

Classical Civilisation Summer School

GCSE Myth and Religion Activities

A. On the day after a Classicist has been appointed Prime Minister...

1. Which individual (god, hero, mortal, monster etc.) from the Myth and Religion syllabus do you think Boris Johnson *considers himself* to resemble most and why?
2. Which individual (god, hero, mortal, monster etc.) from the Myth and Religion syllabus *do you consider* Boris Johnson to resemble most and why?

B. Heracles is often described as a 'culture hero' whose labours were intended to be civilising activities. They were considered good for the world at the time.



Can you think of twenty-first century equivalents to each of the twelve labours of Heracles? I have provided the account of the 12 labours known from Pseudo-Apollodorus, which gives some additional detail about the various labours, but you do not have to accept his interpretation. You can think about why the labours were chosen, and what modern problems might be equivalent to ancient ones (e.g. dung of Augeas = pollution?)

Three sets of four labours

- A. Nemean Lion, Cerynean Hind, Augean stables, Stymphalian Birds
- B. Lernaean Hydra, Cretan Bull, Mares of Diomedes, Belt of Hippolyte
- C. Erymanthean Boar, Cattle of Geryon, Apples of the Hesperides, Cerberus

The Labours of Heracles (extracts from Pseudo-Apollodorus, *Library of Mythology* 2.5)

Note that the order is different from that of the Olympia metopes. Other elements of the story (e.g. ten labours becoming twelve) would not necessarily have been commonly agreed.

The Pythian priestess told Heracles to dwell in Tiryns, serving Eurystheus for twelve years and to perform the ten labours imposed on him, and so, she said, when the tasks were accomplished, he would be immortal.

1. First, Eurystheus ordered him to bring the skin of the Nemean lion; now that was an invulnerable beast begotten by Typhon. On his way to attack the lion he came to Cleonae and lodged at the house of a day-laborer, Molorchus... And having come to Nemea and tracked the lion, he first shot an arrow at him, but when he perceived that the beast was invulnerable, he heaved up his club and made after him. And when the lion took refuge in a cave with two mouths, Heracles built up the one entrance and came in upon the beast through the other, and putting his arm round its neck held it tight till he had choked it; so laying it on his shoulders he carried it to Cleonae... He brought the lion to Mycenae. Amazed at his manhood, Eurystheus forbade him thenceforth to enter the city, but ordered him to exhibit the fruits of his labours before the gates.

2. As a second labour he ordered him to kill the Lernaean hydra. That creature, bred in the swamp of Lerna, used to go forth into the plain and ravage both the cattle and the country. Now the hydra had a huge body, with nine heads, eight mortal, but the middle one immortal. So mounting a chariot driven by Iolaus, he came to Lerna, and having halted his horses, he discovered the hydra on a hill beside the springs of the Amymone, where was its den. By pelting it with fiery shafts he forced it to come out, and in the act of doing so he seized and held it fast. But the hydra wound itself about one of his feet and clung to him. Nor could he effect anything by smashing its heads with his club, for as fast as one head was smashed there grew up two. A huge crab also came to the help of the hydra by biting his foot. So he killed it, and in his turn called for help on Iolaus who, by setting fire to a piece of the neighboring wood and burning the roots of the heads with the brands, prevented them from sprouting. Having thus got the better of the sprouting heads, he chopped off the immortal head, and buried it, and put a heavy rock on it, beside the road that leads through Lerna to Elaeus. But the body of the hydra he slit up and dipped his arrows in the gall. However, Eurystheus said that this labour should not be reckoned among the ten because he had not got the better of the hydra by himself, but with the help of Iolaus.

3. As a third labour he ordered him to bring the Cerynean hind alive to Mycenae. Now the hind was at Oenoe; it had golden horns and was sacred to Artemis; so wishing neither to kill nor wound it, Heracles hunted it a whole year. But when, weary with the chase, the beast took refuge on the mountain called Artemisius, and thence passed to the river Ladon, Heracles shot it just as it was about to cross the stream, and catching it put it on his shoulders and hastened through Arcadia. But Artemis with Apollo met him, and would have wrested the hind from him, and rebuked him for attempting to kill her sacred animal. Howbeit, by pleading necessity and laying the blame on Eurystheus, he appeased the anger of the goddess and carried the beast alive to Mycenae.

