still tightly closed, but I guess he could hear the thing gurgling and steaming. "Mega-yuck."

Annabeth came up next to me, her eyes fixed on the sky. She was holding Medusa's black veil. She said, "Don't move."

Very, very carefully, without looking down, she knelt and draped the monster's head in black cloth, then picked it up. It was still dripping green juice.

Appendix B: *D'Aulaire's Book of Greek Myths* by Edgar Parin d'Aulaire and Ingri Parin d'Aulaire Excerpt

Loud was the song of the Muses about Danaus, first of a line of great kings and heroes.

King Danaus of Libya had fifty daughters, his brother, King Aegyptus, had fifty sons. The fifty sons wanted to marry the fifty daughters, but they were rough and rowdy and King Danaus did not want them for sons-in-law. He feared that they might carry off his daughters by force, so secretly he built a ship with fifty oars and fled with his daughters. The fifty princesses pulled at the oars and fled with his daughters. The fifty princesses pulled at the oars and rowed the ship across the wide sea. They reached Argos, in Greece, and when the people there saw the king standing in the prow of a gorgeous ship rowed by princesses, they were awed. They were certain that Danaus had been sent by the gods, and made them their king.

Danaus was a good ruler, and peace and happiness reigned in Argos until one day another splendid ship arrived. And who should be at the oars but King Aegyptus' fifty sons, who had come to claim their brides. Danaus did not dare to oppose them and had a lavish wedding feast prepared. But secretly he gave each of his fifty daughters a dagger and ordered them all to kill their husbands as soon as they were alone. Forty-nine of the brides obeyed him. But Hypermnestra, the eldest, fell in love with Lynceus, her prince, and fled with him. In vain did Danaus try to find a new husband for his widowed daughters; nobody dared to marry them. The forty-nine Danaides had to live a life without joy, and when they died and came to the underworld, they were sentenced to carry water forever in sieves, trying in vain to fill a bath and wash off their sins.

When King Danaus grew old, there was no heir to his throne, and he had to send for Hypermnestra and Lynceus, who were living in great happiness. They became King and Queen of Argos, and their son became King after them. When he died, his son, Acrisius, inherited the throne. Acrisius, however, had no son. He had only a beautiful, golden-haired daughter whose name was Danae, but her beauty brought no joy to her father. He wanted a son and heir to his kingdom. When an oracle told him that he would die by the hand of his daughter's son, he put Danae in a sealed chamber that had neither windows nor doors, only an opening in the roof. There no suitor could see her beauty and she would remain unwed and childless. But Acrisius forgot to reckon with Zeus. The thunder-god spied the lonesome maiden through the opening in the roof, and in the shape of a golden shower he descended to her. No longer was Danae lonesome, for now she was the happy bride of Zeus. But when her father heard the cries of an infant from her chamber he broke through the walls in a rage, intending to kill his grandson. When he learned that Zeus was the child's father he did not dare to lay hands on him. Instead, he put Danae and her son, Perseus, in a chest and threw it into the sea. If they drowned, Poseidon would be to blame.

Zeus gently steered the chest to the shore of an island, and a fisherman who was casting his nets hauled it in. Great was his surprise when he saw what the chest contained. When Danae had told him her story, he took her and little Perseus to his hut and cared for them as if they were his own, for he was a kind old man and childless. In his humble hut, Perseus grew into a fine and valiant youth, proud of being the son of Zeus and the beautiful Danae. But Danae's beauty attracted the eye of the ruthless king of the island. He wanted her for his queen. In vain did Danae turn him away. She was the bride of Zeus and swore that she could marry no other. The king pursued her and would have carried her off by force if

Perseus had not protected her. The scheming king decided to get rid of Perseus, and he let it be known that he was going to marry a princess from a neighboring island. As was the custom, all the men in the kingdom brought him gifts. Only Perseus was so poor that he had nothing to give. So he offered his services to the king instead. This was just what the king had expected. "Slay the monster Medusa and bring me her head," he said. No man who had ever set out to kill Medusa had come back, and the king was sure that now he was forever rid of Perseus.

Medusa was one of three horrible Gorgon sisters, so gruesome that all living creatures turned to stone at the sight of them. They lived on an island far out at sea, but nobody knew just where.

