

**scripta 14.5: Arachne confronts Pallas Athene**

*In Metamorphoses, Book 6, Ovid retells the story of Arachne, a girl who was so talented at weaving that she claimed she was better even than Pallas Athena (the Greek name for the goddess Minerva). Angered by Arachne's arrogance, Pallas challenges her to a competition. Inevitably, the goddess wins and turns Arachne into a spider, condemned to spin for all time.*

*Ovid's version of the Arachne myth focuses on the bleak limits of mortal power. During the weaving competition, Pallas weaves pictures of the gods' power while Arachne weaves scenes of mortal women who were tricked, raped and abused by the gods. The story is a good example of the theme of change ('metamorphosis') which ties Ovid's great epic poem together but it is also an interesting reflection on different genres of art. In his description of the weaving competition, Ovid has to imagine material art. This gives him the opportunity to demonstrate the breadth of his artistic skill, proving that he is not only skilled as a writer of words, he can also depict exceptional artworks.*

*The extract below focuses on the first moment of direct confrontation between Arachne and Pallas. Arachne has boasted that Pallas has nothing to teach her, claiming that she would be happy to compete against her to prove her own skill. Pallas has decided to disguise herself as an old woman and appear before Arachne, giving her the chance to admit that Pallas is the superior weaver. Ovid describes the moment where Arachne contemptuously responds to the old woman's speech and Pallas then reveals her true identity.*

'You have lost your mind - you come here, done in by advanced old age - it has done you harm to have lived far too long. If you have a daughter in law, or if you have a daughter, she can listen to your advice. I have enough good sense to think for myself; don't think that you are getting anywhere by giving me advice - you haven't changed my opinion. Why doesn't Pallas come in person? Why does she avoid this competition?' Then the goddess said, 'She's here!', discarded the old woman's disguise and showed herself to be Pallas. The nymphs and the Lydian women were in awe of the goddess; only Arachne was not terrified. Even so, she did blush, and a sudden redness marked her cheeks - although she did not want it to; then it vanished, just as the sky typically becomes red at the very beginning of dawn, and - after a short time - grows pale again at the rising of the sun.

- 1) Why does Arachne say she will not take the old woman's advice?
- 2) Why does Arachne blush, and why do you think she did not want to?
- 3) What, if any, do you think are the morals of this story?