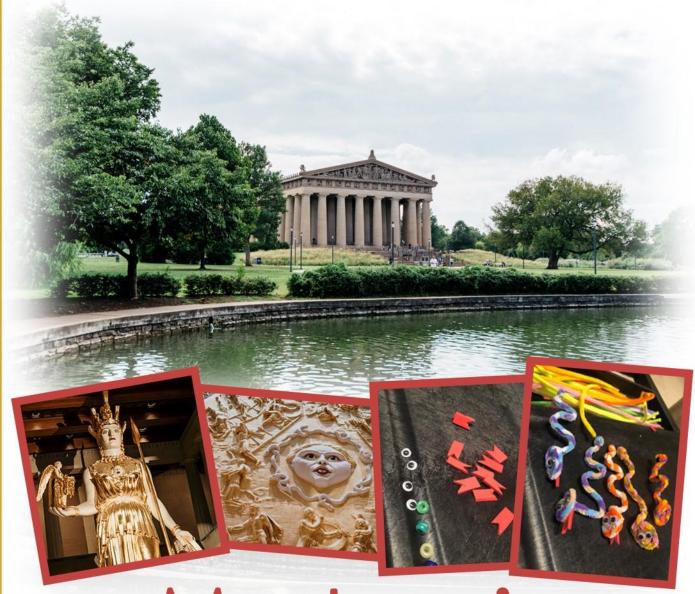


NASHVILLE PARTHENON EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES





Medusa's Snakes

Art Cart: Medusa's Snakes

Mission: To educate the public concerning the Parthenon and the civilization that built it, both in Athens, Greece, in the fifth century BCE and in Nashville, Tennessee, from 1897 to the present. To exhibit, collect, and care for objects and information related to fifth century BCE Athens, the Tennessee Centennial Exposition, and the rebuilding of the Nashville Parthenon. To exhibit, collect, and care for visual art and to educate the public concerning its various forms.

Program Title: Medusa's Snakes

Target Audience: Grades 5-12 and adults

Exhibit/Gallery: Naos

Author: Aubrey King, Education Intern, Nashville Parthenon

Editor: Katherine Petrole, Director of Education, Nashville Parthenon

Activity Time: Approximately 10-15 minutes (plus time for visitor questions)

Implementation Date: July 27th

Staff/Docents Needed: 1

Overview:

During this program, visitors will create snakes from pipe cleaners to represent Medusa. Offering hands-on experiences with figurines and toys will help visitors understand Medusa's role in Greek mythology. Visitors will learn about Medusa becoming a Gorgon, Perseus' heroic tale, and Medusa's death. Visitors will also observe the Medusa on the Athena statue's breastplate or aegis.

Big Idea:

Although Medusa is a common figure in Greek mythology, she was portrayed in many ways throughout art and literature.

Goals:

- Visitors will acquire introductory information about Medusa.
- Visitors will make a conclusion about the role of Medusa in Ancient Greece.

Objectives:

- Visitors will make observations about the different depictions of Medusa.
- Visitors will see and touch toys, figurines, and pictures of Medusa.

Family Learning Behaviors:

A. Family members actively join in on-going/starting program together.

Example: "Ok, now twist here. Let me put the eyes on."

L. Family member facilitates problem solving to mastery.

Example: "Here, let me help you. Now you can keep going."

V. Family members make excited, admiring, or appreciative comments to another about the activity.

Example: "That was great! Do you see the Medusa on Athena's shield?"

Education Standards:

This program meets the state education standards for Social Studies (sixth grade) and Ancient History (grades 9-12).

Sixth Grade Social Studies Ancient Greece: c. 800-300 BCE

- 6.46 Explain the polytheistic religion of ancient Greece, with respect to beliefs about the humanlike
 qualities of the deities, their importance in everyday life, and the emergence of the Olympic Games to
 honor Zeus.
- 6.47 Explain the historical significance of ancient Greek literature, including how the Iliad and the Odyssey provide insight into the life of the ancient Greeks.
- 6.49 Describe the purposes of major Greek architecture, including the Parthenon and the Acropolis.

