

# Men of Myth

2<sup>nd</sup>  
GRADE



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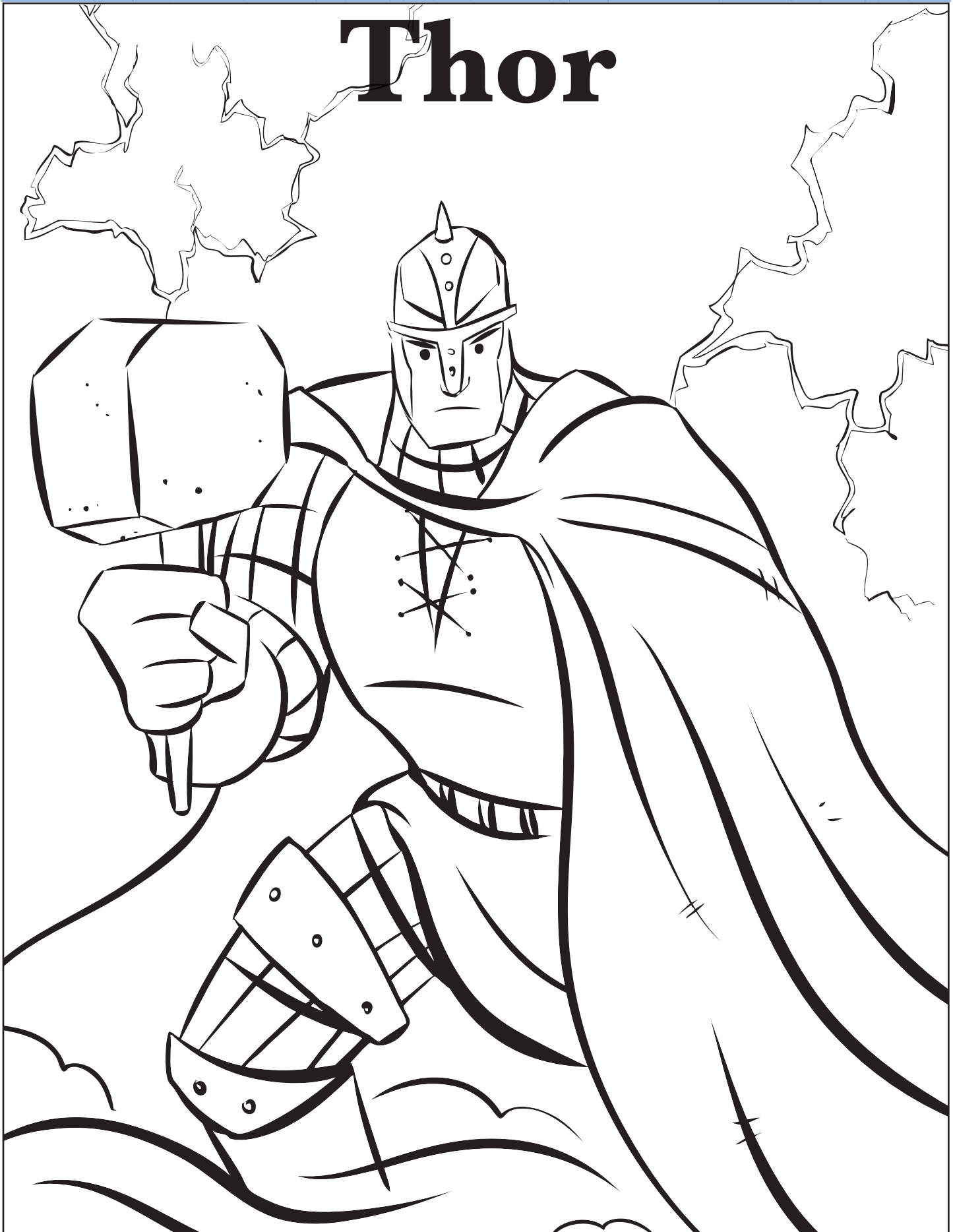
## Men of Myth

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# Thor



# Thor in the Land of the Giants

One day in the spring, Thor, the god of thunder, turned to Loki and said, “I’m getting bored. There is nothing for me to do this time of year. All I do is sit around. I need to exercise my strength! Say, what do you say we hold a contest of strength?”

Loki rolled his eyes. “That’s not a fair fight. You may have the brawn, but I have the brains, and that’s worth much more. I’d beat you in any contest of wits, no problem.”

“Not so!” cried Thor. “Brawn always beats brain—why, all muscles need are exercise. What do you say we go to the Land of Giants to settle this matter?”

“OK, but you’ll be sorry.”

