

MYTH
an ancient story
involving gods or
heroes

Drama

TO SAVE HIS KINGDOM,
JASON MUST FACE A DEADLY DRAGON

THE FIRE-BREATHING DRAGON

BASED ON THE GREEK MYTH OF JASON AND THE GOLDEN FLEECE
BY SPENCER KAYDEN | ART BY ALLAN DAVEY

CHARACTERS

Circle the character you will play.
*Starred characters have major speaking parts.

*Narrators 1 and 2 (N1, N2)

Atalanta, Nestor, and Heracles: Argonauts

***Jason:** a young hero and leader of the Argonauts

All Argonauts: to be read by a group

Aeetes: king of Colchis

Medea: King Aeetes's daughter and a sorceress

Soldiers 1, 2, and 3

Go to Scope Online for a pronunciation guide to the tricky names in this play.

Atalanta: We have battled evil giants—

Nestor: —and murderous monsters.

All Argonauts: If we succeed, Jason will become a king. If we fail, Jason will die.

SCENE 1

N1: The *Argo* sails through the Black Sea.

N2: The Argonauts push their 50 oars through the choppy waters.

All Argonauts (straining): Heave! Ho! Heave! Ho!

Atalanta (pointing east): Look there! Land!

N1: Jason rushes to the bow.

Jason: Brave Argonauts, we have made it to Colchis! The Golden Fleece will soon be ours.

Nestor: Your enthusiasm may be premature. Have you forgotten that a dragon guards the Fleece?

Heracles: A fire-breathing dragon that never sleeps.

Atalanta: A dragon whose 40-foot forked tongue is always ready to strike.

Jason: That is why I have gathered the bravest and strongest young men—

Atalanta: —and woman!—

Jason: —yes, and woman—to join me on my quest.

Atalanta: Have you not considered that your uncle, King Pelias, *wants* you to fail?

Nestor: He did send you on the most difficult and

perilous quest in the world.

Jason: Maybe he does want me to fail. Pelias did murder my father and steal the throne from me. But he also swore he would make me king if I proved myself worthy.

N2: Jason falls silent for a moment.

Jason: I will return to Greece with the Golden Fleece, or I will not return at all. Now row, Argonauts. Row!

All Argonauts (straining): Heave! Ho! Heave! Ho!

N1: The *Argo* glides up to the shores of Colchis.



What Is the Golden Fleece?

The story of the Golden Fleece goes way back. It all started when Jason's ancestor arrived in Colchis on a magical flying ram with golden wool. Then King Aeetes sacrificed the ram to the gods and hung its fleece—that is, its woolly coat—in a sacred grove. The Golden Fleece was a symbol of kingship and was believed to bring prosperity. No wonder Aeetes gave a dragon the job of guarding it!

shouldn't be too hard.

Heracles (whispering): His eyes are fierce like a leopard's.

Jason: Good King Aeetes, I bring you greetings from the land of Iolkos, in Greece.

Aeetes (coldly): You are far from home, boy.

Jason: Great sir, I am no boy. I am Jason, the rightful king of Iolkos.

Aeetes (thundering): AND I AM THE SON OF A GOD!

Jason: I mean no disrespect. I was sent here by my uncle, King Pelias. He swears to make me the king if I bring him the Golden Fleece.

N2: Aeetes tightens his fists.

Jason: The Fleece belonged to my ancestor. It should be kept safe in Greece.

Aeetes: My kingdom is littered with the bones of those who have tried to rob me of my most prized possession.

N1: Medea puts her hand on her father's shoulder.

Medea: Father, this youth has an honest face. Let us not jump to any conclusions.

Jason: I have not come to rob you. I am asking you to give me the Fleece. Please, tell me what I can do for you in return.

N2: A strange look passes over Aeetes's face.

Aeetes: Very well. In one of my fields are two fire-breathing bulls. You must yoke them and plow the field. Then plant dragon's teeth into the soil. From each tooth will grow a bloodthirsty soldier. You must defeat them all.

N1: Jason's face grows pale.

Aeetes: If you succeed, I will give you the Fleece.

To "yoke" animals means to harness them to a plow they are meant to pull through a field.



AS YOU READ, THINK ABOUT:

What are the qualities of a hero?

PROLOGUE

Atalanta: We are a band of heroes sailing on the mighty ship the *Argo*.

Nestor: Jason, our leader, is on a dangerous quest.

Jason: We seek one of the most extraordinary objects on Earth: the Golden Fleece.

Heracles: The quest has taken us through treacherous waters past the edge of the known world.

Adventures at Sea

Jason is a famous hero in Greek mythology. Stories of his adventures aboard the *Argo* (at right) have been told for thousands of years. Why might this story be so enduring?



Jason (*firmly*): I will succeed, King Aeetes.

N2: Aeetes snaps his fingers. A servant brings Jason a helmet filled with dragon's teeth.

SCENE 3

N1: On the *Argo*, Jason tells the crew what Aeetes has asked of him.

Nestor: It is impossible, Jason.

Heracles: You will be **incinerated**.

