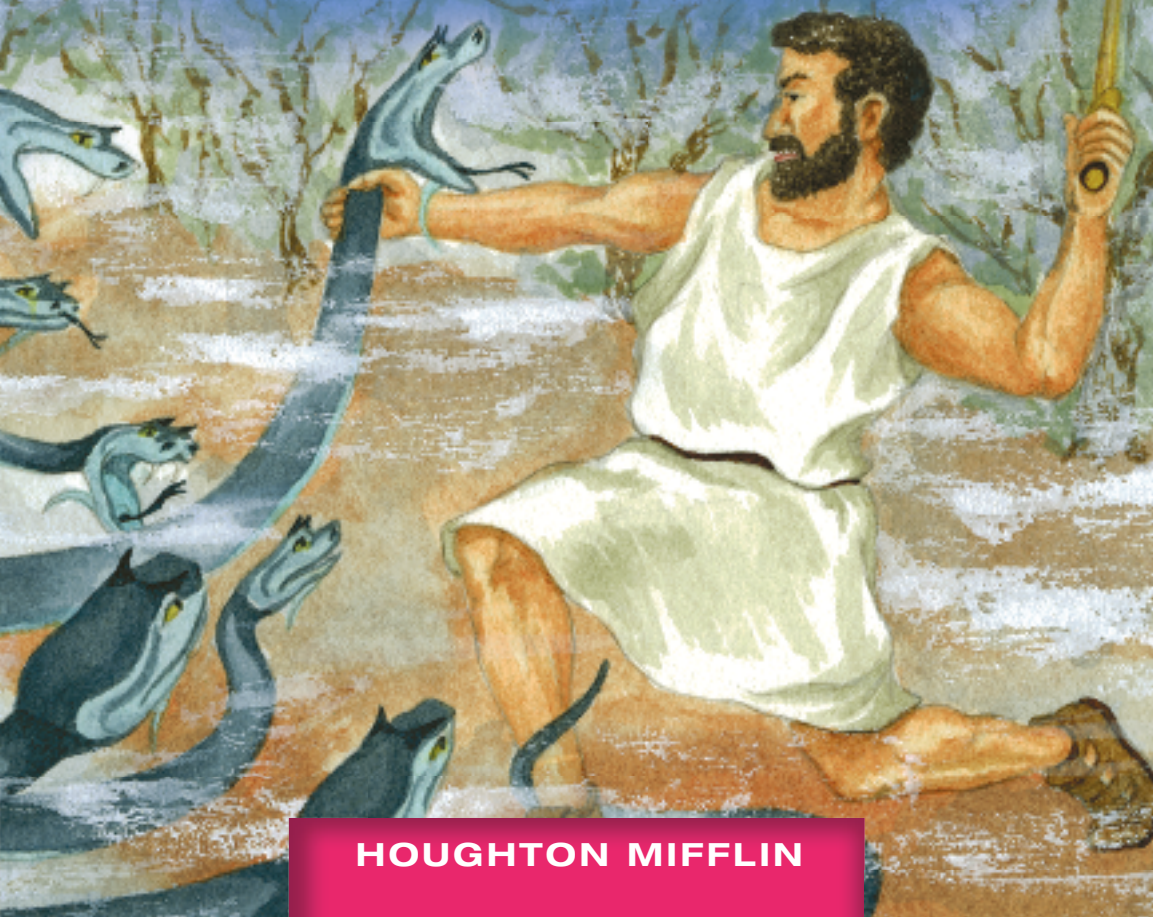




TALES OF HERCULES

BY LIZ SMITHE
ILLUSTRATED BY DREW-BROOK-CORMACK



HOUGHTON MIFFLIN



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BOSTON

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HERCULES THE HERO


Hercules was a hero of ancient Greece. He performed amazing tasks that made him famous. But not everyone loved Hercules. His stepmother, Hera, was always trying to harm him.

