

# MODERN ENGLISH WORDS AND NOTIONS DERIVED FROM GREEK AND ROMAN MYTHOLOGY



*Here are words and phrases in English that are derived from Greek or Roman mythology, each with a brief explanation of the mythological connection. These words and expressions show the enduring influence of ancient mythology on modern English, across various fields from literature to science to everyday speech.*

*For instance, do you have corn flakes for breakfast – **cereal**, that is? **Ceres** is the Roman goddess of agriculture and grain. Does your housing estate still have a **janitor** – a caretaker? **Janus** is the god of doors and transitions.*

**Acheron** – One of the rivers of the underworld, now representing **sorrow or affliction**.

**Achilles' heel** – From the Greek hero Achilles, whose **only vulnerability was his heel**.

**Adonis** – A handsome youth loved by Aphrodite, now representing **a very attractive young man**.

**Aegis** – The shield or protection of Zeus or Athena, now meaning **protection or sponsorship**.

**Aeolian** – From Aeolus, god of the winds, now referring to **things related to the wind**.

**Aeon** – From the Greek god Aion, symbolizing eternity, now meaning **an indefinite or long period of time**.

**Aether** – The personification of the upper air in Greek mythology, now meaning **a clear sky or upper atmosphere**.

**Alecto** – One of the Furies, representing unceasing anger, now symbolizing **relentless fury**.

**Amazonian** – From the Amazons, a race of warrior women, now meaning **tall, strong, or powerful women**.

**Ambrosia** – The food of the gods, now meaning **something extremely pleasing to taste or smell**.

**Amphitrite** – Goddess of the sea and wife of Poseidon, now **used in contexts related to the sea**.

**Andromeda** – A princess chained to a rock as a sacrifice, now **symbolizing someone in distress waiting for rescue**.

**Anthropomorphic** – From "anthropos" (man) and "morphe" (form), now meaning **attributing human traits to gods, animals, or objects**.

**Arachnid** – Derived from Arachne, **a mortal weaver turned into a spider by Athena**.

**Argonaut** – From Jason and the Argonauts, now meaning **a bold adventurer**.

**Ariadne** – From Ariadne, who helped Theseus in the Labyrinth, now symbolizing **a guide through a complicated process**.

**Ariadne's thread** – From Ariadne, who helped Theseus navigate the Labyrinth, now meaning **a solving tool or guide through complexity**.

**Atlas** – A Titan condemned to hold up the sky, now referring to **someone bearing a heavy burden or a collection of maps**.

**Atlas** – The Titan forced to hold up the sky, now symbolizing **strength or collections of maps**.

**Augean stables** – From King Augeas, whose stables Hercules cleaned, now meaning **a place requiring immense cleaning or reform**.

**Aurora** – From Aurora, the Roman goddess of dawn, now meaning **the natural light display in the sky**.

**Aurora Borealis** – Named after Aurora, goddess of the dawn, now referring to **the northern lights**.

**Auroral** – From Aurora, goddess of the dawn, now describing **something related to or resembling dawn**.

**Bacchanalian** – Refers to Bacchus (Dionysus), the god of wine, now describing **wild, drunken revelry**.

**Calliope** – Muse of epic poetry, now used to describe **a musical instrument resembling an organ**.

**Calypso** – From the nymph who detained Odysseus on her island, now meaning **something enchanting or holding captive**.

**Cassandra** – A prophetess cursed to always tell the truth but never be believed, now meaning **someone whose warnings are ignored**.

**Centaur** – Half-human, half-horse creatures, now symbolizing **duality or balance between man and nature**.

**Centaurean** – From Centaurs, creatures with the body of a horse and torso of a man, symbolizing **strength or wildness**.

**Cerberus** – The three-headed dog guarding the underworld, now symbolizing **a vigilant guardian**.

**Cereal** – From Ceres, Roman goddess of grain, now referring to **grains like wheat and oats**.

**Cereal** – From Ceres, **the Roman goddess of agriculture and grain**.

**Chaos** – The primordial void from which everything originated, now meaning **disorder or confusion**.

**Charybdis** – A sea monster who created whirlpools, now representing **a dangerous or unavoidable threat**.

**Chimera** – A fire-breathing monster with a lion's head, goat's body, and serpent's tail, now meaning **a fanciful or grotesque illusion**.