(9-12) Ancient History

The Classical Civilizations of Greece and Rome

 AH.25 Identify the significant developments and contributions of Greece to the following: architecture, art/drama, history, language, law, literature/poetry, medicine, philosophy, religious institutions, science, and technology

Background information:

- What are Gorgons?
 - o In Greek mythology, the Gorgons are portrayed as three sisters named Stheno (ss-THEN-oh), Euryale (yur-EE-ale), and Medusa. The Gorgons were the daughters of the gods Phorcys and Ceto. The sisters had hideous faces with snakes for hair, sharp claws, and wings. These snakes could turn people into stone. Of the three sisters, only Medusa was mortal.
- How did Medusa become a gorgon?
 - o In early versions of the Medusa myth, she and her sisters were born Gorgons. The most common tale, however, places Medusa, Stheno, and Euryale as three maiden sisters. Medusa was said to be the most beautiful of them all, her hair being her best feature. Because of this, she caught Poseidon's attention. While Medusa was visiting the Temple of Athena, Poseidon came to her and raped her.
 - Athena was furious. Instead of punishing Poseidon, she cursed Medusa to become an ugly monster. Medusa's beautiful hair turned to snakes that could petrify anyone that looked at her. Athena also cursed Stheno and Euryale to the same fate as Medusa. However, Athena made Stheno and Euryale immortal. Because they were immortal, only Medusa could die.

Literature

- 8th century BCE: Gorgons mentioned in *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. According to Zolotnikova 2016:
 - o In the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, gorgon= 'dread and awful monster with grim eyes, glaring terribly' whose head, by itself, is in Hades. (p. 353)
 - No explanatory myth related to gorgons provided in *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. (p. 353)
- 7th century BCE: First myths about Gorgons in Hesiod's *Theogony*. According to Zolotnikova 2016:
 - o In *Theogeny*, there were three gorgon sisters who lived together somewhere far West, all daughters of the sea-deities Phorkys and Keto, but no specific details for their physical appearance. Sthenno and Euryale were immortal and forever young; Medusa was maiden mortal. Poseidon mated with Medusa in a soft meadow amid spring flowers. Perseus, an Argive hero, killed Medusa for unspecified reasons and cut off her head; the winged horse Pegasus and the boy Chrysaor came out of the neck of the decapitated Medusa.
- "In the Attic (Ionian) mythic tradition, the killing of Medusa by Perseus seems to have been interpreted quite early on as an act favored and supported by Athena." (Zolotnikova 2016, p. 353-354)
- Early 6th century BCE: ancient poem "The Shield of Herakles" refers to monstrous appearance of Medusa's sisters. According to Zolotnikova 2016:
 - o "Two serpents hung down at their girdles with heads curved forward. Their tongues were flickering, and their teeth gnashing with fury, and their eyes glaring fiercely." (p. 355)
- Late 6th century BCE: Pherekydes from the island of Syros composed another *Theogony*. According to Zolotnikova 2016:
 - Athena helped Perseus kill Medusa and accepted Medusa's head to attach to her aegis—this
 version of the story explains the connection of the dreadful, monstrous face on the shield or
 breast of Athena. (p. 355)

- 498 BCE: Writer Pindar mentions 6th century story in *Pythian Ode*. According to Zolotnikova 2016:
 - Medusa was a deadly female with hair made of snakes whose eyes turned the beholder to stone, while Perseus the hero killed Medusa with Athena's and Hermes' help by cutting off her head and then escaping from Medusa's gorgon sisters. Out of Medusa's neck spring Pegasus ("beautiful white winged horse especially linked to Corinth") and Chrysaor (hero with golden sword). Perseus used Medusa's severed head on the island of Seriphos to turn the king Polydektes into stone, and rescued his mother Danae. He then gave Medusa's head to Athena as a thank-offering. (p. 355-356)
 - Medusa also described as beautiful and having nice cheeks, while referencing her ferocity and snake hair.
- 1st century CE: Roman poet Ovid included stories of Medusa in poem *Metamorphoses*. According to Zolotnikova 2016:
 - Medusa "was originally a ravishingly beautiful maiden and 'the jealous aspiration of many suitors.' Poseidon raped her in Athena's temple and the enraged goddess transformed Medusa's beautiful hair to serpents and made her face so terrible to behold that the mere sight of it would turn onlookers to stone." (p. 358)
- 2nd century CE: Writer Pausanias described Medusa's warrior-like attitude, beauty, and beheading. According to Zolotnikova 2016:
 - Medusa's beauty is "deep-rooted in the mythological imagery of the Greeks."
 - "Not far from the building in the market-place of Argos is a mound of earth, in which they say lies the head of the Gorgon Medusa... After the death of her father, Phorkus, she reigned over those living around Lake Tritonis, going out hunting and leading the Libyans to battle. On one such occasion, when she was encamped with an army over against the forces of Perseus, she was assassinated at night. Perseus, admiring her beauty even in death, cut off her head and carried it to show the Greeks." (p. 358)
- 2nd century CE: myths composed by (Pseudo-) Apollodorus include stories of Medusa. According to Zolotnikova 2016:
 - Medusa was originally so beautiful that she challenged Athena to a beauty contest. Athena won and punished Medusa for being too bold by turning her into a hideous monster to be beheaded by Perseus, Athena's champion. (p. 358)

