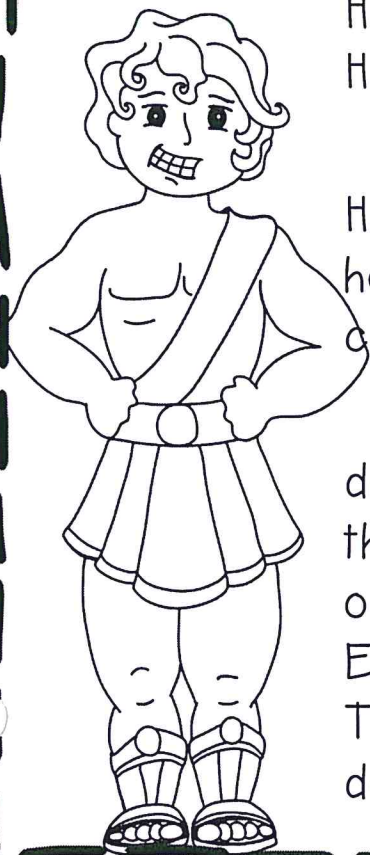


The Twelve Labors of Heracles

The goddess, Hera, despised Heracles from the moment he was born, so she was determined to make trouble for him.

One day, while baby Heracles was asleep, Hera placed two huge snakes in his crib. She hoped they would finally rid her of this baby she hated so much. But just as the snakes were slithering around his neck to strangle him, he tied the snakes in knots and braided them together. Then he tossed them out of his crib. Everyone was amazed by Heracles's strength; everyone that is, except for Hera. She was furious that a mere baby had defeated her. Hera was determined to get even with Heracles.

Heracles grew up to be a strong young man. He married and had many children. Heracles was loved by everyone and was honored time and time again for his heroic deeds. This outraged Hera. She was bound and determined to make Heracles suffer once and for all.



Hera worked her magic and placed a spell on Heracles. He went into a state of madness, and he totally lost his mind. During this state of confusion, Heracles killed his entire family.

Once the spell was lifted, Heracles was distraught about what he had done. He prayed to the god Apollo and asked for guidance. The god's oracle told Heracles he would have to serve King Eurystheus for twelve years as a punishment. The king hated Heracles and gave him twelve deadly and impossible tasks to complete.

The Twelve Labors of Heracles

The first task that Heracles had to complete was to kill a fierce lion. This lion had reeked havoc on the kingdom by eating men, women, and children. Heracles entered the lion's cave with no weapon, just his bare hands. He took the lion by its throat and strangled it. Then he skinned the lion and made a cloak from the hide.

The second task was to kill the Hydra. The Hydra was a huge serpent that had many heads. When it was born, it had nine heads, but every time one of its heads was cut off, two new ones grew in its place. At this point, the Hydra had fifty heads that were gnashing their teeth in anger. Heracles began cutting off the heads, but he soon realized this was a losing battle because two heads kept replacing the one he cut off. Heracles set fire to his club and reentered the fight. He began cutting off the heads again, but quickly burned the stump where the head had been slashed, so it could not grow back. He finally was able to defeat the Hydra. Nothing was left of it but a nubby tree stump.

The third task was to capture a deer with golden antlers. The deer was the fastest in all of the land. After a year of hunting the golden stag, Heracles finally captured it with a net while it slept.

Capturing a wild boar was the fourth task. The boar roamed the snow covered mountains and had tusks that were so sharp, they could pierce through armor. Heracles hunted the boar, trapped it, and wrapped it in chains.

The fifth task was an unpleasant one. Heracles was ordered to clean King Augean's stables. They had not been cleaned in years, so there were mounds of manure everywhere.

The Twelve Labors of Heracles

Heracles built a dam so that a nearby river would change directions. The water flowed through the stables and cleansed them.

King Eurystheus was ready with more commands when Heracles returned. Heracles was to destroy a flock of man-eating birds from the lake, tame the mad bull of Crete, and capture the famous wild horses that ran like the wind. All of which Heracles completed.

King Eurystheus decided to use Heracles as a way to get rich. For his ninth task, he sent Heracles to fetch the jeweled belt worn by the Queen of the Amazons. The Amazons were large, fierce women that were much stronger than most men. Heracles found this particular task easy. He simply asked the queen for the belt. She felt sorry for Heracles and handed it over to him.

And so it continued, when one task was complete, King Eurystheus assigned another one. Heracles found himself stealing a monster's cattle. He simply shot the monster with a bow and snatched the cattle.