**Chimera** – A monstrous creature in Greek mythology, now meaning **an impossible or fantastical idea**.

**Chimerical** – From the Chimera, a fire-breathing monster, now meaning **something wildly fanciful or impossible**.

**Circe** – A sorceress who turned men into animals, now meaning **someone dangerously alluring**.

**Circean** – From Circe, a powerful enchantress, now meaning **dangerously seductive or enchanting**.

**Clotho** – One of the Fates, who spun the thread of life, now **used in discussions of destiny**.

**Clytemnestra** – From the wife of Agamemnon, known for her treachery, now symbolizing **betrayal**.

**Cornucopia** – The horn of plenty, a symbol of abundance, now meaning **a large supply or bounty**.

**Cupid's arrow** – From Cupid, **the god of love, whose arrows caused people to fall in love**.

**Cupidity** – From Cupid, the god of love, now meaning **excessive greed or desire**.

**Cyclopean** – From the Cyclopes, giant one-eyed beings, now meaning **massive or rough in construction**.

**Daedalian** – From Daedalus, a skilled craftsman, now meaning **clever or intricate craftsmanship**.

**Daphne** – A nymph transformed into a laurel tree to escape Apollo, now symbolizing **purity or evasion**.

**Delphic** – From the Oracle of Delphi, known for giving ambiguous prophecies, now meaning **obscure or enigmatic**.

**Delphinium** – A flower named after the Delphi Oracle, known for its deep blue color, symbolizing **beauty and mystery**.

**Deucalion** – The Greek equivalent of Noah, who survived a great flood, symbolizing **renewal or a second chance**.

**Diana** – Roman goddess of the hunt, now used to refer to **someone connected with nature or hunting**.

**Diomedes' horses** – From Diomedes' flesh-eating horses, now referring to **an uncontrollable or dangerous situation**.

**Dionysian** – From Dionysus, god of wine and revelry, now symbolizing **wild, irrational, or hedonistic behavior**.

**Dryad** – Tree nymphs in Greek mythology, now representing **the spirits of trees or nature**.

**Echidna** – A half-woman, half-snake monster, now symbolizing **a dangerous or hidden threat**.

**Echo** – A nymph who could only repeat what others said, now **meaning a repeated sound**.

**Elysian** – Derived from Elysium, the resting place of the blessed dead, now meaning **blissful or heavenly**.

**Elysium/Elysian** – From Elysium, the resting place of heroes, now meaning **a place of great happiness or peace**.

**Elysium/Elysian Fields** – The final resting place of heroes, now meaning **a blissful paradise**.

**Empyrean** – Derived from the highest heaven, home of the gods, now referring to **the celestial or the heavens**.

**Eos** – The Greek goddess of the dawn, now used to refer to **early or dawn-related things**.

**Erebus** – Personification of darkness, now meaning **deep gloom or a place of darkness**.

**Eris** – The goddess of discord, now representing **chaos or conflict**.

**Erisian** – From Eris, goddess of strife, now meaning **something that causes discord or conflict**.

**Eros** – God of love and attraction, now representing **passionate or romantic love**.

**Eumenides** – A name for the Furies, now referring to **avenging spirits or relentless pursuers of justice**.

**Eumenides** – Another name for the Furies, now referring to **avenging spirits**.

**Euphemism** – From the Greek "euphēmismos," meaning "fair speech," now used to describe **a polite or mild expression for something harsh**.

**Euphoric** – From Euphrosyne, one of the three Graces symbolizing joy, now meaning **intense happiness**.

**Fate** – From the Fates, who controlled the destinies of humans, now meaning **destiny or predetermined outcomes**.

**Faun** – Roman forest spirits, now referring to **a mythical creature with the body of a man and the legs of a goat**.

**Fauna** – From Faunus, the Roman god of animals, now referring to **animal life**.

**Faustian** – From the legend of Faust, similar to the myth of making deals with gods or devils, now meaning **a dangerous pact or deal**.

