Please note: This response was developed against the 2017 Subject Outline and has been remarked against the criteria for 2018.

Stage 2 Ancient Studies

Assessment Type 3: Inquiry

**Mythical creatures in Ancient Greece symbolised the influence the gods imposed  
on the lives of Greeks. What was the significance of these creatures in the daily lives of Greek Citizens?**

Mythology and mythical creatures of Ancient Greece played a pivotal role in the Greek society and strongly influenced the folklore of that era. Mythology played a vital role in Ancient Greece as it is the study of mainly religious and heroic legends that are found hard to be believed. Myths have two main functions; one is to explain the creation and destruction of the world and all living things. The other function of a myth was to justify the social system and traditional rites and customs. Whilst gods and goddesses were the main focal point in Greek mythology there were many other characters that were essential to these tales. Many mythical tales use a mortal as the main character, without mortals there would be no influence on the Greek society, therefore having a negative effect on the entire Greek society as religion played a major role in the daily lives of the Greek citizens. To emphasize the gods influence on the Greek society, mythical creatures played a fundamental role; how much of a role was determined by the hierarchy amongst the different types of mythical creatures. Mythical creatures and human hybrids are used in some way by the mortal lead character to achieve the desired outcome.

Mythology focuses on the supernatural beings and gods that are in charge of different aspects of life or the world in regards to religious and heroic legends. The creation and destruction of the world are represented by stories of conflict between good and evil. The word "myth" meaning "story" in Ancient Greece gave the inventors a way in which to tell their story of creation. Many of these stories involved mythical creatures as a way for the teller to describe how they thought the gods could take the forms of animals and pro-create with humans, whilst still respecting the ideas and ambitions of the daily lives of everyday Greeks.

Oracles played a significant role in Greek religion, as insight was a very important part of the Greek religious life. The Greek citizens turned to oracles for insight into their future as death was considered an inevitable evil and they required information on their future life on earth, the insight given by the oracles supported the Greeks religious believes demonstrated by their myths of creation. The oracle was a priest or priestess who acted as a mediator between man and the gods. Some of the most recognized oracles are Zeus' at Dodona and Apollo's at Delphi. One of the most famous tales, 'Perseus,' started with the king of Argolis, Akrisios, consulting with an oracle as to whether he would ever have an heir. The oracle, however, gravely disappointed him by saying "at the hands of his grandson he would meet his death" Following the advice of the oracle King Akrisios locked his daughter Danaë away from mankind, unknowingly allowing Zeus to fulfil his desires and nine months later Danaë gave birth to Perseus.

The first mythical creatures mentioned in the story of Perseus are the Cyclopes. The original Cyclopes Argos, Steropes, and Brontes were minor gods of the second generation and children of Uranus and Gaia. The Cyclopes were metal workers and blacksmiths who assisted the god Hephaestus in constructing lightning bolts for Zeus, the trident that was made for Poseidon and the helmet of darkness that was given to Hades. The Greeks believed that the Cyclops resided under the volcano Mt. Aetna and when the volcano smoked it was a sign that the Cyclopes were working at their forge. The Cyclops assisted Proitos by giving their services and by doing so Proitos was able to surround Tiryns with large stone wails commonly known as the Cyclopean walls, which shielded the Greek citizens of Tiryns from any outside attacks; the ruins of the wall can still be seen today. The Ancient Greek citizen's myths about the Cyclops demon straight how fragile the mind is and how easy it is to manipulate someone that does not under the full consequences of their actions. It also demonstrates the power of the classes, because the Cyclops was a lower class god they had to obey the higher gods. The Greek citizens could strongly relate to the Cyclops as they to were broken up into several classes who had to obey the classes before them.

In 'Perseus', attempts to foil king Polydektes attempts at marrying his mother, Perseus engages in an argument with the king over the expense of a horse which he can not afford "you might as well ask me to give you the head of the Gorgon Medusa."[[1]](#footnote-1) The King doubted Perseus' ability to do and enraged by this, Perseus sets out to find the Gorgon Medusa. Medusa was the only mortal gorgon; she was once a beautiful young girl whose looks enchanted the god Poseidon, who ravaged her in the temple of Athena. Athena was outraged that her temple had been desecrated in such a way, and she punished the temptress by turning her into a gorgon, with snake hair and a terrifyingly hideous face which turned anyone who looked upon it into stone. Perseus set out to find Medusa with the help of the goddess Athena and the messenger to the gods, Hermes, who assisted him by supplying him with an unbreakable sickle to cut off the head of Medusa, which was then affixed to the centre of Athena's shield, the aegis. The Greeks used Medusa as a role model for what the gods would do to them if they desecrated their temples or in any way displeased them. The Greek citizens referred to Medusa as being an evil seducer, who the women had to hide their husbands from until she was turned into a beast. The women still had to shield their husbands from Medusa in her beastly form as she would sorely kill them if they tried to kill her.

