



Arachne was a young peasant girl who lived in Hypaipa, a quiet village in a land called Lydia. She was a gifted spinner and wove many stunning tapestries that she gave as gifts to family, friends and visitors. No-one in Hypaipa could understand how she had developed such an amazing talent, as she had been raised rough and proud by her father.

Arachne's father was a humble man who cared for the village's sheep. He would shear the sheep and bring his daughter the fluffy fleece, packed in tight bundles. Arachne spun this wool into fine strands, then wove these into pleasing fabrics and delicate brocades.

Drawn to the village by the beauty of Arachne's work was a steady stream of curious travellers. Eventually, tales of her great talent reached as far as Athena, the Greek goddess of wisdom, victory and craftsmanship, and supposedly the most brilliant of all weavers. As Athena was also a kind and thoughtful goddess, she was delighted to hear of Arachne's brilliance and she sent her faithful owls to Lydia so that they could find out more.

The owls gathered around the house where Arachne worked, and hovered over the heads of the people who watched through the windows. Inside the house they observed Arachne, her hair pinned back, putting the finishing touches to a tapestry before handing it to a grateful man.

"Why, Lady Arachne, this work is by far your best,"

Arachne laughed, and thanked the man, saying, "Of course — why, you could say that it's the best in the land. Even Athena herself would have a hard time matching my skill!"

When the owls reported Arachne's conceit, Athena was unimpressed. She believed that a mortal who compared herself to a god was not only arrogant, but rude as well.

Disguised as an old woman, the goddess Athena descended to Earth one quiet afternoon and went to the home of Arachne. When Arachne opened the door she was surprised — and a little disappointed — to find just one, old woman standing on her porch.

"I hear you are a wonderful weaver", said the old woman.

"Yes I am," answered Arachne.

"I hear your skill is second to none," said the old woman.

"Indeed it is," replied Arachne.

"You think you are better than all others?" asked the old woman. "You think your skill at the loom is greater than that of the goddess Athena?"

Without hesitation, Arachne answered, "Yes, I do."

Athena threw off her disguise and confronted Arachne. Although Arachne realised her mistake, she stood firm and refused to apologise. The goddess and the mortal agreed to a competition that would determine the best weaver. Each set up a loom and collected the finest threads they could find. They then began weaving, their nimble fingers darting between weft and warp. The images they wove, filled with rich and vibrant colours, quickly took shape.

The goddess Athena's creation was wondrous. In it, she portrayed the Greek gods doing kind deeds and living noble lives. Her pride in the gods was as obvious as her talent. Arachne, on the other hand,

the Greek gods, and especially Athena's father Zeus, behaving badly.

Athena was livid. She could have accepted that Arachne's skill was equal to her own. Indeed, she could not find fault with the girl's work. However, she could not forgive the mortal girl for being so insolent to the gods. Enraged, Athena hit Arachne.

Arachne was hurt and humiliated and any other goddess would have taken her life, but Athena took pity on the girl and decided to spare her. However, instead of allowing Arachne to continue to live as a peasant maiden, Athena transformed her into the world's first spider, able to weave intricate webs to her heart's content.

Today, spiders, the greatest weavers of all, are still classified as *arachnids*, in honour of the Arachne myth.



Questions

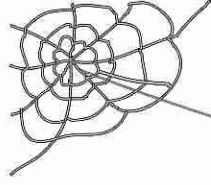
- Arachne lived in the village of
 - Lydia.
 - Athena.
 - Hypaipa.
- Why couldn't anyone work out why Arachne was such a good weaver?
 - She had been raised rough and proud.
 - She had skills that were greater than those of Athena's.
 - Her tapestries attracted travellers from all over the world.
- Athena was the goddess of
 - owls.
 - victory.
 - spiders.
- What did Athena disguise herself as?
 - a spider
 - a shepherd
 - an old woman
- Why was Athena not happy with Arachne?
 - She was an unkind goddess.
 - She could not tolerate a mortal being better than her.
 - She could not tolerate a mortal being insolent to the gods.
- What is the main purpose of this story?
 - To show where the word arachnid came from.
 - To teach people not to upset the gods.
 - To teach people that Ancient Greece was home to many gods.

Vocabulary

Match the words from the text to the clues.

humble faithful mortal insolent livid

- To be true and loyal
- Rude or disrespectful
- To be modest and unassuming
- To be furious or outraged
- A human being



Grammar

Alphabetical Order

Write the word that would be written **first** in alphabetical order.

- peasant, pleasing, porch
- spinner, stunning, shear
- tapestries, thoughtful, trace
- curious, craftsmanship, conceit

Sequencing

Look back at the story to find what happened first.

Choose **a** or **b**.

- Arachne's father brought her fluffy fleece.
 - Arachne spun wool into strands.
- The goddess Athena sent owls to spy on Arachne.
 - Travellers were drawn to Hypaipa to see Arachne's work.
- Arachne and a spider became one and the same.
 - Athena disguised herself as an old woman.

Think About This

- Which of the following best describe Arachne?
 - talented and humble
 - skilful and conceited
 - clumsy and arrogant
- Why do you think that Athena disguised herself as an old woman?
 - No-one would believe an old woman could weave.
 - Arachne would only speak with old women.
 - She didn't want Arachne to know she was a goddess.



Challenge Option

Prepare a brief fact sheet explaining how spiders spin their webs.