

National Theatre Collection



Greek Myths Unplugged

Cross-Curricular Learning Guide

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Introduction to the Productions

Recommended Age Group: KS2

The Unicorn Theatre's ***Greek Myths Unplugged*** features three classic myths, each modernised and adapted carefully to engage and connect with young audiences. Alongside the opportunity to draw comparisons between the adaptations and the original myths, the plays allow for ample cross-curricular learning opportunities. Each is concluded with a thought-provoking question, inviting further thought and discussion beyond the viewing.

The first of the three productions, ***Jessie and the Jellybeans***, is a retelling of the Midas story. In this version, Jessie makes a wish that everything she touches turns to jellybeans. Within the narrative, complex emotional themes surrounding loss, sadness and grief are explored with sensitivity. This play offers strong stimulus for learning in the following Foundation subjects:

- English
- History
- Maths
- PSHE

Ariadne on the Beach is the second production in the trilogy and tells the story of Ariadne as she waits in hope of the return of Theseus. All action takes place in one location, the beach, and while modernised, follows a narrative that adheres to the original myth but told in the first person, from Ariadne's point of view. It offers a clear insight into her emotional journey, the history surrounding the Minotaur in the labyrinth and offers a variety of cross-curricular links:

- English
- History
- Geography
- DT

Narcissus is the final production available in this collection. As with ***Jessie and the Jellybeans***, it is fully modernised. Narcissus' story in modern day has been likened to society's obsession with social media and capturing the ultimate selfie. With the exception of the Muse-style narration that features across all productions, ***Narcissus*** features no dialogue. In place of scripted lines, the audience see hashtags as they are guided through the main character's stay in a hotel. This production lends itself not only to comparisons with the original Greek myth but also strongly to further discussion surrounding our communications online, online safety and the role that social media should or shouldn't play in our lives. Foundation subjects linked to this production are:

- English
- History
- PSHE
- Art & Design with ICT

This Cross-Curricular Learning Guide illustrates how primary school teachers can use this production to support teaching across curriculum subjects such as English, History, Geography and PSHE. This guide offers sequences of activities and suggested lesson structures.

Any activity highlighted in red can be found in the Creative Learning Activity Guide, a separate document found on the [National Theatre Collection](#) and [National Theatre Learning Hub](#). That guide offers step by step instructions on how to deliver the exercises.

Cross-Curricular Learning (opportunities for all plays in the trilogy)

English

Key outcomes of the curriculum targeted:

- *Spoken Language: Physical; Linguistic; Cognitive; Social and Emotional; Oracy (leading to high quality written outcomes)*
- Whether using the play as part of an English unit of study or for the purposes of Foundation subject exploration (see Foundation subject learning suggestions), it is important to ensure that students have a full grasp of the narrative and are able to retell, discuss and question it with confidence.

The following activities can be used time and again for any narrative, ensuring your class possess a deep understanding of all events in the story:

WHY NOT:

- Follow a viewing of either *Jessie and the Jellybeans* or *Ariadne on the Beach* with **And Then** (see Creative Learning Activities).
- Building on from And Then, invite students to use **Group Speeds** (see Creative Learning Activities), to form partners and to carry out **3-2-1** (see Creative Learning Activities).
- Gather outcomes from 3-2-1 and consolidate thinking by establishing a shared set of six story beats before inviting students to carry out **Six-Part Story Method** (see Creative Learning Activities).
- Invite students to work in small groups or partners and to carry out **Story Stones** (see Creative Learning Activities), illustrating stones they have gathered as part of home learning or a class trip to a local outdoor area.
- For *Narcissus*, you could use **Character POV** (see Creative Learning Activities), allowing students to retell the story from either the main character or the brother's perspective.

- They will now be ready to carry out a written English activity with confidence and/or to apply their thinking to any of the following Foundation subject areas.
- The activities listed above will be revisited should you choose to use these productions as an introduction to Greek mythology (see History suggested learning activities).