Mythology, Perseus, and Medusa

• The story told below is copied out of *Stories from Ancient Greece & Rome* by Joyce Tyldesley and Julian Heath, p. 62-69:

"Acrisius was the king of Argos. He had just one child; a grown-up daughter named Danaë. Danaë too had just one child; a young son named Perseus. Perseus's father was Zeus, the king of the gods. One day, as Acrisius prayed to the gods in the temple, he received a message. It was not the sort of message that anyone would want to hear. The gods told Acrisius that he would one day be killed by his own grandson. Frightened for his own safety but unwilling to harm either his daughter Danaë or her young son Perseus, Acrisius ordered his carpenters to make a large wooden chest. He forced Danaë and Perseus to lie in the chest, then he slammed the lid shut, locked it, and threw the chest into the Mediterranean Sea. As the chest floated away from Argos, Acrisius felt a great sense of relief. With Perseus gone, he had no grandson. And with Danaë gone, he could never have another grandson. Problem solved! There was now no way that he could be killed. He would live forever.

Locked in the dark chest, bobbing up and down with the waves, Danaë and Perseus were very frightened. They thought that they were about to drown. Or, if they did not drown, that they would starve to death in the chest. They did not realize that Zeus, king of the gods and father of Perseus, was protecting them from danger. After several days at sea, their locked chest washed up on the shore of the island of Seriphos, and Danaë and Perseus were rescued by a kind fisherman. They went to live in the fisherman's cottage, where Perseus grew up to become a good and brave fisherman.

The island of Seriphos was ruled by King Polydectes. Polydectes fell in love with Danaë; he wanted to marry her and to make her his queen. Perseus, however, did not trust Polydectes. He realized that the king was a cruel man, and he did not want him to marry his mother and become his father. Perseus asked Danaë not to marry Polydectes, and she agreed. She would do as her son asked. This interference in his love life made Polydectes very angry indeed. If Perseus vanished, Danaë would probably agree to be his bride. Polydectes started to think of ways that Perseus could be forced to leave the island of Seriphos.

King Polydectes announced that he was going to throw a splendid party. There would be vast amounts of excellent food, many kinds of delicious drinks, and some very good entertainment provided by the best musicians, singers, dancers and acrobats on Seriphos. All the young men on the island were to be invited to the party. However, every guest would be expected to bring a horse as a gift for the king.

Perseus was very excited because he, too, was invited to the king's party. He could not wait to eat the excellent food, drink the delicious drinks, and enjoy the musicians, singers, dancers and acrobats. There was only one problem; he was a humble fisherman, and he did not have a horse to give to the king. Foolishly, he went to Polydectes, and explained his problem:

'I am so sorry, my king. I really want to come to your splendid party, but I do not have a horse to give to you. However, I will give you anything else that you ask for. Anything at all. Just tell me what you would like.'

Polydectes thought for a moment, and then spoke. His response horrified Perseus:

'Perseus, you have offered to bring me anything that I ask for. So, I ask you to bring me the head of Medusa, the snake-haired Gorgon whose eyes turn living creatures to stone. Go now and collect the head. Do not return to the island of Seriphos until you have this gift for me.'

Perseus went pale. He felt a bit sick, and he started to tremble. He knew exactly who Medusa was. She was one of the three Gorgon sisters who lived in a faraway land. The three sisters were named Euryale, Stheno and Medusa. All three had human faces and arms. But they also had metal claws, hair made from live snakes, and the lower body of a giant serpent. All three were very dangerous, and all three liked to kill. Just one glance from their eyes would turn any living creature into a stone statue. Only one of the three Gorgon sisters

 Medusa – was mortal and could be killed. The other two Gorgon sisters, Euryale and Stheno, could not die.

