



**From: Readers Theatre for Beginning Readers by Suzanne I. Barchers.
Englewood, Colorado: Teacher Ideas Press, 1993, p. 16.**

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Prometheus and Pandora

From: **Atalanta to Zeus: Readers Theatre from Greek Mythology**

At one time the Titans, powerful giants, fought the Olympian gods. Titan brothers Prometheus and Epimetheus remained loyal to Zeus, who chose to reward them by having them repopulate the earth. Prometheus took great care in fashioning the mortals, longing to give them comfort and sustenance. Against Zeus's wishes, he gave them fire and meat. After tricking Zeus, Prometheus was sentenced to continued punishment, only to be rescued by Heracles, known to the Latins as Hercules. Woven into this narrative is the story of Pandora, sent by Zeus to further punish the brothers. In this story, Pandora brings along a jug, refusing to heed Zeus's warning to leave it closed. All the plagues of the world are released when she peeks. Only the quality of hope remains for mortals. During the medieval period, the jug was translated as a box, giving us the well-known Pandora's box symbolizing the moment when mortals learned of all the tragedies of the world.

Presentation Suggestions

The narrators can stand to the sides of the stage. Place Prometheus and Epimetheus in the center with Zeus and Heracles on one side and Hephaestus and Pandora on the other side. Hephaestus and Pandora can enter just before their lines.

Props

The characters can be dressed in gowns or robes. Pandora should wear beautiful clothing, perhaps with flowers or jewels in her hair. Place a jug on the stage.

Delivery

Zeus should sound regal and vengeful. Prometheus should sound strong and later resigned to his fate. Pandora should sound sweet and persuasive.

Characters

Narrator 1
Zeus
Epimetheus
Prometheus
Narrator 2
Hephaestus
Pandora
Heracles

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Prometheus and Pandora

Narrator 1: The gods frequently waged war, with the unfortunate result that all living creatures on Earth had perished. Zeus decided it was time to restore Earth to its former splendor. He sent for Prometheus and his brother Epimetheus, both Titans, powerful giants who lived on earth.

Zeus: Prometheus and Epimetheus, I have a task for you.

Epimetheus: What do you need, Zeus?

Zeus: Go down to earth and fashion new men and beasts.

Prometheus: How will we do this?

Zeus: When you arrive at earth, simply go to the river. Use the clay on the banks to create the mortals, both human and animal. You'll find it works well. As you work, you can give each creature gifts to make it swift, strong, or whatever traits you see fit to bestow.

Narrator 2: The brothers journeyed to earth and began to create many creatures. As was his nature, Prometheus took great care, crafting each man in the image of the gods. Epimetheus created the animals, working as quickly as he could.

Epimetheus: Why are you so slow, brother? Look at what I've created in half the time it's taken you to make one mortal.

Prometheus: Good work takes time, Epimetheus. Men deserve to have the best.

Narrator 1: Unfortunately, Prometheus was so slow that Epimetheus used up all the good gifts on the animals he created. They could run fast, see far, and hear from great distances. They also had warm coats of fur, while the men were left to shiver at night. Taking pity on his creations, Prometheus went to Zeus for help.

Prometheus: Zeus, my people are carefully crafted, but they need warmth and a way to prepare their food. Won't you share the sacred fire with them?

Zeus: You must think I'm a fool! Fire is for the gods, not for mere mortals. Get back to your work.

Narrator 2: Prometheus returned to earth, but he couldn't stop thinking about the fire. He knew he'd probably be punished, but he felt responsible for the creatures he'd created.

Narrator 1: Prometheus sneaked up to Olympus, stole an ember from the fire there, and gave it to man, warning them to never let it die out. The fire not only kept mankind warm, but also kept the beasts at bay. Before long the men learned how to kill the beasts and cook their meat. The smell of roasting meat drifted to the heavens, alerting Zeus to Prometheus's betrayal. He summoned Prometheus to his court.

Zeus: You have disobeyed me, Prometheus, but I have a proposal for you. Have the men share whatever delicious meats they are preparing with me. Then perhaps I'll let them keep part of the meat for themselves, along with the fire that you stole from me.

Narrator 2: Prometheus returned to the mortals and gave them careful instructions.