The two set out on their journey. When they arrived at Utgard, they found the gates locked. Thor tried to wrench them open, but he wasn’t strong enough. He tried to smash them open with his hammer, but still nothing.

“Wait,” said Loki. “Maybe we can squeeze through the openings between the bars.”

That was just the thing. They were able to wriggle themselves through the bars, much to Thor’s dismay. Brains had beaten brawn!

As they entered the great hall, the giants looked down at them and scoffed. “Is this really the famous Thor?” one said. “He is no bigger than a mouse!”

“How dare you!” spat Thor. “I am a mighty god!”

“Prove it,” said the chief. “If you wish to stay here, you must show us how strong you really are.”

In the back, Loki felt his stomach begin to rumble. The journey had taken two days, and he hadn’t had anything to eat since he left Asgard.

“Oh, why did I wait so long to eat? I’m so hungry I could eat more than any of these giants could in one sitting!” he cried out loud. The chief then knew what kind of competition to have. He called the healthiest eater he knew to compete with Loki. A table was piled high with meats, cheeses, and breads and the two got to eating.

Now, Loki was thin, but he could eat more than anyone in Asgard. Even though he hadn’t eaten for two days, he and the giant dropped out at the same time.

“That’s time,” said the chief. “Let’s see who won.” While both Loki and the giant had stopped at the same time, Loki had left the bones from the meat on his table. The giant had eaten his! The giant won.

Next, the chief called Thor to compete. “This won’t do,” said Thor. “I am a man of muscle. In order for it to be a fair competition, I’ll need to be tested by my strength.”



“Very well,” said the chief. “You must lift our pet cat.”

“No problem,” said Thor proudly. What he didn’t know was that this was no ordinary cat—it was a giant-sized cat! He tried and tried, but he could barely lift up its whisker. A little embarrassed, he backed down.

“Don’t worry about it,” said the chief. “After all, it was a very big cat. We couldn’t expect anyone to lift it, even you.”

This made Thor angry. “So you think I’m weak, do you? Well, let’s see you wrestle me! Come, on, just try.”

“Now, let’s calm down, Thor,” said the chief. “That wouldn’t be a fair fight at all. Why, you could barely lift our pet cat! Let’s find you someone that can match your strength. How about my grandmother?”

He extended his hand, and a frail old woman stepped into view. Thor scoffed. “You’re kidding. This will be the easiest match I ever won!” He charged at the old woman, but she wouldn’t budge! He pushed with all his might, but she matched his strength—and then some. Suddenly, in one swift maneuver, the old woman pinned Thor to the ground.

“There, there,” said the chief. “You can’t win ‘em all.” Thor was speechless. How had this old woman defeated him?

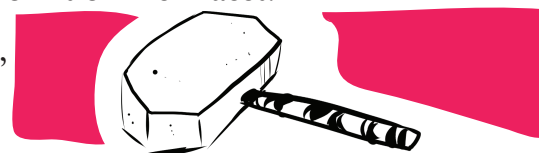
“How did that happen?” he said incredulous. “She was nothing but an old woman!”

“Ah, that is where you’re wrong,” said the chief. “She wasn’t just an old woman. She was someone no one can ever defeat, no matter how hard they try. She was something that every person must succumb to, whether they want to or not. She was old age.”

Thor was even more embarrassed, and didn’t know how else to react but in anger. He immediately reached for his hammer and went to swing it at the chief. But when he turned around, the giant was gone.

Thor and Loki turned to go back to Asgard, their shoulders slumped; frowns on their faces.

“I told you, Thor,” said Loki. “The strong shall never outwit the smart.”



**This story is set in the springtime. Why do you think Thor has nothing to do during the spring?**

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**What do you think is better: brawn or brains? Write two sentences to explain your answer.**

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# Sif's Hair

The Norse god Thor was a tough guy. He was the god of thunder and the strongest god there was, so he was a little rough around the edges. But there was one thing that made him smile, that he always treated with love and care, and that was his wife, Sif.

Sif was known for her long, flowing golden hair. Her hair was longer than anyone else's, and fell down her back in soft waves. Sif was a goddess herself, and was responsible for helping farmers' crops grow fast and strong.

Though she had supernatural powers, she still had to take care of her luxurious hair. All day, Sif combed her soft hair with a glamorous, bejeweled comb, and washed it in sparkling ponds and streams, and would bask in the sun to let it dry. With hair as long and as thick as hers, it took a while to fully dry.