The next mythical creatures that Perseus encountered were the Stygian Nymphs. The Stygian Nymphs appearances were similar to those of normal nymphs apart from having a fan- like appendage on their backs which was able to fold down. The Stygian Nymphs were forging creatures that were known for creating powerful talismans and artefacts. In order to protect their creations the Stygian Nymphs lived and forged at a dark pool on the hidden river of Styx before the river runs down into Tartarus, the route to their location is a secret that only the Stygian Nymphs and the Graiae sisters know. Hermes sent Perseus to find the Stygian Nymphs, as Hades had charged them with guardianship of a pair of winged sandals, a magic bag to hold the Gorgon's head, and the Cap of Darkness that makes its wearer invisible. The major role the Stygian Nymphs played in the lives of Greek citizens was that they were sometimes considered death omens because of their birthplace, and often marvelled for their work on the god's talismans. The Greek citizens referred to the Stygian Nymphs as the treasurers of the gods without whom the myths would have no foundation.

With the help of the Stygian Nymphs Perseus was able to find the Graiae. The Graiae were known as the children of Phorcys, the god of the sea, and Ceto the sea monster, making the Graiae sisters to the Gorgons, Sirens, Echidna, Ladon, Scylla and the Thoosa. The primary role of the Graiae was to be the guardians of their sisters the Gorgons and protect the secret location of them. The three Graiae sisters were Deino was known as dread or terrible, as she had dreadful anticipation of horror, Enyo was known as horror or war- like, and Pemphredo was known as alarm. The Graiae took the form of old grey-haired women, sometimes referred to as sea hags or the Stygian witches. The sisters shared one eye and tooth among them, by stealing either their tooth or eye when they were passing it amongst themselves Perseus was able to force the Graiae to tell him where the Gorgons were by playing on their fear of being permanently blind, and as the Graiae were more afraid of loosing their sight forever then failing to fulfil their obligation as secret keepers they told Perseus where to find the Gorgon. Although often described as being hideous to look at, the Graiae did little to antagonize anyone and by doing so they did not play an active role in the lives of the Greek citizens. They did not appear in any other major tales besides 'Perseus', but they participated in minor references as part of the numbers of the three sisterhoods that populated the tales. The Graiae sisters were feared by the Greek citizen because of grotesque appetence and dealings with the sea. The Graiae were primarily used as a minor device to explain other gods or events.

Mythical creatures act as symbols of the gods, these symbols are important in distinguishing the types of gods and goddesses as the Greek artists tend to idealize their depictions of the gods. It is often difficult to distinguish the gods and goddesses purely on their physical representations, as many of the goddesses such as Athena, Aphrodite and Hera all have similar faces and bodies. Their particular symbols allow the Greek citizens to clearly identify them. Mythical creatures impact the type of symbol shown with a god. One of Zeus' symbols is a thunderbolt forged for him by the Cyclops; this is important to the people as Zeus is the father and ruler of all the Olympus gods. The goddess Athena's main symbol is her aegis with the head of the Gorgon Medusa on it. The god messenger Hermes' symbol was his caduceus, a short herald's staff entwined by two serpents in the form of a double helix and surmounted by wings. Iris owned the staff first as she was the messenger for Hera.

The Greek citizens were surrounded each day by sculptures and paintings of gods and goddesses as well as the mythical creature they created or destroyed. The citizens of Greece were told about mythical creatures as a part of their creation theories. Mythical creatures impacted on their daily lives not dramatically but in a consistent religious manner. The Greek citizens not only believed that mythical creatures existed because of their religious beliefs but because of the similarities in their appearances compared to the animals of their time.

