

English Language for Competitive Exams
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Week - 07
Lecture - 33
Greek Mythology and Vocabulary

Welcome back friends to today's lecture, today's session for English language for competitive exams. Today we are going to, as I already mentioned in my last class vocabulary related to Greek mythology, now Greek mythology has given us innumerable words. We do not even realize that these words have their origin in the Greek mythology; the legendary, the mythical gods and goddesses, and personae, personalities from Greek mythology.

So, the first name that comes to mind, when we talk about Greek mythology is homer h o m e r, and from homer we get the adjective Homeric, which is larger than life, which is of epic proportion. So, what is epic? Epic is a lengthy long verse or poem, that has, that is of tremendous huge magnitude. So, homer is writer of great epics Iliad and Odyssey; Iliad and Odyssey narrating the adventures of the Greek gods, goddesses, warriors, so epic proportion. So, whatever is Homeric is, in today's language related to Homeric proportions, or large, larger than life or epic or of very great magnitude, huge magnitude we hear stories about the persons Homeric tantrums. This is a Homeric attempt, it preventing catastrophe. So, an epic about the escapees and adventures of gods and heroes in the trogon war; that is what homer did, but then here we have to say about, in today's lingo or terms we use it to denote something which is larger than life.

Next is Achilles heels. Now Achilles, who was Achilles? Again a Greek hero, when Achilles was a child, his mother dipped him, when if the infant Achille into the river sticks, and made him invulnerable to any kind of weapon, except in the heel by which she held him; therefore, heel of Achille is the weak spot, and it proved in the case of Achilles who was killed before the walls of troy, when prince Paris shot him in the heel with a poisoned arrow. So, therefore, Achille heel, he was invincible, he would not have died otherwise, but only portion of his body, the only part of his body that was, vulnerable was his heels.

So, the tendency of Achilles, which binds the muscles of calf to the bone of the heel, they receive the name from this myth. You should also know in quadruplet us; that is animals, mammals that move on four feet, this tendency is called the hamstring. To hamstring an animal is to lame it by cutting this tangle, so to hamstring means, to weaken, to destroy the efficiency of somebody something to crippin. So, Achilles heels is a weak spot, French is her Achilles heel, it is very or she is very weak in, the French subject.

Next word aegis, this could be spelt without any also aegis. The aegis was the mantle and shield of the god Zeus z e u s, this is something a name that all of you should be familiar with Zeus, the supreme god in Greek mythology. So, even the king of the gods Zeus, he needed protection in his wars with the titans. So, Zeus lent the aegis to his daughter ethane, when she went into battle on the side of the Greeks, during the trogon war. Homer describes this as a sort of cloak, a mantle. It is generally associated with statues of ethane, on which it appears as a short cloak covered with scales. Whether it was a shield or a cloak, it is certainly had protective powers. Since on it were serpents and head of the gorgon, which turned men to stone if they looked at it. So, in modern usage the meaning of aegis is a shield or protection, and it also, it has been extended to include sponsorship or auspices.

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So, look how language develops, how it evolves. So, now, we say auspices, sponsorship. I am talking about modern term, in modern terms, not the Greek terms. Today aegis is mostly used as part of the, I mean as under the aegis, supporting programs projects mostly in that public welfare. It can also be used in the legal context.

Next word and it is a name Cassandra, Woddie Allen has made a movie. So, Apollo fell in love with Cassandra, and who was the daughter of king prime. He gave her the gift of prophesy, but when she failed to carry out her promise to love him, he decreed that nobody should believe her, although she spoke the truth. So, Cassandra is therefore, prophet; a female prophet, or rather a prophet of doom. Today the name is applied to anyone who utters warnings of trouble to come whether the prophecy is believed or not, but Cassandra today. So, you are Cassandra, means you are giving a warning of troubles to come.