Prometheus: Zeus wants a portion of the meat you are cooking. Here is what I propose. Butcher an ox and divide the meat into two equal portions. Put the fine meat in one sack with the entrails on top. Put the bones in the other sack with the fat on top. Then I'll give Zeus a choice. With some good fortune he may choose the wrong sack.

Narrator 1: Soon Prometheus returned to Zeus with an invitation.

Prometheus: Zeus, the men have prepared two portions of the ox. You don't have need of all of it, as you said. Why don't you come to earth and choose your portion? The men can keep the remains.

Narrator 2: Indeed, when Zeus examined the sacks, he assumed that the good meat lay underneath the fat and chose accordingly. He was furious when he realized he'd been duped.

Zeus: Prometheus, you have tricked me for the last time. You are to be bound in chains at the top of the Caucasus Mountains. Every day an eagle will come down from the sky and dine on your liver. By night your liver will return to health, providing dinner for the eagle the next day. I have another punishment in mind for your precious mortals.

Narrator 1: Until this time, all mortals were men. Zeus decided it was time they had a woman and called Hephaestus to him.

Zeus: Hephaestus, I want you to create a new mortal, fashioned after a goddess rather than a god.

Hephaestus: Do you have anything special in mind for her, Zeus?

Zeus: You can have all the help you need in bestowing gifts on her. Just call on the other gods as you need.

Hephaestus: This will be a worthy project. I can make a wonderful creature, Zeus.

Zeus: But don't make her perfect. The mortals don't deserve perfection!

Hephaestus: I understand, Zeus. You won't be displeased.

Narrator 2: Hephaestus called on the gods and goddesses to help in the creation of the first woman. Aphrodite gave her beauty and charm. Athena taught her cooking, weaving, and spinning. She received many great gifts, but Hephaestus tried to strike a balance, bestowing upon her the gifts of lying and deceit.

Narrator 1: Zeus called Epithemeus to his throne in Olympus.

Epithemeus: Zeus, how can I serve you?

Zeus: Actually, I have a great gift for you. The gods and goddesses have fashioned a woman to be your helpmate on earth. Her name is Pandora, and you may take her with you on your return. This clay pot is another great gift, but neither you nor Pandora can open it unless given my permission. Don't defy me.

Narrator 2: Epithemeus was immediately enchanted with Pandora's beauty and skills. Prometheus had warned him to be wary of Zeus's tricks and to refuse any gifts he might offer, but Epithemeus could only gaze on Pandora in wonder. Finally he decided he had to marry her.

Epithemeus: Pandora, I don't want to share you. Zeus has made a gift of you to the mortals, but you will become my bride.

Pandora: I'll be your wife, but I want to find out what is in the clay jar.

Epithemeus: Pandora, you heard what Zeus said. We are to never look inside it without his permission.

Pandora: Surely a little peek won't hurt anything.

Narrator 1: Before Epithemeus could stop her, Pandora broke the seal on the jar and lifted the lid. Out flew all the blessings of the world, returning quickly to the heavens. Following the blessings came the plagues of the world: envy, fear, greed, vanity, old age, sickness, and others.

Narrator 2: Pandora slammed the lid on the jar, but it was too late. The mortals began to suffer these miseries immediately, while Zeus observed in disgust. Only one blessing remained in the pot, and that was hope. That is why today all of mankind has only hope to counter all the challenges they face from birth to death.

Narrator 1: Meanwhile, Prometheus continued to suffer with his continued punishment. Many years later Heracles passed by while on his quest for the golden apples.

Heracles: Prometheus, what has happened to you?

Prometheus: Zeus is punishing me for giving fire to the mortals.

Heracles: How can your punishment be broken?

Prometheus: It seems I am caught here until someone breaks my chains and takes my place.

Heracles: I can break your chains, and I think I can deliver someone to take your place. But first, let me ensure that that eagle no longer torments you.

Narrator 2: Heracles quickly shot the eagle with his arrow. Known for being the strongest man in the world, he then tore apart the chains. Heracles then brought Chiron, the centaur, to take Prometheus's place. Prometheus expressed his gratitude to Heracles by telling him not to pick the golden apples on his quest or he would die. Only Atlas could pick these apples of immortality.

Narrator 1: Of course, Zeus observed all that transpired, but he allowed Heracles to free Prometheus. Nevertheless, he had one last punishment. He commanded that Prometheus forever wear an iron ring, complete with a chip from the wall of Caucasus. Prometheus was finally free, but he would always be linked to the mountain.