**Bibliography**

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| *Assessment Design Criteria* | *Grade* | *Comment* |
| KU1 | C | The student shows evidence of knowledge of myths though much of this is in the form of recount. There is an understanding of the roles myths and oracles played in ancient life. |
| KU2 | D | There is little engagement with the diversity of experience in the ancient world. |
| KU3 | C | The student is dealing with a historical concept – how does the past (mythology) impact on the present. How can the past be seen to outwork in society |
| RA1 | C- | The student evidences research into myths but with limited analysis. |
| RA2 | C- | The student identified an idea from the Ancient world – mythology symbolizing the gods in daily life and attempted to trace its impact on citizens but without depth of research or analysis of impact |
| A1 | D | Descriptive, recount use of material from sources, but no acknowledgement of sources outside of the bibliography. |
| A2 | C | The student has used elements of essay structures to aid in the communication of idea. There is an introduction which gives context and some outlining of argument. Material is broken up into paragraphs which contain a disciplined topic each. An opening sentence states the topic but without linking it to the argument. Limited analysis of ideas does not help persuade the audience or make clear what the student’s argument is.  There is some use of subject specific mythological terminology. |
| A3 | D | Within the text sources are rarely acknowledged either for ideas or use made of quotes to support argument.  The bibliography reveals a surface consideration of the use of sources. There is no primary source material, no academic research on mythology. The student has predominately relied on readily accessible websites |
| **Overall Grade** | **C-** |  |

Performance Standards for Stage 2 Ancient Studies

| - | Knowledge and Understanding | Research and Analysis | Application |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| A | In-depth knowledge and critical understanding of texts, artefacts, ideas, events, and/or people of the ancient world.  Discerning and well-informed recognition of, and insightful reflection on, the political, social, cultural, and/or economic diversity within the ancient world.  Insightful knowledge and understanding of historical and/or archaeological concepts. | Comprehensive research and critical analysis of appropriate primary and secondary sources and perspectives.  Insightful research into and understanding of ideas and innovations that emerged from the ancient world, and in-depth consideration of their influence. | Comprehensive synthesis of evidence and appropriate and consistent acknowledgment of sources.  Clear, precise, and highly persuasive communication of ideas and arguments, using subject-specific language.  Perceptive, consistent, and accurate evaluation of the nature of sources and evidence. |
| B | Some depth of knowledge and understanding of texts, artefacts, ideas, events, and/or people of the ancient world.  Well-informed recognition of, and thoughtful reflection on, the political, social, cultural, and/or economic diversity within the ancient world.  Some depth of knowledge and understanding of historical and/or archaeological concepts. | Well-considered research and critical analysis of appropriate primary and secondary sources and perspectives.  Thoughtful research into and understanding of ideas and innovations that emerged from the ancient world, and some depth in consideration of their influence. | Well-considered synthesis of evidence and appropriate acknowledgment of sources.  Clear and persuasive communication of ideas and arguments, using subject-specific language.  Consistent and accurate evaluation of the nature of sources and evidence. |
| C | Knowledge and understanding of texts, artefacts, ideas, events, and/or people of the ancient world.  Generally informed recognition of, and considered reflection on, the political, social, cultural, and/or economic diversity within the ancient world.  Knowledge and understanding of historical and/or archaeological concepts. | Competent research and analysis of appropriate primary and secondary sources and perspectives.  Research into and understanding of ideas and innovations that emerged from the ancient world, and consideration of their influence. | Description with some synthesis of evidence and acknowledgment of sources.  Informed communication of ideas and arguments, using some subject-specific language.  Consideration and some evaluation of the nature of sources and evidence. |
| D | Recognition and basic understanding of texts, artefacts, ideas, events, and/or people of the ancient world.  Recognition and superficial consideration or description of the political, social, cultural, and/or economic diversity within the ancient world.  Recognition of one or more historical and/or archaeological concepts. | Identification and basic consideration of primary and secondary sources and/or perspectives, mainly using description.  Recognition and superficial consideration of ideas and innovations that emerged from the ancient world. | Description of evidence with acknowledgment of sources.  Superficial communication of ideas and arguments.  Superficial consideration of the nature of sources and evidence. |
| E | Limited awareness of an aspect of the ancient world.  Attempted description and emerging awareness of the political, social, cultural, and/or economic diversity within the ancient world.  Some awareness of a historical or archaeological concept. | Limited identification or use of sources.  Some awareness of an idea or innovation that emerged from the ancient world. | Attempted description of evidence.  Attempted communication of an idea or one or more points towards an argument.  Limited consideration of a source. |

1. Gill, N, S, The Gorgon Medusa in Greek Mythology, About.com, viewed 16/9/09 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)