Perseus bid his mother good-bye and set out to search for Medusa. He went over land and over sea asking his way, but nobody could tell him where the gorgons lived. As he stood at a crossroad, wondering which way to go, Athena and Hermes suddenly appeared. Zeus had sent them to help him. They could tell him the way to the island of the gorgons, but he needed more than that. Athena lent him her shield, which was polished as brightly as a mirror. Hermes lent him his sword, which was so sharp it could cut through the hardest metal, and he also needed three magic things owned by the nymphs of the north, they told him, but even the gods didn't know where the nymphs lived. That was a secret closely guarded by the three Gray Sisters, and they would never willingly reveal it, for they were the Gorgons's sisters. But Hermes offered to take Perseus to them and find a way to get the secret out of them. He took Perseus under his arm, swung himself into the air, and flew off, swifter than the wind. They flew far, far to the west and at last they came to a land where the sun never shone and everything was as gray as dusk. There sat the three Gray Sisters. Their hair was gray, and they had only one gray eye between them, which they took turns looking through. As one of the sisters was handing the eye to another, Perseus sprang forward and snatched it.

"Now I have your eye," cried Perseus. "You will never get it back unless you tell me the way to the nymphs of the north."

The three Gray Sisters wailed and begged for their eye, but Perseus would not give it back, and so they had to tell him the way. Again Hermes took him under his arm and flew with him far, far to the north, beyond the North Wind, where the sun never set. The nymphs of the north received them kindly, and when they heard why Perseus had come, they gladly lent him the three things he needed; a pair of winged sandals to carry him through the air, a cap to make him invisible and a magic bag to hold whatever was put into it. Now he was ready to slay the Medusa, said Hermes. He showed him the way and wished him good luck. Wearing the winged sandals, Perseus flew far to the west. When he came to the island of the Gorgons he did not look down. He looked, instead, into Athena's polished shield, and shuddered at the sight he saw mirrored there. The three Gorgon sisters were lying on the shore, fast asleep. Long yellow fangs hung from their ginning mouths, on their heads grew writhing snakes instead of hair, and their necks were covered with scales of bronze. Around them stood the strangest stones; it was easy to see that they had once been men.

Looking into the mirroring shield, Perseus swooped down, and with one deft stroke he cut off the Medusa's head. Out from the monster's severed neck sprang a beautiful winged horse, the Pegasus. He neighed and the other two Gorgons awoke. Quickly, Perseus threw Medusa's head into the magic bag and swung himself into the air. Wailing, the two Gorgon sisters took to the air on heavy wings in groping pursuit. They could not find him, for he had put on the magic cap of invisibility.

Appendix C: Cover Letter

Hi Participant!

I'm conducting a study called "Greek Myth and Myth Retelling: Differences in Adolescent Engagement." I'm currently enrolled in the AP Research course at XXX High School and am using this study as the basis of my research paper for my AP exam for the course. I'm trying to see the extent of differences in adolescent narrative engagement when reading Greek myths versus young adult fantasy Greek myth retellings.

You don't have to participate. You can decline at any time or leave any questions blank that you don't want to answer. There are no known risks to participation in this survey. Your answers will be audio recorded and stored on a password protected Google Drive, not shared. They will be used to generate themes regarding engagement. Your responses will remain confidential and anonymous, and no individual data will be reported. No other person in the AP Research class (or in any other class/program) will know your individual answers to the survey.

If you agree to participate, please complete and submit the appropriate form(s) on Genesis.

If you have any questions about the project, feel free to contact the AP Research course advisor, XXX, at XXX@XXX.com.

Thank you!

Appendix D: Parent Consent Form

PARENTAL CONSENT FORM

Greek Myth and Myth Retelling: Differences in Adolescent Engagement

This form is to request permission for your child to respond to a survey for a research project investigating the extent to which adolescents aged thirteen to nineteen experience the four aspects of narrative engagement (narrative understanding, attentional focus, narrative presence, emotional engagement) differently when reading Greek myths versus young adult fantasy Greek myth retellings. Your child was selected as a possible participant because they attend XXX High School and are aged from thirteen to nineteen. The study seeks to find the extent of difference in adolescent engagement regarding Greek myths versus Greek myth retellings.

This study is being conducted by: a student in the AP Research course of the AP Capstone program offered at XXX High School. This course is under the direction of XXXo, an English teacher at XXX High School.

Your child's participation is voluntary. Because he/she is a student in the district, your consent is required before your child can participate in the study. Please note that your child will also be asked to indicate whether or not he/she is willing to participate. Parent and child permission are both required before your child can participate.

Please consider the information carefully and feel free to ask questions before signing off on your child's participation. If you consent to your child's participation, please sign this form. You can select to receive a copy of your response to this form.

