

Sirens Fact File

Ancient Greeks told stories called myths to explain things in nature, such as the weather, the formation of the world and death. The stories were full of adventurous heroes and terrifying creatures. Some of the scariest stories were about beings called the Sirens.

What Were the Sirens?

In Greek mythology, the Sirens were wicked yet beautiful creatures. They lured sailors to their deaths. The sirens would sing beautiful songs and play enchanting music. As ships sailed by, sailors would become transfixed by the music and would sail their ships to the rocky shore where they would be shipwrecked and die.



What Did Sirens Look Like?

The Sirens were described in different ways. Sometimes they were said to be part bird/part woman. Some ancient Greek pottery shows the Sirens as having wings and being able to fly. In some stories, they were described as being incredibly beautiful women.

The Sirens in Ancient Greek Stories

Jason was a mythological hero who was set a task of finding a magical golden fleece. He led his team of people (the 'Argonauts', named after their ship the 'Argo') on many adventures on their quest to find the fleece. The Argonauts knew the danger that the Sirens posed so Jason had Orpheus play his harp as loudly as possible to drown out their song. Butes, one of the Argonauts, could still hear the song and jumped into the sea. However, he was rescued by the goddess Aphrodite.

Odysseus was an ancient Greek hero who fought in the Trojan war. After the war, Odysseus set off to return home to Ithaca and had many adventures along the way. A sorceress named Circe had warned Odysseus about the Sirens so he instructed his men to put wax in their ears so they wouldn't hear the song. Because Odysseus was adventurous, he wanted to hear the Siren's song. Odysseus ordered his men to tie him to the ship's mast. He was then able to hear the enchanted music but was unable to make the ship follow it.

The End of the Sirens?

Some versions of the stories say that after Odysseus sailed past the Sirens, they died. This is because the Sirens had been told that should anyone hear their song and survive, then they themselves would die. Other stories say that the Sirens survived and would later take their revenge on Odysseus by killing his son Telemachus.