One day Hera caused Hercules to kill his wife and children. When Hercules saw what he had done, he wept **bitterly**. As punishment for his crime, the gods told Hercules that he must spend 12 years working for a cruel king.

The king gave Hercules 10 tasks. The first task was to kill a terrible lion. Hercules strangled it in a deadly **embrace**.

 Hercules faces a terrible lion.




 The king was amazed to see Hercules arrive at his gates with the lion. Hercules was even stronger than he looked! The next task would have to be something even more difficult. The king sent Hercules to kill a monster called the Hydra.


HYDRA, THE WATER SERPENT

The Hydra was a water serpent that looked like a giant snake with nine heads. The Hydra was so poisonous that it could kill people just by breathing on them. Worse, one of its heads was immortal and would never die.

Hercules brought his favorite nephew along to help him. When they got to the swamp, Hercules shot flaming arrows into the Hydra's den. The Hydra came out, ready to fight.

 Hercules held his breath to avoid the monster's poison. He grabbed the Hydra and started chopping off its heads. Every time Hercules cut off one head, the Hydra grew two more!

The Hydra also had help from a friend. A huge crab came out of the swamp. While the Hydra coiled around Hercules' ankle, the crab attacked his foot. Fortunately, Hercules had a heavy club. He smashed the crab with a powerful blow.

 Hercules then shouted to his nephew to help him. He could not fight all the Hydra's new heads alone.

Hercules' nephew started a fire in a nearby grove of trees. He took burning branches from the fire. Then he returned to the spot where Hercules continued to fight the Hydra with great **fury**.

 Hercules struggles with the Hydra.




Each time Hercules cut off one of the Hydra's heads, his nephew pressed a torch into the wound. This stopped the Hydra from growing new heads. Only the head that wouldn't die was left. Hercules could not kill this head, but he chopped it off. Then he buried it under a rock. In this way, Hercules completed his second task.






 Hercules completes many tasks.

 Hercules did not return to the king's palace right away. First he cut open the Hydra's body. He dipped his arrows in the poisonous blood. Now Hercules had a powerful new weapon. Even a small scratch from one of his poison arrows was enough to kill his enemies.


EIGHT MORE TASKS

Most people were happy that the Hydra was dead. It had killed many people. But Hercules' stepmother, Hera, was in a **somber** mood when she heard the news. She had raised the Hydra herself. Now she would have to think of other ways to hurt Hercules.



 Over the next several years, Hercules completed eight more tasks. He tracked a deer through a maze of trails and captured it alive. Then he trapped a fierce boar. When asked to clean some filthy animal pens, he moved a river to flush out all the dirt. Next he scared a flock of deadly birds away from a lake.

Hercules traveled to the island of Crete to capture a wild bull. Then he drove away some man-eating horses. When Hercules visited the queen of the Amazons, she gave him the belt that he needed to bring back. For his tenth task, Hercules rounded up a herd of cattle that belonged to a giant.

 After all this work, Hercules thought he had reached the end of his punishment. However, the king said that two of his tasks did not count. Hercules had gotten help from his nephew in killing the Hydra. And the owner of the animal pens had paid Hercules for cleaning them. So, Hercules was forced to complete two more tasks.


THE GOLDEN APPLES


The next task was the hardest one yet. The king told Hercules to bring back golden apples from a tree that belonged to Hera. This tree was very precious to Hercules' stepmother. A fierce dragon guarded it from anyone who might steal its fruit.