Next word is chimera, I will also write Cassandra. The chimera was horrible monster that breathe fire. It had the head of a lion body of a goat, and it had a serpent's tail, it also had a goats head on it is back. Now it is a fantastic combination. So, a wild dream, an impractical idea, some fantastic idea, a vein fancy is the chimera. The adjective is chimerical. Robert Louie Stevenson; the great English essayist he wrote an essay called Eldorado, and he says that the goals that men seek, and he terms them chimeras. So, wild fancies something that is not practical.

Next word is hermitically sealed. Now hermits he was the roman, it is a roman name for mercury, mercury is a patron God of Magic. In the middle ages Alchemida, precedes of chemistry was known as a hermitic art, to put the hermitic seal or the seal of the hermits on a bottle in the laboratory meant, to twist the neck with flame and therefore, seal it airtight. So, hermitically sealed, the expression is often used figuratively to imply that a person's mind is shut against the infiltration of new ideas or information. So, you are hermetically sealed, it is a very bad thing, do not be hermitically sealed; that means, you are closing out new ideas, exchange of information.

Next word is hydra headed; again very popular term, hydra, hydra headed. The Hydra was a water monster; you know hydra hydrogen, hydrant, hydraulics, hydrophobia. So, all these words even dehydrate, that is where it comes from. So, where that is where these words come from. So, Hydra was a water monster, it had nine heads, think of

Indian mythology also, a monster with ten heads. The Hercules, a great hero, Greek hero, a man with immense strength, he was ordered to kill the Hydra. Now the Hydra had remarkable regenerative powers, as soon as Hercules would cut off a head, two new ones replaced it. Think of the film Terminator the two, second Terminator, Terminator two the judgment day, and the more you kill the villain is android the robot, the faster he would or it would regenerate itself. So, all these ideas and plots come from the Greek mythology.

Now remember in hydra, in hydra scales the heads could not grow back, if fire was applied immediately to the cut. Hercules therefore, enlisted the aid of an assistant, who quarterized the necks as Hercules severed the heads, hydra headed means hard to eliminate or destroy, the term is applied to an evil which apparently put down in one place, springs up elsewhere. In biology the hydra is a fresh water animal of microscopic size, which has the property of it is mythological name say, if this is cut up each part will develop into new hydra.

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Iridescent, iris that is the origin was a lovely maiden, who left a trail of color as she carried messages from the gods to the earth. She was the goddess of the rainbow. So, the word iris, i r i s itself may mean a flower, a part of the eye, or the combination of the brilliant colors. So, it is a beautiful name suggesting beautiful imagery; therefore, poets were fascinated by the name, in Tanisens lines from Loxley hall. He uses the word is the

verses in the way the spring, a livelier iris changes on the burnished off, and turns to thoughts of love, so Loxley hall and tanisens use of the word iridescent, beautiful being.

Next word is Pandora's Box, you open a Pandora's box and what happens troubles. The first woman according to Greek mythology was someone called Pandora. Milton tells us the British, the English poet Milton, John Milton the poet, the writer of paradise lost an epic poem, and he tells us how she got her name. He tells. Milton says Pandora whom the gods endowed with all their gifts. So, pan means all when we use the word pan Indians, all Indians, across India. So, pan p a n, Andorra means gifts. So, every god and goddess contributes something to make her a perfect being, Zeus angered at mankind, sent her down to be a cursed man, not to a particular man, but to mankind. until she was created the earth was only inhabited by man and bees, the gods gave her a box which she was warned not to open, unable to overcome her curiosity, she did open it one day, trouble then came up on earth, all the ills that plagued the body and mind of man flew out.

Only hope remained that someday something better would come. So, opening a Pandora's Box, now it has become a very popular, very common usage in our language. it could be anti feminist when women do something opening a Pandora's box, but we often say that politicians, you steer this problem, you wake up this problem and you are going to open a Pandora's box. So, it is better to let sleeping dogs lie, do not steer the issue, or otherwise there will be Pandora's box, all sorts of mudslinging will happen. A Pandora's Box in other way other words is a source of evil, a seeding cauldron, on which there should be lid. This is a cauldron, cauldron is something a huge pot in which you boil something, stew something.