Procedures

Your child will be randomly selected to either listen to an audiobook read an excerpt from *The Lightning Thief* by Rick Riordan regarding Medusa or an excerpt from regarding Medusa from the *D'Aulaire's Book of Greek Myths* by Edgar Parin d'Aulaire and Ingri Parin d'Aulaire, and follow along with a printed copy of an excerpt. Then, they will answer four questions regarding their age, ethnicity, race, and gender on Google Forms. Then, they will answer a couple multiple choice questions to check their understanding of the excerpt. Finally, they will answer four open-ended interview questions related to engagement. These interviews will be audio recorded and stored on a password protected Google Drive, not shared. They will be used to generate themes regarding engagement.

Risk and Benefits of being in the study

Possible Risks:

There are minimal risks with participating in this survey. Your child may feel uncomfortable and sad due to fictional character deaths. In the case of an emergency, the XXX High School counselling department is available.

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Benefits of Participation:

There are no direct benefits resulting from participation in this survey, but your child might experience a new interest in Greek myths or *The Lightning Thief*.

Confidentiality

All information collected from this survey will be done via Google Forms, and their interview responses will be stored on a password-protected Google Drive. They will be audio recorded through Vocaroo, a fully online and secure recording platform where I will download audio files to Google Drive. The level of analysis being performed is at the individual level, so participant numbers will replace names. No information collected will be distributed. The records will be stored in a password-protected Google Drive for three years and will then be destroyed.

Voluntary Nature of the Study

Participation in this survey is voluntary.

Your decision whether or not to participate in the survey will not affect any class or transcript grades or records at XXX High School. Questions on the survey and/or interview can be left unsubmitted and unanswered. If you or your child choose not to participate or stop participating, there will be no penalty.

Consent

- By signing your name on this form, you consent to your child being in this study, and can remove them from the study at any time.
- If you have any questions, please contact the AP Research instructor XXX, at XXX@XXX.com.

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Statement of Consent [use if distributing via SIS]

Please indicate below whether or not you give your child permission to participate.

By typing your name below, you are acknowledging you have read and understand the information presented and you are giving your consent for your child to participate in the study.

Parent/Guardian Name

Select today's date below

Appendix E: Student Assent Form

STUDENT ASSENT FORM

Greek Myth and Myth Retelling: Differences in Adolescent Engagement

This form is to request permission for you to respond to a survey for a research project investigating the extent to which adolescents aged thirteen to nineteen experience the four aspects of narrative engagement (narrative understanding, attentional focus, narrative presence, emotional engagement) differently when reading Greek myths versus young adult fantasy Greek myth retellings. You were selected as a possible participant because you attend XXX High School and are aged from thirteen to nineteen. The study seeks to the extent of difference in adolescent engagement regarding Greek myths versus Greek myth retellings.

This study is being conducted by: a student in the AP Research course of the AP Capstone program offered at XXX High School. This course is under the direction of, XXX, an English teacher at XXX High School.

Your participation is voluntary. Because you are a student in the district, your assent is required before you can participate in the study. Please note that your parent/guardian will also be asked to indicate whether or not he/she is willing for you to participate. Parent and child permission are both required before you can participate.

Please consider the information carefully and feel free to ask questions before signing off on your participation. If you assent to your participation, please sign this form. You can select to receive a copy of your response to this form.

Procedures

Participants will be randomly selected to either listen to an audiobook read an excerpt from *The Lightning Thief* by Rick Riordan regarding Medusa or from *D'Aulaire's Book of Greek Myths* by Edgar Parin d'Aulaire and Ingri Parin d'Aulaire, and follow along with a printed copy of the excerpt. Then, they will answer four questions regarding their age, ethnicity, race, and gender on Google Forms. Then, they will answer a couple short multiple choice questions to check their understanding of the excerpt. Finally, they will answer four open ended interview questions related to their engagement. These interviews will be audio recorded and stored on a password protected Google Drive, not shared. They will be used to generate themes regarding engagement.

Risk and Benefits of being in the study

Possible Risks:

There are minimal risks with participating in this survey. You may feel uncomfortable and sad due to fictional character deaths. In the case of an emergency, the XXX High School counselling department is available.

Benefits of Participation:

There are no direct benefits resulting from participation in this survey, but you might experience a new interest in Greek myths or *The Lightning Thief*.