Atalanta: Is the Fleece really worth dying for?

Jason: My uncle is a merciless ruler. I must do this for my people.

Nestor: Then let us slay King Aeetes and take the Fleece.

Jason: No. I will not spill blood.

Heracles: Why should you care about Aeetes? He will not shed a tear when you are savagely killed.

Nestor: Yes—if there must be death, let it be his.

Jason: My dear Argonauts. Do we not have the gods on our side? I will accept this challenge and face my fate.

SCENE 4

N2: That night, a messenger arrives at the *Argo*.

Atalanta: Who goes there?

Medea: I bear a message for Jason.

Jason: Medea? What are you doing here?

Medea: I have come to warn you. My father will never give up the Golden Fleece. Not ever.

Jason: I do not understand.

Medea: Long ago, an **oracle** foretold that my father would lose his kingdom if he lost the Golden Fleece. That is why he has given you a task you cannot survive.

Jason: Why do you tell me this?

Medea: Because I can help.

Jason: You would defy your father to help me?

Medea (*blushing*): Your eyes tell me you are noble and kind.

N1: She takes out a small vial.

Medea: Sprinkle your skin with this oil and your sword and shield too. It will protect you from the bulls' fiery breath.

Becoming a Hero

In mythology, a character becomes a hero by completing a series of difficult—if not impossible—tasks designed to test strength, courage, and faith. *How can a person become a hero today?*



Jason: What of the soldiers who will rise from the earth?—

Medea: Cast a great stone into their midst.

Jason: How will that help me—

N2: Medea looks over her shoulder nervously.

Medea: I must go.

N1: Jason watches Medea hurry away.

SCENE 5

N2: Early the next morning, everyone gathers at the edge of the field. Smoke and fire belch from the bulls' lair.

Jason: My brave Argonauts, do not fear for me, for the gods are on my side. But if I should die, do not weep, for stories of my bravery will be told for generations!

All Argonauts (*battle cry*): For honor! For strength! For Iolkos!

N1: Jason marches to the middle of the field.

N2: The bulls emerge. The field echoes with a terrible roar as they charge at Jason.

Jason (*to himself*): What if Medea's charm fails?

N1: Jason clutches his sword and shield as the bulls draw closer. Fire blazes from their nostrils.

Jason (*to himself*): I must cast aside my fear.

Aeetes: Watch how the bulls' breath will shrivel that boy into a black cinder.

N2: A wave of heat **engulfs** Jason.

N1: Flames curl around him.

All Argonauts: *Gasp!*

N2: The smoke clears to reveal . . . Jason, unharmed.

All Argonauts: YEEEEHHHH!

Aeetes: How can this be?

N1: Jason grabs one bull by the horns and the other by the tail. He throws the yoke around them.

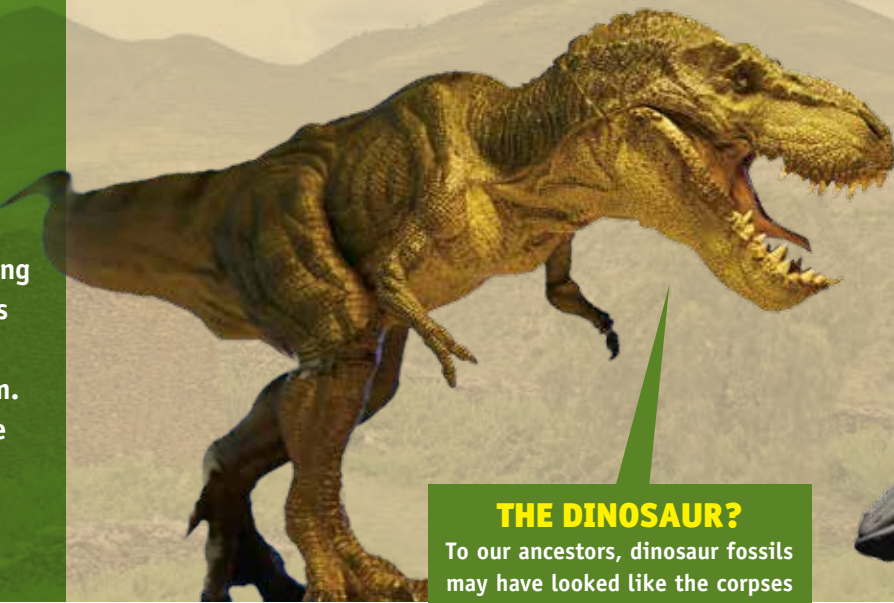
N2: Then he plows the field and plants the dragon's teeth.

Aeetes (*angrily*): What sorcery has saved him I do not know, but surely he cannot survive what is coming next.

N1: Helmets begin to rise from the earth. →

WHERE DO DRAGONS COME FROM?

Nearly every culture on Earth has stories and myths about fire-breathing lizards. In some cultures, a dragon is a symbol of luck or good fortune; in others, a dragon is a symbol of doom. This got us thinking: Where do these stories come from? They may have been inspired by real-life animals. Here are three possibilities.

