

Perseus: symbol of ethical values. assignment



When I think of what a hero represents to me, think of an individual who fights for family values and the ethics of a good human being. Greek mythological heroes have many attributes that can be related to positive traits in society today. One such ancient hero is Perseus. During his exploits Perseus set standards, which people of ancient Greece could follow and which people can follow today. The myth of Perseus shows that he acts within the social and ethical boundaries of ancient times, that are similar to the values of today's society.

As a child Perseus and his mother were abandoned in a trunk and left afloat in the ocean. A fisherman found them and accepted them into his family. The fisherman's brother was an evil dictator named Polydectes, who fell in love with Perseus' mother, Danae. In order to have Danae all to himself the king plots to get rid of Perseus. He does this by telling Perseus that the head of a gorgon is a gift he craves more than anything else in the world. Polydectes knows that this is an impossible task and will most certainly cause death to anyone who attempts it.

Despite the difficulty of this assignment, Perseus sides to go on this journey because if he accomplishes it Polydectes will leave his mother alone. He feels obligated to protect his mother because she is the only blood relative that he knows of. In ancient Greece the bond between children and their parents was looked upon as being sacred. Even today, strong bonds between family members are seen as a positive way people can grow emotionally. Like Perseus, many sons and daughters today strive to protect and care for their parents when they grow older.

On his quest, the goddess Athena and the god Hermes help Peruses achieve his goal. They are sympathetic to him because they see that he is doing this for the worthy cause of protecting his family. Without the help of the gods, completing his mission would be impossible. The divine help the gods provide Peruses, which momentarily elevates him to a higher status than other mortals so he may complete his mission. According to Stephen Harris and Gloria Planner, " Peruses literally assumes, at least temporarily, powers like flight and invisibility that humans may dream of but are otherwise reserved for the gods. (274). In ancient times people believed that the gods often eloped people who had just cause or who worshiped them with more dedication. The same can be said for today's society. Modern Christians believe that if they follow certain moral rules that God has provided, they will be accepted to an elevated level of being. Also, people often pray when they need strength during trying times or to complete difficult tasks. During Peeress's return voyage from beheading the gorgon he stopped in Ethiopia. There he found a beautiful woman who was to be sacrificed to a sea serpent. Peruses instantly fell in love with this woman, Andromeda, and vowed that he would rescue her. Edith Hamilton adds, " He waited beside her until the great snake came for its prey; then he cut it's head off just as he had the gorgons"(207). Peruses marries Andromeda, and she remains by his side until the end of his days. The moral value that can be interpreted in this part of the story is the power of love and attraction. This love indeed is the love which begins a family. Peruses fights a giant monster and risks his life for the chance of a loving relationship with the woman that he desires.

It is a common belief in today's society that the love of another is worth fighting and sacrificing for. Like Perseus, an individual today is not always willing to give up on love. Once the hardships are over the love that is received is worth the struggle to obtain it. When Perseus and his new wife return to his homeland they find that his mother is once again in danger. Pierre Grammar states, " During his absence Polydeuces had tried to rape Danae, who had to seek refuge at the altars of the gods. Perseus took his revenge by turning him to stone "(343).

In this story not only does Perseus feel the need to protect his family as previously stated, but to protect the rights of a woman from sexual violence. Although some gods did not have great records when it came to sex and women, in ancient Greece, just as it is today rape was viewed as immoral. The fact that he seeks retribution for this moral crime shows that Perseus is a model of ethical and moral values of ancient Greece and today's society. Heroes were symbols of how ancient people should behave. Their journeys and quests were symbolic of the principles that people of the past admired and tried to follow.

Many of these ancient values are still present in the twenty-first century. The stories of Perseus display many examples of this. Heroes like Perseus set the boundaries of Ancient Greece, and many of those are still present today. The standards of what a hero consists of in society are paralleled to those Perseus displays in his myths.