History

Key outcomes of the curriculum targeted:

- *Ancient Greece*

The ancient myths used by the Unicorn Theatre offer a fantastic insight into Ancient Greek civilisation: their beliefs and cultures. They allow young audiences to engage with the subject with empathy. Whether before or after viewing the productions, students should be secure in their knowledge and understanding of the original myth, to fully appreciate the adaptations and to be able to acquire cultural currency as a part of the learning.

WHY NOT:

- Tell your class one of the original myths, acting as a storyteller, a muse for your class. Then invite your students to move around the space using **Group Speeds** (see Creative Learning Activities) recalling the story in their minds. Call 'Stop' and ask them to get into pairs. Now invite them to carry out **3-2-1** (see Creative Learning Activities). The myth will be fully ingrained at the end of the activity, and together you will be able to identify the key events/bones of the story for future activities.
- Building on the above activity, why not ask students to sit in a circle and, using a ball of red string (as used in the productions they are yet to see), carry out **And Then** (see Creative Learning Activities) to retell the myth as a class.
- To further consolidate the myth, you could now set up **Six-Part Story Method** (see Creative Learning Activities), allowing students to take responsibility for different narrative beats within the myth. Your class will be fully prepped for an amazing myth rewrite session after this.
- Your class will now be able to analyse the Unicorn Theatre's creative decisions with confidence, discussing how they feel about the directorial choices made, the differences between the original and the adaptation, whether the message from the original myth is the same or has been changed.
- Now introduce a new myth, one that has not been adapted by the Unicorn Theatre, and repeat the same activities as before. After they have carried out Story Machine, invite students to draw characters, settings and key events on to individual stones and carry out story-retelling using **Story Stones** (see Creative Learning Activities).

Now invite them to think of other modern-day characters, locations and events and to retell the myth using these new modern-day ingredients. They could transform their ideas into their own published collection of myths, that can sit proudly in your reading corner or school library for all to enjoy.



Jessie and the Jellybeans: Cross-Curricular Learning

Maths

Key outcomes of the curriculum targeted:

- *Multiplication; Addition and Subtraction; Predicting and Estimating*

Jessie loves jellybeans. She collects them, filling enormous jars with them. She never eats them so she knows she will always have the same amount. When she makes her wish, everything she touches turns to jellybeans. She cannot give them away or eat them fast enough.

WHY NOT:

Create a series of maths problems using *Jessie and the Jellybeans* as a stimulus? For example:

- If one jar contains X beans, how many jellybeans will Jessie have if she fills three, four or five jars?
- Jessie has X beans. She gives each of her friends Y beans. How many does she have left if she doesn't touch anything else in the meantime?
- How many jellybeans do we think are in the jar? Remove the beans and sort them into groups of eight or nine, for example, and then count them in multiples of eight or nine to establish the actual number.

PSHE

Key outcomes of the curriculum targeted:

Health and Wellbeing; Relationships:

- *H23. about change and loss, including death, and how these can affect feelings; ways of expressing and managing grief and bereavement.*
- *R7. to recognise and respect that there are different types of family structure (including single parents, same-sex parents, step-parents, blended families, foster parents); that families of all types can give family members love, security and stability.*
- *R8. to recognise other shared characteristics of healthy family life, including commitment, care, spending time together; being there for each other in times of difficulty (PSHE Association).*

Jessie and her father speak openly about the loss of Jessie's mother. We, as the audience, see her picture and hear about the character traits that made her special. We are confided in over the loss and loneliness they both feel, and the fears they both experience at the thought of losing all that she once was completely. They are now a single parent family, with Jessie's father doing all he can to fill the void in Jessie's life. This subject matter can be challenging to approach in class, and, with the Unicorn Theatre's sensitive portrayal of the narrative, we have a vehicle which allows for meaningful discussion, and for empathy and understanding to be developed.