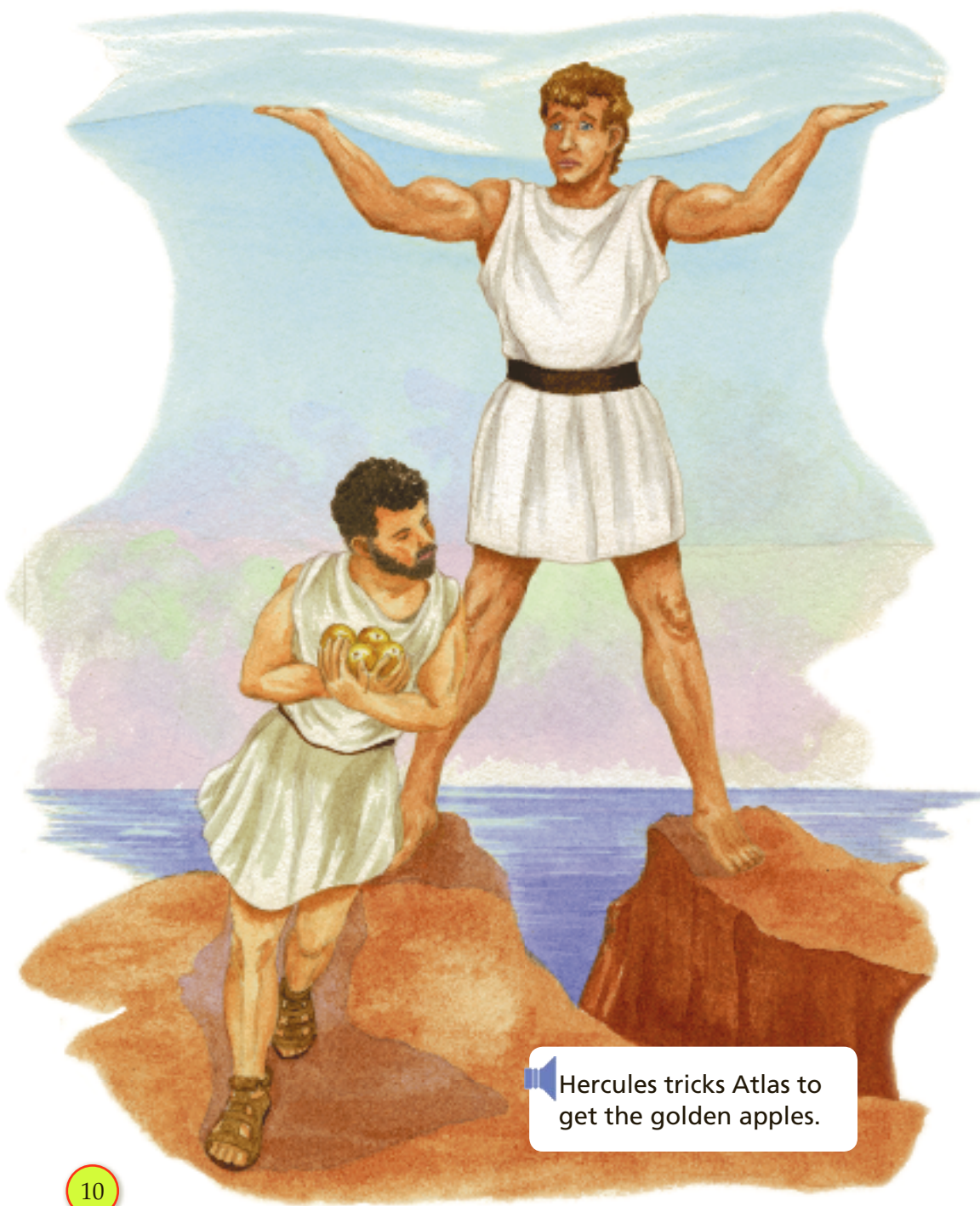
Hercules set out to find the garden where the apple tree grew. He met a sea god who gave him some advice. The sea god told Hercules to get help from Atlas, the god who held up the sky. The daughters of Atlas took care of the apple tree.


Hercules went to see Atlas. He offered to hold the sky for a while if Atlas got the apples. Atlas was glad to help. However, Atlas was nervous about the dragon in the garden. Hercules took out his bow and arrow and killed it. Then Atlas carefully shifted the sky onto Hercules' strong shoulders.



 With the dragon dead, Atlas can see his daughters and pick the golden apples.