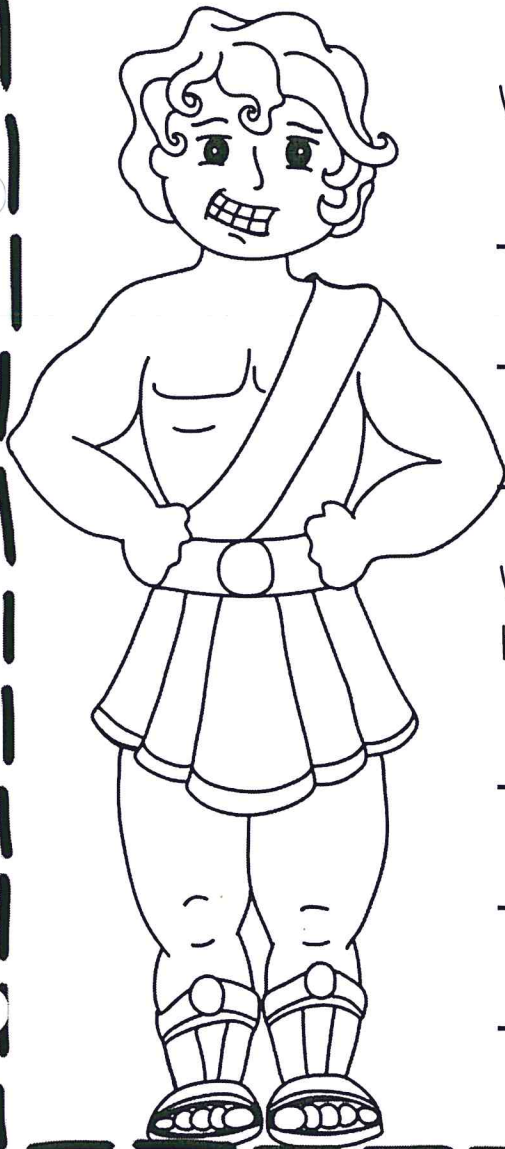
Then Heracles had to travel to the dreaded Underworld and steal Cerberus, the three-headed dog that belonged to Hades. The dog guarded the gates of the Underworld. Once Heracles returned to King Eurystheus with evil dog, the king was scared of it and made Heracles return Cerberus to the Underworld.

The last task was to collect golden apples from the Tree of Hesperides. These magical apples grew on a tree in the garden that was at the end of the world. The tree was guarded by a dragon that never slept.

The Twelve Labors of Heracles

Heracles knew that the dragon was more than he could handle. However, Heracles remembered that Atlas was a friend of the dragon and would have no problem getting the apples. So, Heracles found Atlas, who held the weight of the sky on his shoulders at the edge of the Earth. Atlas offered to pick the apples if Heracles would hold the sky while he went to get them.

After twelve years and completing the twelve labors, Heracles was forgiven for killing his family. However, Heracles never forgave himself for what he had done. Heracles was a mortal and eventually died. But the gods did not forget him.



What is the theme of the story?

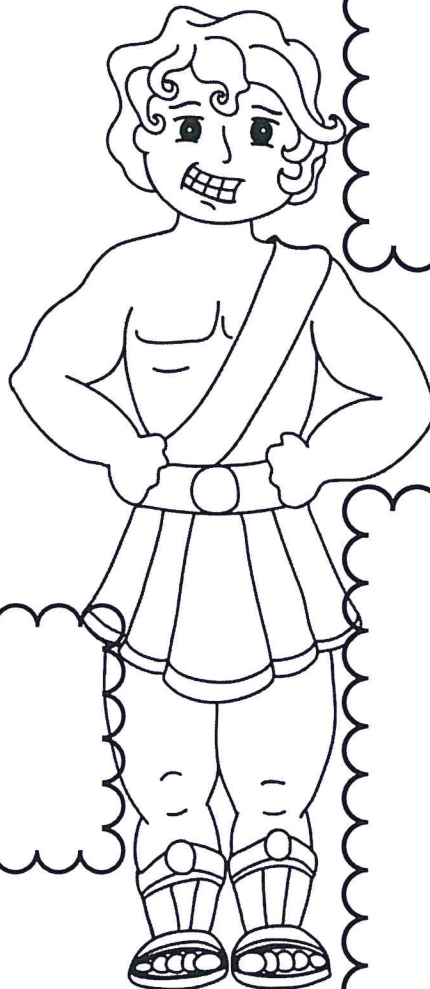
What does the allusion "Herculean" or "a Herculean task" mean?

Heracles

What character traits would you use to describe Heracles? Use evidence from the text to support your answer.

Character Trait

Evidence from the text



Character Trait

Evidence from the text