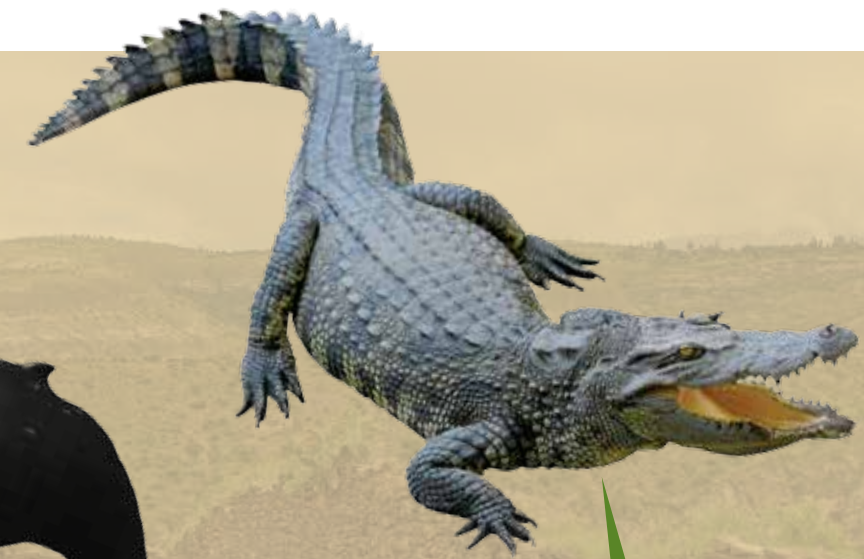


THE DINOSAUR?

To our ancestors, dinosaur fossils may have looked like the corpses of dragon-monsters.

THE WHALE?

Whales are massive creatures, and if you had never encountered a living one, as few ancient people had, it would be easy to mistake its skeleton for that of a fantastical dragon.



THE NILE CROCODILE?

At 18 feet, these creatures are the largest crocodiles on Earth. Some historians believe that they inspired dragon legends.

N2: Hundreds of armed soldiers spring up.

Soldier 1: We are thirsty for battle!

Soldier 2: Show us the enemy!

Soldier 3: My sword is at the ready!

N1: Jason remembers Medea's instructions. He picks up a large stone and hurls it into the field.

N2: It hits one soldier in the helmet, bounces off another's shield, and smacks into the face of a third.

N1: The soldiers turn on each other.

Soldier 1: You hit me, you brute!

Soldier 2: I didn't hit you. He did!

Soldier 3: I did not!

N2: The soldiers begin to attack each other. Soon, every last one is dead.

All Argonauts: *Cheering.*

N1: Aeetes boils with rage as he walks onto the field.

Aeetes: Congratulations, Jason. You have proven yourself a powerful warrior. Tonight, the Golden Fleece shall be yours.

N2: As the crowd disperses, Medea approaches Aeetes.

Medea: Father, it is right to keep your word and give up the Golden Fleece.

Aeetes: I have no intention of giving up anything, foolish girl. Tonight, we will kill them all.

SCENE 6

N1: The Argonauts celebrate on the shores of the sea.

Heracles: A remarkable feat!

Jason: We shall soon set sail for home.

N2: Medea rushes up to them, breathless.

Medea: It is just as I feared: My father does not intend to keep his word.

Jason: What do you mean?

Medea: He intends to slaughter you and your men.

Nestor: The villainy!

Medea: You must get the Fleece and leave—now.

Jason: But how?

Medea: I know where it is. But if I help you, I can never go home. I can never see my family again.

N1: Tears fill Medea's eyes.

Jason: Then you will sail with us.

Atalanta: We will be your family.

Nestor: Greece will be your home.

N2: Medea smiles sadly.

SCENE 7

N1: Jason and Medea stand in a grove of thick oak trees.

N2: As they approach a large tree, Jason stares in awe at the Golden Fleece hanging on the highest branch.

Jason: It is like a cloud filled with light.

N1: Entranced, he begins to walk toward it.

Medea: Jason, stop!

N2: It is too late. The dragon has seen him.

N1: The beast uncoils its immense body from around the tree.

N2: It stretches out its long neck and, in a flash, its massive jaws open.

N1: It unleashes a horrible hiss. A wave of heat emanates from its mouth.

N2: Medea rushes forward and sinks to her knees. She begins to chant a magic song.

N1: The dragon's eyes droop; its jaw thuds to the ground.

Jason: You killed it with . . . *song?*

Medea: I have only put it to sleep. Now go quickly!

N2: Jason climbs the tree and snatches the Fleece.

N1: Then he and Medea run back to the *Argo*.

WRITING CONTEST

Jason is considered a hero of Greek mythology. In your opinion, does he deserve that title? Is he the hero of this story? Answer both questions in a short essay. Use text evidence to support your ideas. Send your essay to **HERO CONTEST**. Five winners will each get *The Shadow Thieves* by Anne Ursu. See page 2 for details.

GET THIS
ACTIVITY
ONLINE

