

PROMETHEUS AND PANDORA

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Everyday I'm sufferin'





BACK IN MY DAY

**WHEN I GOOGLED PANDORA,
I ONLY RECEIVED GREEK
MYTHOLOGY RESULTS**

SUMMARY

- Way back in the day, sometime around the beginning of everything, Prometheus steals fire from Zeus to give to mankind.
 - This is not okay.
- And guess what? Zeus is majorly ticked off.
- He chains Prometheus to a rock for all eternity and has big nasty birds come eat his liver every day.
- Each night, his liver grows back so the birds have a snack for the next day.
 - Gross to the max.
- As if that isn't a big enough punishment, Zeus also decides to wreak some havoc on mankind.
- What is his devilish scheme you ask? What horrible thing does he inflict on men everywhere?
 - Dun dun dun: a woman.
 - (They didn't know about sexism back then.)

SUMMARY

- Hephaestus is on the job. Using Aphrodite as a model, he mixes some earth and water together to create the first woman, who is named Pandora.
- Lots of gods have a hand in making Pandora, each giving her a "gift"
 - Athena teaches the woman how to weave
 - Demeter teaches her how to garden
 - In some versions, Hermes makes her skilled at lying and being deceitful.
 - (Did I mention this was sexist?)
- Then they all get together and put her in a really hot outfit.
 - So far so good.
- Hermes also gives Pandora a jar full of every kind of bad thing imaginable and warns her never to open it.
 - (Worst wedding present ever, anyone?)
- Oh, P.S. All these so-called gifts are how Pandora got her name: it means "all endowed" or "all gifted."

SUMMARY

- Next up, Zeus has Hermes take Pandora down to Epimetheus, Prometheus's brother, to offer her as a bride.
- Prometheus had warned Epimetheus to not take any presents from Zeus, but Epimetheus accepts Pandora anyway, fearing that if he doesn't, Zeus will do something bad to mankind.
 - (Spoiler alert: that turns out to totally backfire.)
- Eventually, Pandora gets curious about the mysterious jar that Zeus gave her.
- She opens it, and every terrible thing you could possibly imagine streaks out of the jar and goes off to plague all of humanity.
 - Oops.
- But not all hope is lost. Literally: the only thing that remains in the jar is Hope.
 - Some versions interpret *hope* to be *foreboding*

THEMES: WOMEN

- Hesiod must have had some nasty experiences with women, don't you think? In the myth of Prometheus and Pandora, Pandora sure doesn't get the royal treatment. Yes, she's the first woman, but she's also described as being full of deceit, trickery, and cunning. And as if that weren't enough, she then opens a jar that releases horrifying terribleness onto the world.
- Since Pandora is the *first* woman, we don't think it's too much of a leap to say that she was meant to represent *all* women. So are the Greeks saying that the worst blight ever inflicted on the male of the species was the female? Could be. And some people think that Hesiod's version of this story might represent a shift to patriarchy (male domination) in Greek society.
- Whatever the case, there's no doubt that this story is full of blatantly anti-women themes. We know we're judging it from a 21st-century standpoint, but come on, dude.
 - Questions About Women and Femininity
 - What major traits do the gods give Pandora in the story? How do these traits comment on the nature of womankind?
 - Does this story portray anything positive about women? If so, what?
 - Compare and contrast the view of women in the stories of Adam and Eve and Prometheus and Pandora.

THEMES: SUFFERING

- At its core, the myth of Prometheus and Pandora is an attempt to explain how suffering first entered the world. It just goes to show you that people have been struggling with this question forever.
 - Pretty much all the bad stuff that happens now happened way back in the day, too. People suffer from fear, depression, and anxiety. They die from terrible diseases. They're abducted by aliens.
 - The point is that suffering has always been a part of the human experience on Earth. Not so uplifting, but don't worry.
 - The story does have a silver lining: despite all the badness we have to put up with on this planet, the one thing they can't take away from us is hope.
- Questions About Suffering
- Why do you think hope is included with all the bad stuff in the jar?
 - The story lists toil and work as part of the terribleness that Pandora releases on the world, but some might argue that work is a good thing. What's your view? Why do you think so?
 - Some people have theorized that this story is depicting hope itself as a form of suffering. What do you think about this? How might that point of view be reflected in the tale?

PROMETHEUS

- Talk about a sacrifice. When Prometheus defies his former ally, Zeus, by giving fire to man, he knowingly submits himself to years and years of awful torture.
 - And come on, would you put up with being tied to a rock and having your insides pecked out by birds on a daily basis if it meant the betterment of all humanity?

The Catalyst

- What role does Prometheus really play in this story, though?
- It's Pandora who screws everything up by opening the jar, right?
- But the thing about Greek mythology is that everything has an origin story. And while the myth of Prometheus and Pandora is the origin of all suffering ever (thanks!), Prometheus's fire scheme is the origin of that origin.
 - Those Greeks loved them some beginnings.

PANDORA

- Pandora has the honor of being the first woman on earth. And boy does she gum up the works. By opening the forbidden jar, she releases every bad thing ever onto mankind, and gives us what we now know as horrible suffering. Thanks, Pandora!

Who's to Blame

- Of course, can you really blame her? After all, she was designed by Zeus to do this very thing; she doesn't really have a choice in the matter. Reading the myth the 21st century, we might say "he just wanted to blame a woman, that misogynistic pig!" But you have to remember, feminism wasn't around back then, so the Greeks probably weren't too worked up about it.
 - Also, when you call Zeus a misogynistic pig, he gets kind of angry.
- Whatever the case, Pandora is the one who opens that box, so she's the one we associate with the disaster, even to this day. If you ever hear someone say "you've really opened a Pandora's box with that one," you know you've messed up. Just keep your fingers crossed that there's a little hope left for you, too.

ZEUS

- The king of the gods comes off as kind of a jerk in this myth.
 - What's new, right?
- When Prometheus helps mankind by giving him fire, Zeus not only dooms Prometheus to be horribly tortured, but he also creates Pandora to release all kinds of badness on humanity.
 - Yo, Zeus, is it really that bad for mankind to have fire? Was all that really necessary?
- To play devil's advocate, though, human beings have done an awful lot of bad stuff with fire over the years: weapons, war, burning restaurants down and the like.
- So, who knows? Maybe Prometheus should've listened to what Zeus had to say.

PANDORA'S BOX

- Actually, it's not even a box. It's a jar.
 - "Pandora's Jar" just doesn't have the same ring to it.
- See, somewhere back in the day, someone mistranslated the story and said that Pandora opens a box to release all the badness in the world. But in the original Greek story, it's supposed to be a jar.
 - Not really important, though.
- What matters is that Pandora's Box has become a pretty widely recognized symbol. You might hear somebody say, "Don't talk about that; it's a total Pandora's box."
- That means that if you bring it up, a whole lot of badness (and no hope?) will come from it.
 - Domino effect, people.