**Flora** – The Roman goddess of flowers, now referring to **plant life**.

**Flora and Fauna** – Roman goddess of flowers and nature, now referring to **plant and animal life**.

**Floral** – From Flora, the Roman goddess of flowers, now describing **things related to flowers**.

**Fortuna** – The Roman goddess of fortune, now meaning **luck or chance**.

**Furies** – Avenging spirits in Greek mythology, now representing **intense, vengeful anger**.

**Furor** – From the Roman Furies, now meaning **an outbreak of anger or excitement**.

**Gaea (Gaia)** – The personification of the Earth, now symbolizing **the Earth or nature**.

**Galatea** – A statue brought to life by Pygmalion, now symbolizing **an idealized female figure**.

**Geryon** – A three-bodied giant defeated by Hercules, now symbolizing **something complex or with multiple facets**.

**Gigantic** – From the Greek giants (Gigantes), now meaning **extremely large or powerful**.

**Glaucus** – A sea god who had once been a mortal, now meaning **sea-related transformations or the unpredictable nature of the sea**.

**Gordian knot** – A complex knot untied by Alexander the Great, now symbolizing **an intricate problem solved by a bold solution**.

**Gorgon** – From Medusa and her sisters, whose gaze turned people to stone, now describing **something terrifying**.

**Gorgonize** – From the Gorgons, who turned people to stone with their gaze, now meaning **to paralyze with fear**.

**Hades** – Greek god of the underworld, now representing **death, hell or the underworld**.

**Halcyon** – From Alcyone, who was transformed into a kingfisher, now symbolizing **a peaceful or calm period**.

**Harpies** – Winged spirits who tormented mortals, now referring to **unpleasant, nagging people**.

**Harpy** – Winged creatures that snatched food, now referring to **a nagging or predatory woman**.

**Hebe** – Goddess of youth, now meaning **youthful beauty or vitality**.

**Hecate** – Goddess of magic and witchcraft, now used in contexts **related to the supernatural or witchcraft**.

**Heliconian** – From Mount Helicon, home of the Muses, now meaning **poetic inspiration or something connected to artistic creation**.

**Helios** – The sun god, now meaning **anything related to the sun**.

**Heliotrope** – From Helios, the sun god, and the flower that turns towards the sun, now referring to **a plant or sun-related phenomena**.

**Herculean task** – From Hercules, known for his immense strength and his 12 labors, now meaning **a daunting challenge**.

**Hercules' club** – A symbol of immense strength or effort, referencing **the weapon used by Hercules in his labors**.

**Hermaphrodite** – From Hermaphroditus, a being combining male and female traits, now referring to **an organism with both sexes**.

**Hermetic** – From Hermes, associated with secrecy, now meaning **airtight or mysterious**.

**Hesperian** – From the Hesperides, nymphs who guarded golden apples, now symbolizing **something western or idyllic**.

**Hesperides** – Nymphs who tended the golden apples, now symbolizing **a place of rare beauty or bounty**.

**Hippocampus** – A sea creature with the upper body of a horse, now **used in biology for a part of the brain**.

**Hyacinth** – From Hyacinthus, a youth loved by Apollo, now representing **a flower and symbolizing beauty and sorrow**.

**Hydra-headed** – From the Hydra, a serpent with many heads, now referring to **a problem that multiplies when tackled**.