4. As a fourth labour he ordered him to bring the Erymanthian boar alive; now that animal ravaged Psophis, sallying from a mountain which they call Erymanthus... And when he had chased the boar with shouts from a certain thicket, he drove the exhausted animal into deep snow, trapped it, and brought it to Mycenae.

5. The fifth labour he laid on him was to carry out the dung of the cattle of Augeas in a single day. Now Augeas was king of Elis; some say that he was a son of the Sun, others that he was a son of Poseidon, and others that he was a son of Phorbas; and he had many herds of cattle. Heracles accosted him, and without revealing the command of Eurystheus, said that he would carry out the dung in one day, if Augeas would give him the tithe of the cattle. Augeas was incredulous, but promised. Having taken Augeas's son Phyleus to witness, Heracles made a breach in the foundations of the cattle-yard, and then, diverting the courses of the Alpheus and Peneus, which flowed near each other, he turned them into the yard, having first made an outlet for the water through another opening... But Eurystheus would not admit this labour either among the ten, alleging that it had been performed for hire.

6. The sixth labour he enjoined on him was to chase away the Stymphalian birds. Now at the city of Stymphalus in Arcadia was the lake called Stymphalian, embosomed in a deep wood. To it countless birds had flocked for refuge, fearing to be preyed upon by the wolves. So when Heracles was at a loss how to drive the birds from the wood, Athena gave him brazen castanets, which she had received from Hephaestus. By clashing these on a certain mountain that overhung the lake, he scared the birds. They could not abide the sound, but fluttered up in a fright, and in that way Heracles shot them.

7. The seventh labour he enjoined on him was to bring the Cretan bull. Acusilaus says that this was the bull that ferried across Europa for Zeus; but some say it was the bull that Poseidon sent up from the sea when Minos promised to sacrifice to Poseidon what should appear out of the sea. And they say that when he saw the beauty of the bull he sent it away to the herds and sacrificed another to Poseidon; at which the god was angry and made the bull savage. To attack this bull Heracles came to Crete, and when, in reply to his request for aid, Minos told him to fight and catch the bull for himself, he caught it and brought it to Eurystheus, and having shown it to him he let it afterwards go free. But the bull roamed to Sparta and all Arcadia, and traversing the Isthmus arrived at Marathon in Attica and harried the inhabitants.

8. The eighth labour he enjoined on him was to bring the mares of Diomedes the Thracian to Mycenae. Now this Diomedes was a son of Ares and Cyrene, and he was king of the Bistones, a very warlike Thracian people, and he owned man-eating mares. So Heracles sailed with a band of volunteers, and having overpowered the grooms who were in charge of the mangers, he drove the mares to the sea. When the Bistones in arms came to the rescue, he committed the mares to the guardianship of Abderus, who was a son of Hermes, a native of Opus in Locris, and a minion of Heracles; but the mares killed him by dragging him after them. But Heracles fought against the Bistones, slew Diomedes and compelled the rest to flee. And he founded a city Abdera beside the grave of Abderus who had been done to death, and bringing the mares he gave them to Eurystheus. But Eurystheus let them go, and they came to Mount Olympus, as it is called, and there they were destroyed by the wild beasts.

9. The ninth labour he enjoined on Heracles was to bring the belt of Hippolyte. She was queen of the Amazons, who dwelt about the river Thermodon, a people great in war; for they cultivated the manly virtues, and if ever they gave birth to children through intercourse with the other sex, they reared the females; and they pinched off the right breasts that they might not be trammelled by them in throwing the javelin, but they kept the left breasts, that they might suckle. Now Hippolyte had the belt of Ares in token of her superiority to all the rest. Heracles was sent to fetch this belt because Admete, daughter of Eurystheus, desired to get it. So taking with him a band of volunteer comrades in a single ship he set sail... Having put in at the harbour of Themiscyra, he received a visit from Hippolyte, who inquired why he was come, and promised to give him the belt. But Hera in the likeness of an Amazon went up and down the multitude saying that the strangers who had arrived were carrying off the queen. So the Amazons in arms charged on horseback down on the ship. But when Heracles saw them in arms, he suspected treachery, and killing Hippolyte stripped her of her belt. And after fighting the rest he sailed away and touched at Troy... And having brought the belt to Mycenae he gave it to Eurystheus.