 Atlas headed off for the garden. He was happy to see his daughters. With the dragon dead, it was easy to pick a few golden apples from Hera's tree. Atlas took the fruit and returned to Hercules. But, he was in no hurry to take the heavy sky back.



 Atlas told Hercules that he would take the apples to the king. He promised to return if Hercules would hold up the sky for a few months. Hercules understood why Atlas would want a vacation. However, he did not trust Atlas to return.


Hercules knew he would need to trick Atlas. He asked Atlas to do him a favor. Hercules said that the weight of the sky was hurting his shoulder. He asked Atlas to take it back for a just moment, so that Hercules could put a soft pad on his shoulder.

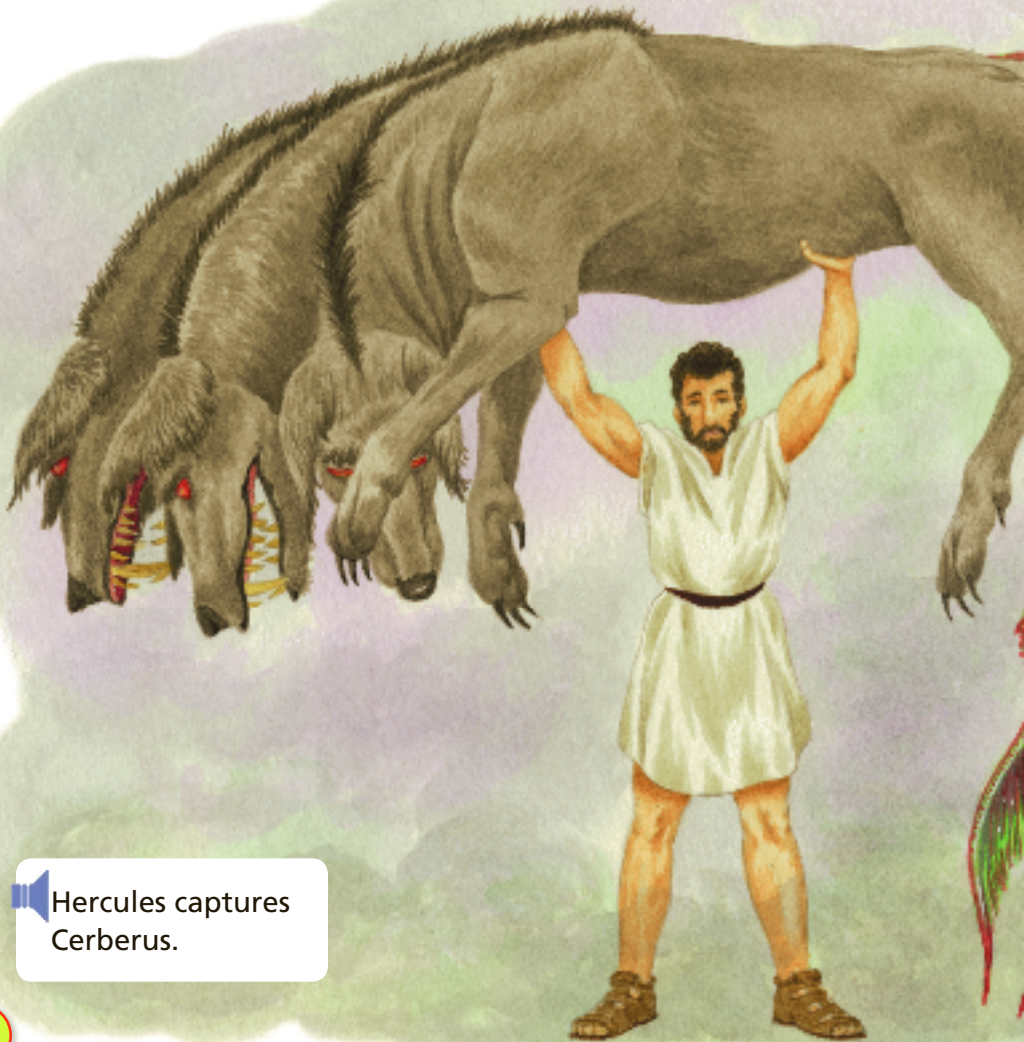
Atlas believed Hercules' story. He put the golden apples on the ground and lifted the sky onto his own shoulders again. Hercules grabbed the apples and fled. Poor Atlas was right back where he started.