WHY NOT:

- Use **Role on the Wall** (see Creative Learning Activities) to develop the characters of Jessie and her father. Explore how they want the world, and each other, to see them and how they really feel on the inside. Use **Statues** and **Thought tapping** (see Creative Learning Activities) to bring the characters to life and to explore their inner thoughts and feelings.
- Use **Group Speeds** followed by **Paired Hot-Seating** (see Creative Learning Activities), allowing the characters to question each other about their feelings and thoughts.
- As a class, gather responses to questions/outcomes from the **Paired Hot-Seating** activity and invite students to each think of a piece of advice they could give to Jessie and to her father, using **Balanced Argument Sentence Starters** (see Resources). Now invite Jessie to

enter the **Conscience Alley** (see Creative Learning Activities) and, when completed, to name the pieces of advice she found most useful. Repeat the exercise for Jessie's father. You could gather all advice created into a class book that could be positioned in your Reading Corner and made available to anyone should they ever need similar advice.



Ariadne on the Beach: Cross-Curricular Learning

Geography

Key outcomes of the curriculum targeted:

- *Location Knowledge; Place Knowledge; Physical and Human Geography; Geographical Skills*

The original myth of Theseus and the Minotaur and, indeed, the Unicorn Theatre's adaptation, feature two European locations: Athens and Crete. Where are these locations? What are they like in modern day? How have human and physical features changed since Ancient Greece or have some remained as they were? What is the distance between them? How similar or different are they to the UK?

WHY NOT:

- Use maps, ICT and other research materials to gather information on the two locations, both in the time of Ancient Greece and in modern day, and use **World of the Story Mindmaps** (see Creative Learning Activities) to bring ancient and modern-day Athens and Create to life using all senses.
- Create **Masking Tape Worlds** (see Creative Learning Activities) to map out the locations, layering with adjective/noun pairings and other descriptive language. Now invite your students to find a specific area that most interests them and to create a **Diorama** (see Creative Learning Activities) that can be layered with information regarding human and physical features and resulting in 3D, information rich versions of key areas of each location.
- Both above activities will provide a fantastic starting point for an information guide to Athens and/or Crete, both in the past and in modern day.

DT

Key outcomes of the curriculum targeted:

- *Design: use research and develop design criteria to inform the design of innovative, functional, appealing products that are fit for purpose, aimed at particular individuals or groups.*
- *Make: select from and use a wider range of materials and components, including construction materials, textiles and ingredients, according to their functional properties and aesthetic qualities.*
- *Evaluate: evaluate their ideas and products against their own design criteria and consider the views of others to improve their work.*
- The Minotaur lives in a labyrinth beneath King Minos' palace. During the production, we see Ariadne recreate the design using sand. In the final moments, she destroys her creation.

WHY NOT:

- Use this aspect of the production to inspire design, making and construction of labyrinths. Working individually, paired or in small groups, students could sketch their designs, make their first versions using sand, evaluate and adapt, investigate methods and materials to reinforce their structure, test and evaluate, working towards a presentation of their finished article. The strongest, most elaborate and deepest labyrinth wins!

Narcissus: Cross-Curricular Learning

PSHE

Key outcomes of the curriculaum targeted:

- *Health and Wellbeing; Relationships*

Narcissus is overwhelmed by the power of his reflection. The Unicorn Theatre's creative team have drawn a likeness between the character's weakness in the ancient myth and the obsession to take selfies and to self-promote the best or, at times, exaggerated aspects of our lives via social media.

WHY NOT:

- Use the production as a basis for discussion around the following topic: 'The importance of balancing time online with other activities: strategies for managing time online'. You might want to use outcomes from an initial discussion to create two debate teams arguing for and against the benefits of time spent online and the value of selfies, using **Balanced Argument Sentence Starters** (see Resources) to form strong arguments. Invite a volunteer to become, or position yourself as, the main character from the Unicorn Theatre's production and allow each team to present their case. Can they change her mind?
- The production concludes with words of wisdom and insight from the muse, the narrator who has guided young viewers through the stories:

Narcissus realised that the most powerful creature was their reflection, that no one else would ever be the same.

