

## Lesson 2. The Olympian Gods

Use the information you find in this lesson to begin to fill in the gods and goddesses chart at the end of this lesson; you will also need to do your own research to complete it.

Now that you understand the way that the Greeks viewed the beginning of the world, you are ready to learn about the Olympian gods.

First, we have to explore exactly what we mean by “Olympian gods.” Mount Olympus is a real mountain in the north of Greece. Gradually, it became associated less and less with an actual mountain and more with an imaginary place high above the earth. According to the ancient Greeks, the gate to Olympus was made of clouds and it was guarded by four goddesses, the Seasons. Each god had his or her own dwelling place, but Olympus was home base.

There were up to 14 gods considered Olympian gods. Seven of them were Zeus and his siblings, and seven others were children of Zeus. Sometimes only 12 will be listed. The Greeks and Romans shared mythology, so you will find two names for most gods.

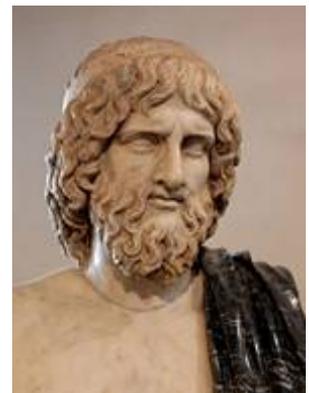


### Zeus

Zeus was the king of the hill. He was dominating, powerful and had a soft spot for pretty women. He could be terrifying when angry. His symbols were the thunderbolts, or lightening bolts made for him by the Cyclopes (his uncles); the eagle; and the scepter, or rod. Please copy this information onto your chart.

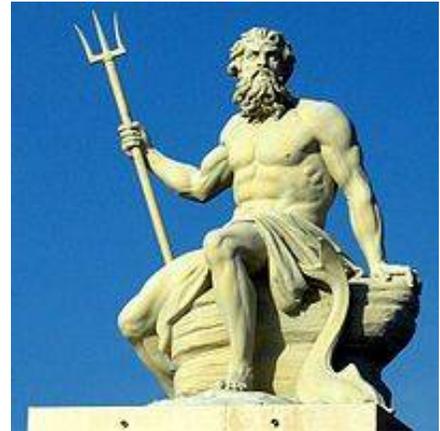
### Hades

Hades, or Pluto, was the god of the underworld and of the dead. He was called the same names by the Romans, but they also sometimes called him Dis or Dis Pater. He was Zeus’s brother and married Persephone after kidnapping her against her will. He was gloomy and frightening.



## Poseidon

Next, we have Poseidon, or Neptune, as the Romans called him. He was Zeus's brother, and he was the god of the sea and also earthquakes. He often is shown with a three-pronged spear called a trident that was made for him by his nephew, Hephaestus, and/or a fish.



## Hera

Our first goddess is Hera. She sits on the right side of Zeus and is his wife. Of course, she's his sister, too, but that's the way it was on Olympus. Hera's Roman name is Juno, and she is the queen of the gods. She is the guardian of marriage and was well-loved by the Greeks; it's kind of sad that she's the goddess of marriage but her own marriage was so bad. She was often jealous of her husband's girlfriends and did mean things to them, even the ones who didn't want anything to do with him, but she could be tender and loving as well. The peacock was her symbol. In fact, the circles in a peacock's tail are said to be the eyes of her 100-eyed servant, Argus.

## Athena

Next is Athena, or Minerva, the daughter who sprang fully formed from the head of Zeus after a major headache. She is the goddess of wisdom and war and also the protector and namesake of the city of Athens. She preferred reason to violence unless she was pushed. She turned Arachne into a spider for bragging that she could spin better than Athena. She was very competitive and is often pictured with her helmet and a spear. She carried Zeus's shield, called the aegis. The owl was her bird. Can you see it in her hand?



## Apollo

Apollo was a twin. His Roman name was the same as his Greek name. He was the god of the sun or light, poetry, music and medicine and was famous for his oracles (wise women to whom he gave his power to predict and interpret the future). He was very proud and also protective of his mother and sister. His symbols were the gold bow and arrows, and he often appears golden and shining. He wears a laurel wreath in memory of Daphne, who didn't want to be his lover and prayed to Mother Earth for help escaping him; she was turned into a laurel tree.



## Artemis

Artemis was Apollo's twin. Her Roman name was Diana, and she was the goddess of hunting, chastity and the moon. She protects women and small children, is fiercely independent and particularly dislikes men. In pictures, she is seen accompanied by three hunting hounds, a bow and a fawn.

## Ares

Ares or, as he is known by his Roman name, Mars, was the god of war. He would fight on both sides, if possible. He was young, strong and handsome, and liked to dress in battle clothes even when he wasn't fighting.