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Next word is promethean, one of the most popular and sympathetic Greek figures. Prometheus was a titan who brought the gift of fire to man kinds. So, that by it is use man could develop his civilization. See the use of fire was very important, like Prometheus we often say the scientist of our time, have rested from nature the secret; that is no longer a secret. So, promethean has, if someone who has to make immense sacrifice in order to bring something good to mankind, larger good of mankind. We often say once again men are turning into to the symbol of Prometheus, as a lesson, a warning to mankind. So, Prometheus was bound to the edge of a precipice, a cliff, and every day a vulture or eagle would eat off his liver; that was meant to be a punishment, but then Prometheus was a hero and he could bear the punishment

Next word is antaeus. I advise you if you are interested in all these words to keep looking up these words for more background knowledge, and understanding and how these are used. So, antaeus is having the power to renew ones strength, Antaeus was a wrestler, son of Poseidon Neptune and Earth, and he was invincible as long as he was in contact with mother earth, so son of Poseidon and Earth, Poseidon also another word for Neptune. The aragonites were heroes who sailed with Jason on the Argo in quest of the Golden Flees. So, the coinage of the term Astronauts, or astronauts can be explained as like the Argonauts of antiquity. The Argonauts sailed the seized on the Argo, their swift ship. So, antaeus, a wrestler son of Poseidon, and Argonauts heroes who sailed with Jason on the Argo. Now remember the astronauts are being. For example, we can say the

astronauts are propelled in a capsule towards the astras, stars or outer space, the word cosmonaut, became equated with astronauts.

Next word is Sisyphean, it comes from the word or the name Sisyphus s i s y p h u s. He was a king of currant, and it is used for a task, that is endless at the same time ineffective. The myth of Sisyphus, from Sisyphus you get Sisyphean, a task that is arduous as well as ineffective.

Next word is titan. The titans were the members of divine beings, they descended from the primordial deities, and they preceded the Olympian deities. Now the titans most famously include the first 12 children of the primordial Gaia; that is mother earth and Uranus. So, Gaia and Uranus they were giant deities, so titans, origins of Titans giant deities. So, today when we say, it is a titan; that means, a giant figure, it is a very positive name you take titanic steps towards something gigantic steps, he is a titan in the field of science, titanic structure. So, you politician of titanic magnitude, almost like a deity, god like proportions, you are paying someone a huge respect you can call him a or her a titanic figure.

Next is Pantheon p a n t h e o n, it means all the gods or of a people or religion, the deities of the Hindu pantheon. Today we also call a group of famous or important people, the pantheon has come together, in order for you know to collect, something to for a charitable cause; so a pantheon of stars, a pantheon of musicians. So, group of important people, the pantheon of the all time greats. The Beatles have joined the pantheon of all time great musicians.

Next word is Argus eyed a r g u s, someone who is very watchful, keen sighted very observant. Remember Argus was a mythological monster, who had a hundred eyes, some of which always remained awake. The Argus eyed very observant, the principle of the college is Argus eyed

Next word is bacchanalian, look at them spelling double c h a n a. Now this is characterized by drunken rivalries or by esthetic frenzies. Bacchus was the god of wine, and bacchanalia were feasts of revelry in his honor. So, when we say bacchanalian festivity, we mean by people were reveling and drinking and behaving in general, very wildly.

Next word is calliope c a l l i o p e. Calliope was the muse of eloquent, someone who could speak beautifully, her name meaning beautiful voice is humorously applied to this modern harsh sounding instrument calliope; a series of extreme whistles played from a key board, stem organ. So, these are the synonyms.

Next word is cornucopia; it means horns of plenty in exhaustible reserves, symbol of abundance, the infant Zeus was nursed by a goat name Amelthia; one of whose horns had the power of being filled with whatever the owner desired. So, cornucopia means horn of plenty.