Extremely worried, Perseus prayed to the wise goddess Athena and asked for her help. Luckily, Athena liked Perseus, and was happy to offer some good advice. First, she told Perseus that he would need to collect the right equipment if he was to kill the Gorgon. She lent him a polished metal shield. His father Zeus, king of the gods, lent him sharp sword, and Hermes, the messenger god, lent a pair of winged sandals which would allow Perseus to fly, and a helmet that would allow him to become invisible.

Next, the wise goddess Athena told Perseus how to find Medusa:

'You must first travel to the house of the Grey Ones. They will tell you where to find the home of the Gorgons.'

'But who are the Grey Ones?' asked Perseus, 'and where do they live?'

'The Grey Ones are three very old women. They are the sisters of the Gorgons, but they are harmless. They live in a house many miles from here. They share one eye and one tooth, passing them from one to another as they need to use them. You must sneak into their house, steal their one eye, and refuse to give it back until they tell you where Medusa lives.'

Perseus strapped on his sandals, put on his invisibility helmet, picked up his sharp sword and polished shield, and flew off to find the far-away house where the Grey Ones lived. Eventually, after many days and nights of searching, he found it. The house was damp and dark, and it smelt quite unpleasant. Entering without knocking, Perseus saw the three very old women crouched around a small fire. These were the Grey Ones. The first very old woman held an eye in her withered hand; she could see, but she could not eat. The second very old woman held a tooth in her withered hand; she could eat, but she could not see. The third very old woman held nothing at all in her withered hand; she had no eye and no tooth and could neither see nor eat.

Perseus rushed forward and snatched the eye from the first Grey One. Immediately, all three sisters shrieked loudly:

'Who is that? Who has stolen our one eye? Give it back at once, you thief! Without that eye, none of us can see.'

'I am Perseus, son of Danaë. I come from the island of Seriphos. I mean you no harm. I will gladly return your eye. But first you must tell me where the Gorgon known as Medusa lives.'

Grumbling, the three very old women told Perseus where he might find Medusa's home. Perseus returned the stolen eye to the nearest old woman, and quickly flew away from the house of the Grey Ones.

Medusa and her two Gorgon sisters lived in a cave cut into the slope of a very steep mountain, near the sea. The cave looked like a simple hole in the rock, but Perseus knew that he had found the right place, because the cave entrance was surrounded by many, many statues. These were the men, women, children and animals who had accidentally looked at the Gorgons and had instantly been turned into stone.

Perseus tiptoed past the many statues and entered the cave. Inside, he could see columns, stairways, and many rooms, and he could hear a curious rumbling and hissing noise. The three Gorgons were asleep. All three sisters were snoring very loudly, while the live snakes that covered their heads were hissing quietly as they dreamed. Perseus followed the sound of the snoring and hissing because he knew that it would lead him to Medusa and her sisters. However, he also knew that he must not look directly at the three Gorgons, as their eyes had the power to turn him into stone. He did not want to become a part of their statue collection. So, he used his polished shield as a mirror, and looked only at the reflections in the cave as he made his way cautiously towards their bedroom, being careful not to trip on the stone statues that littered the floor.

Medusa was the largest and ugliest of the three sisters. Not only did she have a slithery serpent body, metal claws and live-snake hair, she also had a large tongue that flickered in and out of her mouth, and a very mean expression on her face. Creeping towards the sleeping Medusa, and always using his shield as a mirror, Perseus drew his sword. He was just about to strike a fatal blow, when the live snakes on Medusa's head let out a loud hiss, and Medusa woke up. She opened one eye, then the other eye, and looked around her, but Perseus, who was still wearing his invisibility helmet and still using the shield as a mirror, was safe. Confused, Medusa reared up, and Perseus swung his sharp sword. The hair-snakes continued to hiss, but Medusa was dead. Perseus picked up her head by its snake-hair and dropped it into a bag. He then flew away, quickly, before the other two Gorgons could wake up and turn him to stone.

Safely back on the island of Seriphos, Perseus returned his equipment to Athena, Zeus and Hermes and thanked them for their help. He then went to straight the palace and demanded an audience with the king.

'Ah, Perseus," Polydectes laughed. "Welcome back to the island of Seriphos. What is in your bag? Is it a gift for me? Have you bought me the head of Medusa, as you promised?'

'Indeed, I have, my king,' said Perseus. And, closing his eyes tight shut, he quickly pulled Medusa's head out of the bag, again holding it by the snake-hair. Astonished, Polydectes looked directly into Medusa's eyes, and was instantly turned to stone. Carefully, with his eyes still tight shut, Perseus put the head back into the bag.