HERA'S REVENGE


Hercules returned to the king and gave him the apples. However, the king would not keep them. He knew that the apples belonged to Hera. Hercules gave the apples to the goddess Athena, and she returned them to the garden.

The king had one last chance to give Hercules an impossible task. For the twelfth task, he sent Hercules to kidnap Cerberus.

 Cerberus was a dog with three heads and the tail of a dragon. He guarded the entrance to the Underworld. Cerberus would devour anyone who tried to get in. He also prevented the dead from getting out.



 Hercules captures Cerberus.

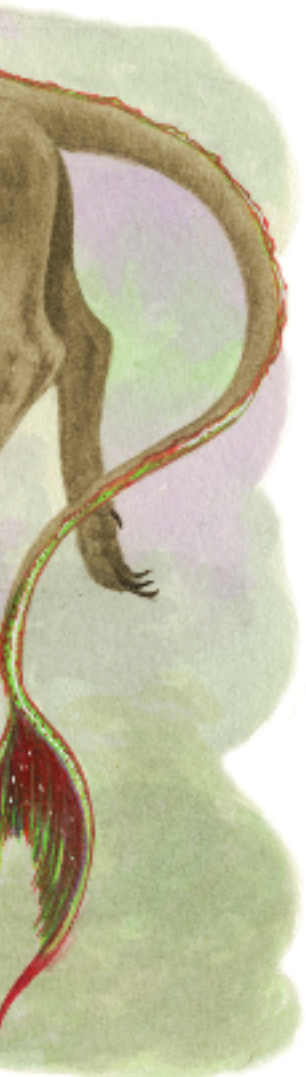


Hercules traveled to the Underworld. He was not allowed to use any weapons against Cerberus, so he choked Cerberus until the beast gave up. Then Hercules brought Cerberus to the king.

After completing his 12 tasks, Hercules had many more adventures. At the same time, Hera kept trying to kill him.


Finally, one of her plans worked. Hercules' wife sent him a beautiful white cloak on which she had rubbed a love potion. At least, she thought it was a love potion. In fact, Hera had made sure it was a deadly poison.

When Hercules put the cloak on, it burned like fire. He pulled with all his might, hoping the cloak would **unravel**, but it only tore his skin. When Hercules could bear the pain no longer, he made a huge pile of wood and climbed on top of it. He convinced a friend to set the wood on fire.



HERCULES BECOMES IMMORTAL

Hercules' human body died in the fire, but the gods decided to make him immortal. Hercules joined the gods in their home on Mount Olympus. Now the ancient Greeks worshipped Hercules as both a hero and a god.

 Greek gods welcome Hercules to Mount Olympus.



Responding



TARGET SKILL Story Structure

What major characters are involved in *Tales of Hercules*? What is the story's conflict? Copy and complete the chart below.

Characters: ?	Setting: ancient Greece
Conflict: ?	
Resolution: Hercules completes all of the tasks.	



Write About It

Text to Self Hercules had to complete many tasks. Write a paragraph summarizing which task you think was the most difficult and why.



TARGET VOCABULARY

abandon

bitterly

embrace

fury

labyrinth

massive

rash

somber

steadfast

unravels



TARGET SKILL

Story Structure Examine details about characters, setting, and plot.



TARGET STRATEGY

Infer/Predict Use text clues to figure out what the author means or what might happen in the future.



GENRE A **myth** is a story that tells what a group of people believes about the world.

Level: U

DRA: 44

Genre:

Myth

Strategy:

Infer/Predict

Skill:

Story Structure

Word Count: 1,315

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