And next word is Cyclops, cyclopean. So, Cyclops were giants, who erected structures by piling up huge stones without cementing them. This is used to denote something which is huge, massive, and it is often used to describe a type of early architecture.

Next word is gorgon, g o r g o n, gorgons were three sisters, very ugly sisters, anyone who looked at them would turn into stone. Medusa one of the three gorgon sisters, she was the only one of the gorgons who was subject to mortality. She celebrated for her personal charms, and the beauty of her hair locks, Neptune became enameled of her obtained her favors in the temple of Minerva. Now the violation of the sanctity of the temple provoked Minerva, and she changed the beautiful locks of medusa into serpents.

So, a woman with serpent like coil hair. So, medusa and her sisters they came into the world with snakes on their head, instead of hair. Their bodies were also covered with scales, impenetrable scales, and their very looks at the power of killing or turning to stones. So, persias surrendered his name immortal by his conquest of medusa. He cut off her head and the blood that dropped from the wound, produced the innumerable serpents of a certain continent. So, the conqueror placed medusas head on the shield of Minerva, which was used when he went on his expedition, the head still retained the same petrifying power as before, and it was fatally known in the court of sepias, the king as medusas head, you look at it you turn into stone. So, something very inauspicious, medusa head is now also used to denote certain kind of texture of hair.

Next word is harpy h a r p y, a ravenous person, the harpies were flying female monsters. So, today it has come to denote someone who is very, who is a ravishing grasping ravenous demanding per person. They snatch the food of their victims and the souls of

the dead. So, that is where the word comes from someone who are very greedy, someone who is very greedy, some people who are very greedy.

Next term is Janus faced j a n u s; that means, two faced, one half is something and another half is something else. Janus faced, two faced. Janus was a god, his statues rather show us with two heads facing in opposite direction. So, a person who is duplicitous, who is hypocritical, today we say Janus you know, he is not able or not willing to give, or take a stand.

Next word is jovial, quite common, joyous, merrymaking, inspiring happiness. Jovial is pertained to Jupiter, persons born under it is believed, persons born under the planet Jupiter are supposed to be joyous, joyful. Ancient sculptures and poets represented Jupiter and Zeus as smiling appointment. So, that it is jovial, coming from Jupiter, happy.

Next word is mentor m e n t o r. We often use this often in academic as well as corporate set ups mentor; he is my mentor we describe a mentor as a teacher, or someone who gives us counseling. We also use for athletic, this word for athletic coaches. Mentor; remember the Greek mentor was the friend of Ulysses, to whom the later entrusted the education of his son. So, mentor became the educator of Ulysses son. So, that is how we get the word.

Next word is mercurial, synonyms are swift, active, quick silver, you know having the qualities of mercury. Mercury the messenger of the gods, who flew with the aid of his winged footwear, sandals, therefore, swift and active, we say mercurial temper.

Next word is myrmidons look at the spelling, these are loyal followers, attendance who execute order without question or pity or mercy no questions asked just shoot myrmidons was, a tribe of warriors who followed Achilles. So, when today's language if someone is a blind follower who could do anything for the sake of pleasing the leader, we call them myrmidons, sycophants, if you take it to another level.

Next word is narcissism, which is self love and admiration. Narcissus was a handsome youth who fell in love with his own reflection, and was changed into the flower of same name. So, when people are too obsessed with themselves, we call them narcissistic. You harbor narcissistic tendencies, self love, excessive self, all of us should love ourselves

which is very normal, but to be obsessed by ones, or to try, and people who are obsessed looking at their own reflection, harping on their own glory, achievements, they are narcissistic, they want people to praise them all the time.

Nemesis n e m e s i s, nemesis was the goddess of retribution of punishment, the upholder of the moral courts. The nemesis in other words is an agent of retribution or punishment, it is a Jing. So, you are a nemesis, I met my nemesis there, someone who opposed me, who somehow you know brought punishment or me.