With Polydectes now a statue, Danaë was free to marry the kind fisherman who had rescued her and her son many years ago. But what happened to King Acrisius of Argos? Did he live forever, as he had hoped? No. No one can live forever. One day Acrisius was watching a sporting competition when a discus flew into the crowd, hit him on the head, and killed him. The discus that accidentally killed King Acrisius was thrown by his long-lost grandson, Perseus."

<u>Art</u>



Etruscan, 6th century BCE



Greek, South Italian, Tarentine, ca. 540 BCE



Greek, South Italian, Tarentine, 2nd half of the 5th century BCE



Greek, South Italian, Apulian, Canosan, late 4th to early 3rd century BCE





This program introduces visitors to the Medusa myth and shows the way she is displayed on the Athena statue. By interacting with figurines and images of Medusa, visitors will understand her story and why she is pictured on the Athena statue.

Ideas for Initiating Interaction:

This program will take place in a visible location in front of Athena. Staff can tell visitors to keep an eye out for something special happening near Athena.

Daily times for these programs will be posted by the front desk.

Props:

- Art Cart
- Folding stool
- T-style acrylic signholders (with signs) for Front Desk and Art Cart
- Products from Museum Store:
 - o Toy Medusa \$13
 - Toy Poseidon
 - Snake Ring
 - <u>Usborne Illustrated Stories from the Greek Myths</u> \$19.99
 - Heroes of Greek Mythology \$9.95
- Appendix A: Images
- Pipe cleaners (snake)
- Red felt (snake tongue)
- Beads (snake eyes)
- Glue
- Clicker counter
- Clipboard with program tracking sheet
- Pencil

Advance Preparation:

- Gather props on Art Cart and check craft supplies.
- Drop off "Program Happening Now" sign at Front Desk and inform staff how long you will be in the Naos.
- Bring Art Cart to Naos and set up program supplies.

Gathering:

"Hi, everyone! My name is ____ and I brought some things to help us learn about Medusa. Come stop by the cart while you are exploring today."

Program Script: Note: This script is a suggestion of how to initiate a discussion between you, the facilitator, and the visitors. You are welcome to navigate this discussion following your own path, as any dialogue that supports the mission, goals, and objectives is key to a successful program. All dialogue should be plain, notes and stage directions should be **bold**.

Hi, come on up. My name is _____ and I have some interesting things on my cart here. Have you been to the Parthenon before? (Allow for response.) Welcome! (Or Welcome back!) We're glad to see you!

What do you notice about this giant statue of Athena? (Allow for response. Include all visitors by asking for observations from younger and older visitors.) Excellent observations. Let's focus on one of those—Medusa! What do you know about Medusa? (Allow for response. This helps younger visitors connect their Parthenon visit to something familiar.)

Here I have a toy Medusa, who looks like a snake-haired monster! (**Show toy.**) I think it's interesting that stories about Medusa change over time. (**Show images in books and Appendix A: Images.**) What do you notice about all these images of Medusa? (**Allow for response.**) Her appearance changes! Early on, she is a hideous monster. But later, she is a beautiful woman. Today, we're going to learn more about her story!

Medusa had two sisters named Stheno and Euryale. Do you have sisters or siblings? (**Allow for response.**) Medusa was different than her two sisters-- they were both immortal, but Medusa was not. Some stories say that Medusa had beautiful hair. Poseidon thought that Medusa was very beautiful, so he met her in the temple of Athena. Athena found out and was furious! So, she turned Medusa's hair into slithering snakes that could turn people to stone. What do you think about Medusa, was it fair for Athena to curse her? (**Allow for response.**)

There's more stories about Medusa, though! Have you heard of Perseus, or Percy? (**Allow for response.**) Perseus was the famous Greek hero who killed Medusa—and today Percy and this same story is popular in the Percy Jackson books and movies. Perseus was the son of Zeus, but was raised as a fisherman after his grandfather cast Perseus and his mother out because of a prophecy. Perseus and his mother Danae were tossed adrift at sea in a basket. A fisherman rescued them when they washed ashore on the Greek island of Seriphos.

One day, the King of Seriphos, Polydectes, held a big party. Everyone who attended had to bring a horse as a gift! Perseus did not have a horse to give, so he asked the King what other gift he could bring instead. Well, King Polydectes wanted to marry Perseus's mother (Danae), but Perseus had so far interfered and prevented the marriage. King Polydectes thought of a plan to get rid of Perseus, so he asked for his gift to be the head of the gorgon Medusa. The King thought that Perseus would not come back alive.