Never in the whole universe. No one else will ever look or think or feel the exact same as you.

And this is powerful. This is our power.

Each and every one of us has a unique take on the world. And to share our ideas and impressions on what it is like to be human is a great act of generosity.

We all have stories to tell.

And there are all sorts of ways to be a storyteller.

All sorts of ways to share the choices we make, big and small.

WHY NOT:

- Invite students to reflect on who they are as a person and to create individual **Role on the Walls** (see Creative Learning Activities) with statements to justify adjectives. Using **Statues** and **Thought Tapping** (see Creative Learning Activities) to gather statements regarding key achievements, likes and dislikes, skills they are most proud of, things that make them laugh or feel angry.
- Following the above activity, use **Group Speeds** (see Creative Learning Activities) to move students around the room and ask them to get into partners. Introduce **My Partner is Amazing** (see Creative Learning Activities) and allow them to carry out the activity through to final presentations, sharing and celebrating all aspects of their partner and all that makes them unique and special.



Art & Design with ICT

Key outcomes of the curriculum targeted:

- *Classic Art Study; Photography and Photo-Enhancing Technology; Painting*

Caravaggio created the iconic portrait of Narcissus, fixated on his reflection in the water as his distorted reflection gazes back at him.

WHY NOT:

- Research and study Caravaggio's portrait, observing position, use of light and dark, the facial distortion in the reflection. Explore why we think the image is distorted, is this an effect created by the water or a technique used by the artist to convey a message to the viewer?
- Following the above study, invite students to work in pairs to recreate the image. Using a mirror and camera, pairs will work with one student positioning themselves over the mirror, using Caravaggio's portrait to create an identical position over the mirror and form a facial expression of awe and wonder. The partner student will act as the photographer. Partners should then swap roles.
- The photographs from the previous activity would make a fantastic basis for an ICT lesson using software that can manipulate and distort aspects of images, such as Photoshop. Allow students time to explore the software and then to distort their reflected expression in the image taken.
- You might decide to conclude learning with a photographic outcome but you could proceed to a final, painted outcome, inviting students to use the image they have created as a starting point. Students may use tracing or sketching to create the base of their painting, adding colour and texture using the paint materials you have chosen. A Narcissus-inspired exhibition awaits!

Reading Corner Themes

WHY NOT:

Use Ancient Greece as stimulus to create a Reading Corner inspired by the architecture and filled with texts linked to the subject, fictional and non-fictional OR use one of the locations in the productions and turn your Reading Corner in to Jessie's bedroom filled with books and a jellybean or two; Ariadne's beach or a Narcissus-inspired area filled with different types of mirror.



Linked Texts

There are a wide variety of texts to choose from if you're looking to populate a reading corner or to select a class text that might compliment your exploration of the productions. A few suggestions include:

Who Let the Gods Out? by Maz Evans

Tales of the Greek Heroes by Roger Lancelyn Green

Greek Myths by Geraldine McCaughrean

The Odyssey by Geraldine McCaughrean

Mark of the Cyclops: An Ancient Greek Mystery by Saviour Pirotta

The Curse of Hera by P.J.Hoover

The Boy Who Fell from the Sky: 50 Greek Myths by Lucy Coats

Beasts of Olympus 1: Beast Keeper: Book 1 by Lucy Coats

So You Think You've Got It Bad? A Kid's Life in Ancient Greece by Chae Strathie, Marisa Morea

Greek Gods and Heroes: 40 Inspiring Icons by Sylvie Baussier

Our Funders

Lead philanthropic support from Richard and Kara Gnodde. NT Collection is made possible in primary schools by the Hearn Foundation, as the Principal Funder of the Primary Schools Programme. NT Collection is also supported by The Attwood Education Foundation, Mike Staunton, and The Michael Marks Charitable Trust.

National Theatre Collection in New York City is supported by Penny and Bill Bardel.

All images in this guide are by Ellie Kurttz.

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