**Hyperion** – A Titan representing light, now meaning **something or someone towering and imposing**.

**Hypnosis** – From Hypnos, the god of sleep, now meaning **a state of deep relaxation or trance**.

**Icarian** – From Icarus, who flew too close to the sun, now meaning **overly ambitious**.

**Ichor** – The ethereal fluid flowing in the veins of the gods, now meaning **something precious or life-giving**.

**Irene** – The Greek goddess of peace, now used as **a name and symbol of peace**.

**Iris** – The goddess of the rainbow and a messenger, now used as **a symbol for color or connection**.

**Ithaca** – The home of Odysseus, now representing **a longed-for destination or goal after a long journey**.



**Ixion** – A king punished by being tied to a wheel in Tartarus, now representing **unending torment or punishment**.

**Janitor** – From Janus, the two-faced god of doors and transitions, now meaning **a caretaker of buildings**.

**Janus-faced** – From Janus, the Roman god of doors and transitions, now describing **someone who is two-faced**.

**Jovial** – From Jove (Jupiter), the Roman king of gods, now meaning **cheerful or good-humored**.

**Labyrinth** – From the maze that housed the Minotaur, now symbolizing **a complicated or confusing situation**.

**Labyrinthine** – From the Labyrinth, where the Minotaur was kept, now meaning **complex or maze-like**.

**Lachesis** – One of the Fates who measured the thread of life, now symbolizing **destiny or fate**.

**Lethargy** – From the River Lethe, where souls forget their past lives, now meaning **sluggishness or drowsiness**.

**Lethean** – From the River Lethe, causing forgetfulness, now meaning **something that induces forgetfulness**.

**Lethean waters** – From the River Lethe, now symbolizing **forgetfulness or oblivion**.

**Lotus-eater** – From the people in the "Odyssey" who ate lotus flowers and forgot their home, now meaning **someone who indulges in pleasure and forgets responsibilities**.

**Lupine** – From the Latin word for wolf, associated with **Lupa, the she-wolf who nursed Romulus and Remus**.

**Lycanthropy** – From the myth of Lycaon, who was turned into a wolf, now meaning **a mental condition where a person believes they can transform into a wolf**.

**Maenad** – The frenzied followers of Dionysus, now meaning **a woman in a state of wild frenzy**.

**Maia** – A nymph and mother of Hermes, now symbolizing **warmth, growth, and spring**.

**Martial** – From Mars, the Roman god of war, now referring to **warlike or military matters**.

**Medea** – A sorceress who killed her children out of revenge, now symbolizing **extreme vengeance or betrayal**.

**Medea complex** – From Medea, who killed her children in revenge, now **used in psychology to describe maternal jealousy**.

**Medean** – From Medea, known for her cunning and revenge, now symbolizing **ruthless or extreme actions**.

**Mentor** – From Mentor, the wise friend of Odysseus, now meaning **a trusted advisor**.

**Mercurial** – From Mercury, the Roman messenger god, now describing **someone who is quick and changeable**.

**Metis** – A Titaness representing wisdom and cunning, now **used to describe intelligence and strategic skill**.

**Midas** – From King Midas, who turned everything he touched to gold, now meaning **a talent for making money or success**.

**Midas touch** – From King Midas, who turned everything he touched to gold, now meaning **the ability to make money easily**.

**Midas-eared** – From the story of King Midas, who was given donkey ears, now symbolizing **foolishness**.

**Mnemosyne** – Goddess of memory and mother of the Muses, now used to symbolize **memory or recollection**.

**Moirai** – The Greek Fates who controlled human destiny, now symbolizing **unavoidable destiny or fate**.

**Morpheus** – The god of dreams, now meaning **dream-like states or sleep-inducing drugs**.

**Muse** – The nine goddesses of the arts, now meaning **a source of inspiration**.

**Naiad** – Water nymphs, now symbolizing **a fresh-water or nature-related spirit**.

**Narcissism** – From Narcissus, who fell in love with his own reflection, now referring to **excessive self-love**.

**Nemean lion** – A monstrous lion slain by Hercules, now symbolizing **an unbeatable challenge or enemy**.

**Nemesis** – The goddess of retribution or vengeance, now meaning **an arch-enemy, an unbeatable adversary or source of downfall**.

**Nereid** – Sea nymphs who helped sailors, now representing **beauty and calm in a sea setting**.

**Nereid** – Sea nymphs, daughters of the sea god Nereus, now symbolizing **ocean spirits**.

**Nike** – The goddess of victory, now symbolizing **success or triumph (e.g., in sports or contests)**.

**Nympholepsy** – From the nymphs, **a frenzy caused by longing for or obsession with an unattainable ideal**.

**Oceanic** – From Oceanus, the Titan representing the ocean, now referring to **something vast or relating to the ocean**.

**Oceanid** – Daughters of Oceanus, now meaning **sea spirits or vast oceanic beings**.

**Odyssey** – From Odysseus, known for his long and adventurous journey, now meaning **an epic voyage or quest**.

**Oedipus complex** – From the myth of Oedipus, who unknowingly killed his father and married his mother, now used in psychology to describe **a child's unconscious sexual desire for the parent of the opposite sex**.