Confidentiality

All information collected from this survey will be done so via Google Forms, and your interview responses will be audio recorded on Vocaroo (a fully online recording platform), stored on a password-protected Google Drive. The level of analysis being performed is at the individual level, so participant numbers will replace names. No information collected will be distributed. The records will be stored in a password-protected Google Drive for three years and will then be destroyed.

Voluntary Nature of the Study

Participation in this survey is voluntary.

Your decision whether or not to participate in the survey will not affect any class or transcript grades or records at XXX High School. Questions on the survey/interview can be left blank and you are free to not submit the survey. If you choose not to participate or stop participating, there will be no penalty.

Right to Ask Questions and Report Concerns

- You have the right to ask questions about this research study and to have those questions answered by me before, during or after the research. If you have any further questions about the study, at any time feel free to contact XXX at XXX@XXX.com.
- By signing your name on this form, you assent to participating in this study, and you can remove yourself from the study at any time.
- If you have any questions, please contact the AP Research instructor XXX at XXX@XXX.com.

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[Include if distributing via SIS]

By typing your name below, you are acknowledging you have read and understand the information presented and you assent to participate in the study.

Select today's date below.

Appendix F: Adapted interview Questions

Narrative understanding

1. When, if at all, did you have a hard time understanding the story or a character's motives?
 - a. What was it that you did not understand?

Attentional focus

2. To what degree did you find your mind wandering to other things while reading?
 - a. Was there anywhere in particular?
 - b. What changed in the narrative to make your mind wander?

Narrative presence

3. What do you think it means to be inside the world created by the story while reading?
 - a. Did you experience this while reading?

Emotional engagement

4. Where in the story did you feel something different from your everyday emotions?
 - a. What do you think the characters were feeling at that moment?
 - b. What were you feeling at that moment?

Appendix G: Demographic Questions and Myth Retelling Check for Understanding

i. What is your age?

- a. 13
- b. 14
- c. 15
- d. 16
- e. 17
- f. 18
- g. 19

ii. What is your gender?

- a. Male
- b. Female
- c. Non-Binary
- d. Prefer not to say

iii. What is your race?

- a. American Indian
- b. Alaska Native
- c. Asian
- d. Black or African American
- e. Native Hawaiian or other Pacific islander
- f. White
- g. Other Race
- h. Prefer Not to Say

iv. What is your ethnicity?

- a. Hispanic or Latino
- b. Not Hispanic
- c. Prefer Not to Say

1. Who is Aunty Em?

- a. Medusa
- b. Annabeth's sister
- c. Percy's grandmother
- d. The minotaur

2. Who was the one who cursed Aunty Em?

- a. Annabeth
- b. Percy

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- c. Athena
 - d. Her husband
3. Who did Aunty Em have an affair with?
- a. Poseidon
 - b. Percy
 - c. Her husband
 - d. None of the above
4. Who killed Aunty Em?
- a. Annabeth
 - b. Percy
 - c. Athena
 - d. Zeus
5. How did the one killing Aunty Em feel about doing so?
- a. Reluctant
 - b. Eager
 - c. Angry
 - d. Disgusted
6. Why did the character kill Aunty Em?
- a. To avenge his/her father
 - b. To get her head
 - c. To prove their worth
 - d. To stop her from turning more people into stone

Appendix H: Demographic Questions and Medusa Myth Check for Understanding

i. What is your age?

- h. 13
- i. 14
- j. 15
- k. 16
- l. 17
- m. 18
- n. 19

ii. What is your gender?

- e. Male
- f. Female
- g. Non-Binary
- h. Prefer not to say

iii. What is your race?

- i. American Indian
- j. Alaska Native
- k. Asian
- l. Black or African American
- m. Native Hawaiian or other Pacific islander
- n. White
- o. Other Race
- p. Prefer Not to Say

iv. What is your ethnicity?

- d. Hispanic or Latino
- e. Not Hispanic
- f. Prefer Not to Say

1. Why was Danae exiled?

- a. An oracle said that her son would kill the king, her father
- b. She was too beautiful
- c. She committed theft
- d. She angered the gods

2. Why did Perseus need to kill Medusa?

- a. To prove himself to his mother
- b. To avenge his father
- c. Hera sent him

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- d. The king of the island fell in love with his mother and wanted him dead

3. Who helped Perseus?

- a. Athena
- b. Hermes
- c. The Graeae
- d. All of the above

4. Which of the following is true?

- a. Perseus killed Medusa without injuring himself
- b. Perseus killed Medusa but injured himself
- c. Perseus was too scared to kill Medusa
- d. Perseus was turned to stone