There is a word called odyssey which is very common o d y double s e y, which means long voyage. Now if you say I am going from here to my hometown that is not an odyssey that is a journey that is a common normal regular journey. Odyssey is a long voyage; it is often dangerous brought with danger, adventures. So, you are odyssey. Writers often use you know, the process of this writing, this novel my odyssey, or my journey as an, as someone very accomplish. So, my odyssey, but then you have seen ups and downs, you do not just say I sat in a train from here to my hometown and then that was an odyssey.

Remember odyssey is another word for Ulysses, he is the hero of homers odyssey. He took 10 years to get home from the trogon war, meeting many strange or encountering many strange creatures, as well as facing lot of adventures, misadventures, perils and dangers that is how you get the word.

Next word is Olympian you know the festival of games, Olympics Olympian is majestic mount Olympus was the home of the gods, majestic is (Refer Time: 33:45) Olympian is majestic (Refer Time: 33:49) epic proportion. sometimes you often use the word as like someone who is detached and aloof, but then you have to earn that detachment and aloofness, you cannot just act standoff is and call yourself Olympian. Olympian means someone who has achieved a lot and remains aloof, a person living in ivory tower. So, Olympian, but basically more commonly the usage is for majestic and (Refer Time: 33:20).

Next word palladium, the word comes from pallas p a l l a s, it means safeguard, the bill of rights is the palladium of our, the constitution is the palladium of our freedom of our rights. So, the word derives from pallas p a l l a s another tern for Minerva. Her image or palladium guarded troy and troy could not be taken until Ulysses had stolen the image.

So, palladium was like maskers to safeguard the city. So, we use the term to something a document that safeguards us, constitution safeguards us, bill of rights in America safeguards citizens

Next word is phoenix. So, from palladium we move on to phoenix; phoenix p h o e n i x, a person or thing supposed to have died, or passed into oblivion, written off basically, finished, done with, but then what happens the person rises again. So, phoenix like ability to rise from the ashes, phoenix was a bird, living thousands of years ago, after being consumed in fire, it rose fresh and youthful from it is own ashes. Today we often call you know this sportsmen the cricketer, he has been written off by his critics, but then he stayed or come back, scored a century, and phoenix like ability to rise again, so a symbol of courage, determination, strength, and absolute, an absolute refusal to be written off.

Next word is protean, not protein, but protean p r o t e a n, protean is someone who is capable of changing shape, proteus was the old man of the sea who could change his form and appearance at will. So, we say protean like actor, you know someone who could who can change his looks, protean like politician who changes his face everyday his decisions, his ideologies every day.

Next word is saturnine, saturnine, Saturn, was the father of Jupiter in Greek mythology. Saturn, saturnine it turn the name into adjective which is heavy gloomy serious, Saturn was the father of Jupiter, Saturn was jovial and his period of rule was supposed to be the golden age. The feast celebrating his worship of gay and wild, so it meant having a wild time. However, astrology has given saturnine a gloomy aspect, for persons born under the influence of the planet Saturn are supposed to be sad and gloomy. So, saturnine, we often say saturnine temperament.

Next word is stentorian, very loud voice, bellowing, stentor was herald of the Greeks. Herald means someone who would see in ancient time, we did not have advertisements television to project, or to announce something of important. So, they used to have heralds who would call out or declare or shout out, something of importance. So, stentor was the herald of the Greeks, which was like having a loud, human loud speaker. Someone in today's time someone who speaks very loudly, great authority, bellowing that is stentorian.

And the next word is stygian. Stygian is derived from the river Styx. If you remember I was just telling you the story of Achilles, the infant Achilles was dipped into the waters of the river Styx. So, stygian comes from there. The river Styx flowed down to the lower world, they believe that there is a this world, the higher world, the lower world, spirits entering (Refer Time: 40:13) had to cross it on a ferry. Now stygian means inky, very dark, gloomy and hellish, so that is the meaning.