

## How does the myth of Sisyphus help us to learn about Greek beliefs and society?

**Hubris** – a crime or offence against the gods.

**Please read through the story of Sisyphus and highlight where we can see acts of *hubris* (anything that might have offended the gods – such as ignoring them) or where we can see any information about the Underworld (such as who goes to the Underworld and the different areas)**

### **Tricking the gods for the first time**

Sisyphus had offended Zeus by not respecting him as a god. As a result, Zeus had ordered Thanatos – the god of Death – to chain Sisyphus up and take him to the Underworld. As Thanatos revealed the chains to Sisyphus, Sisyphus asked him to demonstrate how they worked. Eager to show how the chains worked, Thanatos attached them to his own wrists! Sisyphus then locked Thanatos in a room and as a result no mortals could die. When Thanatos broke free the gods were furious at Sisyphus.

### **Tricking the gods for the second time**

Knowing that the gods would be annoyed, Sisyphus thought of another trick to play on the gods. Sisyphus knew that he would be taken to the Underworld and so he asked his wife to throw his body in the streets when he dies. When Sisyphus arrived in the Underworld, he went to Hades and Persephone. He told them that his wife had treated his body so poorly and had not buried him. The gods were outraged that he had not been buried. Sisyphus asked for a chance to go back up to the land of the living to tell his wife to bury him. They agreed but Sisyphus never came back to the Underworld – once again tricking the gods.

### **The punishment for hubris**

The gods were not happy to hear that Sisyphus had escaped death for a second time. When Sisyphus eventually died of old age, Zeus himself made sure that Sisyphus was taken to the Underworld where everyone who dies goes to. Sisyphus had offended the gods by tricking them and ignoring them and therefore, he went to a part of the Underworld called Tartarus which was for people who had committed **hubris**. The punishment Sisyphus received was to push a boulder. He was told that if he managed to roll a boulder to the top of a hill, he could go back to the land of the living and live forever. Sisyphus agreed and started to push the boulder.

As he started on his first attempt, Sisyphus was feeling extremely confident as he made his way up the slope. At the halfway point, he felt tired but determined to get to the top. When Sisyphus was within a couple of steps from the top, the boulder slipped and went all the way down to the bottom of the slope. Sisyphus thought he did well for a first attempt and went back to the bottom to try again. To this day, Sisyphus is still trying to push the boulder up the slope to achieve his immortal life. He will remain there until the end of time.

This myth reminded the Greeks to **never commit hubris** otherwise you would be punished.

Acts of *hubris*

Information about the Underworld