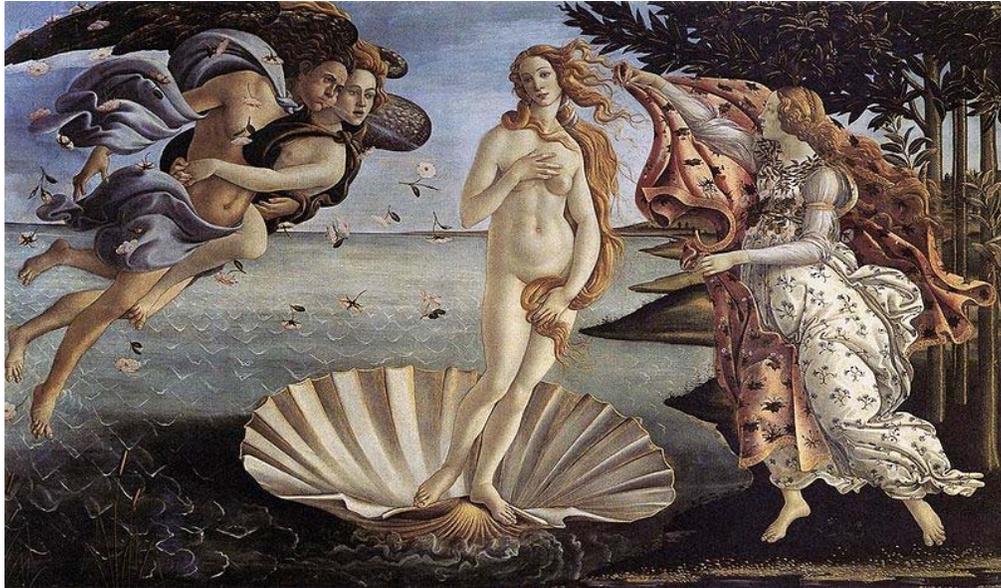
## Hephaestus

Hephaestus, or Vulcan, was born lame and was further crippled when he was thrown from Olympus by his mother, Hera, in a rage. He was the only Olympian with a disability. He was unhappily married to Aphrodite and worked as a blacksmith in the gods' forge.



## Aphrodite

Hephaestus's wife, Aphrodite, whose Roman name was Venus, was the goddess of love and beauty. She was born out of sea foam when the blood of Uranus dropped into the ocean. She was the mother of Eros and was irresistibly charming, fickle, vain and competitive. Her symbol was a cestus, or magic belt, that made everyone fall in love with the wearer; sometimes she would lend it to humans. This is a famous painting of the birth of Venus, or Aphrodite, by Botticelli.



## Hermes

Hermes, or Mercury, was the god of science and invention, but he is best known as the messenger of the gods. He is often pictured with a winged helmet and sandals. He is said to have invented the alphabet, boxing and gymnastics! In this painting by Goltzius, you can see his helmet with wings; he's not wearing his famous sandals, though.



## Hestia

Hestia was Zeus's sister and the goddess and protectress of hearth and home. She is also known by her Roman name, Vesta. She was gentle and kind and was very popular with the Greeks. She didn't have a lot of adventures, so she's rarely pictured in art.



## Demeter

Demeter was the goddess of the crops and the harvest. She is also known as Ceres (Roman) and sometimes Deo. Her symbols include a torch, a crown, a scepter and stalks of grain. She is often portrayed with her daughter, Persephone, who was kidnapped by Hades and taken to the underworld. By the time she was rescued, she'd eaten six pomegranate seeds, so she couldn't escape the underworld entirely. Her mother was so frantic that winter draped the land and no crops would grow. A deal was struck, and Persephone was allowed to return to her mother for half of the year. So each year, when she returns to the underworld, fall comes, then winter – but when she returns to her mother, spring and summer come again.



## Dionysus

Dionysus was the partier of the mountain retreat. He was Zeus's son by another woman, who was driven crazy by Hera and her jealousy. Dionysus went all around teaching people how to make wine and having a good time. Eventually, Hestia gave up her throne for him, and he lived on Olympus. He was the god of wine, of course, and also vegetation.

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Now, use at least two sources in addition to what you read here to fill in your chart completely. Write down the sources you used on the back of the chart.

## Book suggestions

- *D'Aulaires' Book of Greek Myths* by Ingri and Edgar Parin D'Aulaire
- *The Mighty 12: Superheroes of Greek Myths* by Charles Smith
- *Greek Myths and Legends* by Cheryl Evans

If your library doesn't have these, check around Dewey Decimal Number 398.2. That's where Greek mythology is.

## Web references

- <http://greece.mrdonn.org/myths.html>
- <http://www.mythweb.com/>
- <http://mythman.com/>
- <http://www.loggia.com/myth/content.html>
- <http://www.pantheon.org/areas/mythology/europe/greek/articles.html>

## Olympian Gods & Goddesses Chart

GREEK NAME	ROMAN NAME	REALM	SYMBOL	FACTS / CHARACTERISTICS
1. ZEUS				
2. HERA				
3. POSEIDON				
4. HADES				
5. ATHENA				
6. APOLLO				

### Greek Mythology-2.6

## Olympian Gods & Goddesses Chart, continued

GREEK NAME	ROMAN NAME	REALM	SYMBOL	FACTS / CHARACTERISTICS
7. ARTEMIS				
8. APHRODITE				
9. HERMES				
10. ARES				
11. HEPHAESTUS				
12. HESTIA				
13. DEMETER				
14. DIONYSUS				

### Greek Mythology-2.7