10. As a tenth labour he was ordered to fetch the cattle of Geryon from Erythia. Now Erythia was an island near the ocean; it is now called Gadir. This island was inhabited by Geryon, son of Chrysaor by Callirrhoe, daughter of Ocean. He had the body of three men grown together and joined in one at the waist, but parted in three from the flanks and thighs. He owned red cattle, of which Eurytion was the herdsman and Orthus, the two-headed hound, begotten by Typhon on Echidna, was the watchdog... And having reached Erythia he lodged on Mount Abas. However the dog, perceiving him, rushed at him; but he smote it with his club, and when the herdsman Eurytion came to the help of the dog, Heracles killed him also. But Menoetes, who was there pasturing the cattle of Hades, reported to Geryon what had occurred, and he, coming up with Heracles beside the river Anthemus, as he was driving away the cattle, joined battle with him and was shot dead... And he conveyed the cattle and gave them to Eurystheus, who sacrificed them to Hera.

11. When the labours had been performed in eight years and a month, Eurystheus ordered Heracles, as an eleventh labour, to fetch golden apples from the Hesperides, for he did not acknowledge the labour of the cattle of Augeas nor that of the hydra. These apples were not, as some have said, in Libya, but on Atlas among the Hyperboreans. They were presented to Zeus after his marriage with Hera, and guarded by an immortal dragon with a hundred heads, offspring of Typhon and Echidna, which spoke with many and divers sorts of voices. With it the Hesperides also were on guard, to wit, Aegle, Erythia, Hesperia, and Arethusa... Now Prometheus had told Heracles not to go himself after the apples but to send Atlas, first relieving him of the burden of the sphere; so when he was come to Atlas in the land of the Hyperboreans, he took the advice and relieved Atlas. But when Atlas had received three apples from the Hesperides, he came to Heracles, and not wishing to support the sphere he said that he would himself carry the apples to Eurystheus, and bade Heracles hold up the sky in his stead. Heracles promised to do so, but succeeded by craft in putting it on Atlas instead. For at the advice of Prometheus he begged Atlas to hold up the sky till he should put a pad on his head. When Atlas heard that, he laid the apples down on the ground and took the sphere from Heracles. And so Heracles picked up the apples and departed. But some say that he did not get them from Atlas, but that he plucked the apples himself after killing the guardian snake. And having brought the apples he gave them to Eurystheus. But he, on receiving them, bestowed them on Heracles, from whom Athena got them and conveyed them back again; for it was not lawful that they should be laid down anywhere.

12. A twelfth labour imposed on Heracles was to bring Cerberus from Hades. Now this Cerberus had three heads of dogs, the tail of a dragon, and on his back the heads of all sorts of snakes. When Heracles was about to depart to fetch him, he went to Eumolpus at Eleusis, wishing to be initiated. However it was not then lawful for foreigners to be initiated: since he proposed to be initiated as the adoptive son of Pylus. But not being able to see the mysteries because he had not been cleansed of the slaughter of the centaurs, he was cleansed by Eumolpus and then initiated. And having come to Taenarum in Laconia, where is the mouth of the descent to Hades, he descended through it... When Heracles asked Pluto for Cerberus, Pluto ordered him to take the animal provided he mastered him without the use of the weapons which he carried. Heracles found him at the gates of Acheron, and, cased in his cuirass and covered by the lion's skin, he flung his arms round the head of the brute, and though the dragon in its tail bit him, he never relaxed his grip and pressure till it yielded. So he carried it off and ascended through Troezen. And Heracles, after showing Cerberus to Eurystheus, carried him back to Hades.