Perseus got help from Athena and Hermes, who gave him advice and special gear such as her shield his winged sandals. Perseus found the gorgon's cave and knew he could not look them in the eyes, so he used Athena's shield as a mirror. Luckily, the gorgons were still sleeping! Perseus chopped off Medusa's head and journeyed back home, where he used Medua's head to turn King Polydectes into stone.

Isn't that quite the story? (**Allow for questions.**) So, why might Athena have the head of Medusa on her shield and breastplate? (**Allow for response.**) It was a gift from Perseus, as a thanks for lending her shield.

Now that you know all Medusa, why don't we do something cool? We can make snakes out of pipe cleaners to wear around you finger, wrist, or ear! (Pass out materials and give instructions.)

- Select three pipe cleaners.
- Thread them all through a bead.
- Bend or fold slightly so they're stuck together.
- Next, braid or twist the entire pipe cleaner.
- Then start spiraling the non-bead end sideways, almost like a snail shell. This will be the head.
- Pinch this spiral a bit to make it more of an oval shape.
- Glue a tongue to the bottom of the head. Hold it there for 30 seconds.
- Glue two googly eyes to the top of the head. You might need to hold it together for a while, or use more glue when you get home.
- When the glue it set, you can bend the body to make bumps or curl it, and wear it proudly! Just don't let anyone look directly into its eyes;)

Those snakes look great, awesome job!

Conclusion:

- Example: Thanks for joining me today! I hope you enjoyed learning about Medusa. I'll be here for about __ minutes if you have more questions while you explore. If you'd like to see more examples of Medusa in Greek art and architecture, feel free to stay and look at some pictures.
- Example: Thanks for joining me today! I hope you enjoyed learning about Medusa. If you head down that way, you can get a glimpse of Medusa on Athena's shield. If you have any questions, please let me know and enjoy your visit!

Adaptation suggestions for different audiences:

One Family/Small program size

• Tailor conservation information to specific ages in the group. Be sure to include all ages in the conversation and ability to hold objects and ask guestions.

For younger/preschool audiences

• Spend more time on visual representation. Instead of saying that Poseidon raped or assaulted Medusa, instead say that they were together in the temple of Athena. Also, you can give them a pre-made snake.

<u>Larger groups (who may wish to participate but have limited time or space)</u>

Keep discussions shorter. Include adults by inviting them to answer questions, modeling participation
for their group. Let them know what supplies are needed for the craft and suggest that they could
make one at home.

Adults only

 Adults often look for more detailed background knowledge, including the origin of the myth, different representation in art, etc.

Following Up: This can be a space for self-reflection, for reporting damaged props, and reminder to record the number of people you spoke with, all ages, even babies—if someone heard you, or watched an interaction with you, they count!

- Self-assessment: What went well? What is one thing that didn't go well? What is one thing you will try next time?
- Record number of visitors on the program clipboard. Return cart and materials; report any items that need repair or replacement.

Resources:

- Karoglou, Kiki. "Dangerous Beauty: Medusa in Classical Art." The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin, v.75, no. 3 (Winter 2018).
 - https://www.metmuseum.org/art/metpublications/Dangerous Beauty Medusa in Classical Art
 The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin v75 no 3
- Tennessee Sixth Grade Social Studies and Ancient History (9-12) Standards
 - https://www.tn.gov/education/instruction/academic-standards/social-studies-standards.html
 - o https://www.tn.gov/content/dam/tn/education/standards/ss/Social_Studies_Standards.pdf
- Tyldesley, Joyce, and Julian Heath. Stories from Ancient Greece & Rome. Oxbow Books, 2017. JSTOR.
 - www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctvh1dt4f
- Zolotnikova, Olga. "A hideous monster or a beautiful maiden? Did the Western Greeks alter the concept of Gorgon?" Philosopher Kings and Tragic Heroes: Essays on Images and Ideas from Western Greece.
 H. L. Reid and D. Tanasi (eds.). Sioux City, Parnassos Press, 353-370, 2016. JSTOR.
 - https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctvbj7gjn

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APPENDIX A: IMAGES

Medusa, Etruscan, 6th century BCE 2,600 years ago

Medusa, South Italian, ca. 540 BCE 2,540 years ago





Medusa on shield, 1990 (representing 430s BCE)