**Olympian** – From Mount Olympus, the home of the gods, now meaning **someone godlike or exceptional**.

**Oracular** – From the oracles who delivered prophecies, now meaning **cryptic or prophetic statements**.

**Orphean** – From Orpheus, whose music could charm all beings, now describing **something entrancingly musical**.

**Paeon** – A hymn of praise to Apollo, now meaning **a song or expression of praise**.

**Palladium** – From the statue of Pallas Athena, which protected Troy, now meaning **something that provides protection**.

**Panacea** – From Panacea, the goddess of universal remedy, now meaning **a solution to all problems**.

**Pandemic** – From Pan, meaning "all," and demos, "people," now meaning **widespread, as in a disease.**

**Pandemonium** – From Pan, meaning "all demons," now describing **wild uproar or chaos.**

**Pandora's box** – From Pandora, whose box released all evils into the world, now meaning **an action that unleashes problems.**

**Panic** – From Pan, the god of the wild, whose shout could cause sudden fear, now meaning **sudden uncontrollable fear.**

**Parnassian** – From Mount Parnassus, home of the Muses, now meaning **something related to poetry or literature.**

**Pegasus** – A winged horse born from Medusa's blood, now symbolizing **poetic inspiration, creativity or flights of fancy.**

**Peleus** – From Peleus, the father of Achilles, now symbolizing **something connected to great battles or warriors.**

**Penelope** – The faithful wife of Odysseus, now symbolizing **fidelity and patience.**

**Penelope's web** – From Penelope, who wove and unwove a shroud to delay suitors, now meaning **a task deliberately never finished.**

**Phlegethon** – A river of fire in the underworld, now symbolizing **something destructive or infernal.**

**Phobia** – From Phobos, the personification of fear, now meaning **an irrational fear.**

**Phoebus** – Another name for Apollo, god of the sun and light, now symbolizing **radiant beauty or illumination.**

**Plutocratic** – From Pluto, god of the underworld and wealth, now meaning **wealthy and powerful.**

**Plutonic** – From Pluto, god of the underworld, now meaning **something related to the deep interior of the Earth.**

**Procrustean** – From Procrustes, who stretched or cut people to fit his bed, now meaning **enforcing conformity in a harsh way.**

**Procrustean bed** – From Procrustes, who stretched or cut people to fit his bed, now meaning **arbitrary enforcement of uniformity.**

**Promethean** – From Prometheus, who gave fire to humanity, now meaning **boldly creative or defiant**.

**Promethean fire** – From Prometheus, who gave fire to mankind, now symbolizing **creative or rebellious power**.

**Protean** – From Proteus, a shape-shifting sea god, now meaning **adaptable or changing form**.

**Psyche** – The mortal who became the goddess of the soul, now referring to **the human mind or soul**.

**Pygmalion effect** – From Pygmalion, who sculpted an ideal woman, now referring to **the phenomenon where higher expectations lead to better performance**.

**Pythonic** – From the Python slain by Apollo, now meaning **something related to prophetic or oracular wisdom**.

**Rhadamanthine** – From Rhadamanthus, a strict judge in the underworld, now meaning **stern or inflexible judgment**.

**Saturnine** – From Saturn, the Roman god, now meaning **gloomy or slow to change**.

**Sirens** – Creatures whose songs lured sailors to destruction, now meaning **a dangerously alluring temptation**.

**Sirens' call** – From the Sirens, who lured sailors to destruction with their songs, now meaning **something dangerously tempting**.

**Sisyphean task** – From Sisyphus, doomed to roll a boulder uphill forever, now meaning **an endless, futile effort**.

**Stygian** – From the River Styx in the underworld, now meaning **dark, gloomy, or infernal**.

**Tantalize** – From Tantalus, who was eternally tempted with unreachable food and drink, now meaning **to tease by withholding**.

**Terpsichorean** – From Terpsichore, the Muse of dance, now meaning **something related to dance**.

**Tethys** – From the Titaness who ruled the seas, now symbolizing **vast bodies of water or ancient oceans**.

**Titanic** – From the Titans, the powerful giants overthrown by the Olympian gods, now meaning **enormous or powerful**.(Source: Chat GPT)