One afternoon, as she was drying her hair in a field, she fell asleep. What she didn't know is that Loki, the most mischievous god in Asgard, had cast a spell over her! He was tired of listening to Thor brag about his wife's precious golden hair, and wanted to take it from her. While she slept, he chopped off Sif's hair—every last bit! He scurried away, her golden curls spilling out from his arms.

When she woke, she felt a cool breeze on her neck. Instantly, she knew something was wrong. She rolled over to see she was surrounded by bits of blonde hair. Her precious hair was gone! She ran inside and cried and cried. As she cried, rain began to fall and ruined crops across the land. The farmers knew something was wrong with Sif.

When Thor returned home, he called for his wife, but she did not respond. He went out to look for her, knocked on neighbors' doors, but he couldn't find her. He returned again to an empty house. Again, he tried, "My dear Sif, I am home."

Then, he heard a small whimper from deep in the house. He followed it until he saw her sitting in a dark corner. He couldn't quite see her.

"My darling! What is wrong?"

"Don't look at me. I'm so ashamed."

"Of what, my dear?"

"My beautiful hair. It's gone!" she moved a little into the light. He could see the short ends of her hair sparkling in the light that seeped through the window. "I must leave Asgard," she said.

"What? But why?"

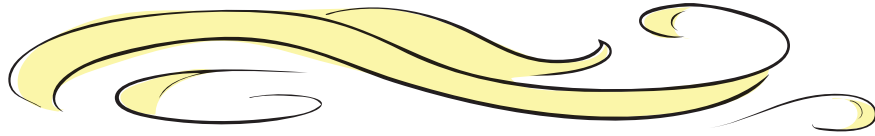
"Asgard is beautiful and perfect. I am no longer so. I do not fit here. I must go live among the mortals."

"That is ridiculous. You are and will always be the most beautiful woman in the world to me. Come into the light so I can see you."



She did so. It was true, Thor did still think her beautiful, but the joy had gone out of her eyes. He did not like seeing her unhappy.

“How did this happen?”



“Someone took it from me. Some mischief-maker; evil-doer.”

Thor’s blood began to boil. Now, it never took much to make Thor angry, but the one thing that angered him more than anything else was when others upset his beloved wife.

“Who was it?” he said angrily.

“I don’t know; I didn’t see them.”



“Then I will find out. Whoever it was, they are going to pay for what they did!”

The humans below heard the sky roar with thunder.

Thor and Sif went to the Court of the Immortals to meet the other gods to see what they could do. None of them knew who had cut Sif’s hair, but they all had a pretty good idea. “It must have been Loki,” they agreed. Loki was known for his mischievousness, which sometimes went too far.

Odin knew Loki wouldn’t come if he asked for him, so he put out his call. Odin’s call was a terrible noise, but it meant that all gods, even Loki, must stop what they were doing and come to the Court at once.

When the meeting began, Loki could see that all the gods knew he had done it. “Oh, come on,” said Loki boastfully. “You have no proof that I did it. Therefore, it must not have been me.”

“Please, come clean just this once, Loki. You’ve made Sif very sad, and Thor very angry. That is no way to treat your fellow gods—we always treat each other with respect. You must apologize and make it up to them.”

“What can I do? I can’t make her grow new hair,” he said smugly, which of course only made the gods angrier.

“Listen, you need to make this right. We all look out for each other here,” said Odin rather threateningly. Loki understood that he was serious, and went off to think of a plan.

Loki didn’t know where he could go to find Sif new hair. He didn’t know anyone in the Land of Giants, and he knew that the mortals on Earth could not help him. The only place left to go was under the earth, where the gnomes lived.

The gnomes were excellent crafters. Since they spent all their time underground, they passed the time by making things, and were talented metalsmiths, jewelers, glassblowers, and weavers.

Because they were cut off from the rest of society, they were also very trusting and sweet. When Loki arrived, he showered them with praise, and asked them to make him a wig, with long hair reaching down to the floor, the hair made from gold spun soft as silk. The gnomes agreed, no questions asked. The jewelers had a lot of gold, and they all worked hard, wearing down the gold until it was fine and soft like silk. Then, the weavers spun the golden thread for days and days, and fashioned it into a luxurious wig.



Loki was impressed. “You are master craftspeople indeed. May I take this in return for the heavens and earth?”

Since the gnomes lived underground, they did not know that they already had the heavens and earth, and quickly agreed. Loki traveled back to Asgard, taking care not to lose a single strand of hair from the golden wig. Upon his return, he proudly presented it to Sif, who tried it on and loved it even more than her own hair. Her new golden hair gleamed, and the sun came out once again, and the crops were restored to health.

**What was Sif’s job as a goddess?**

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**Why was Sif’s hair precious?**

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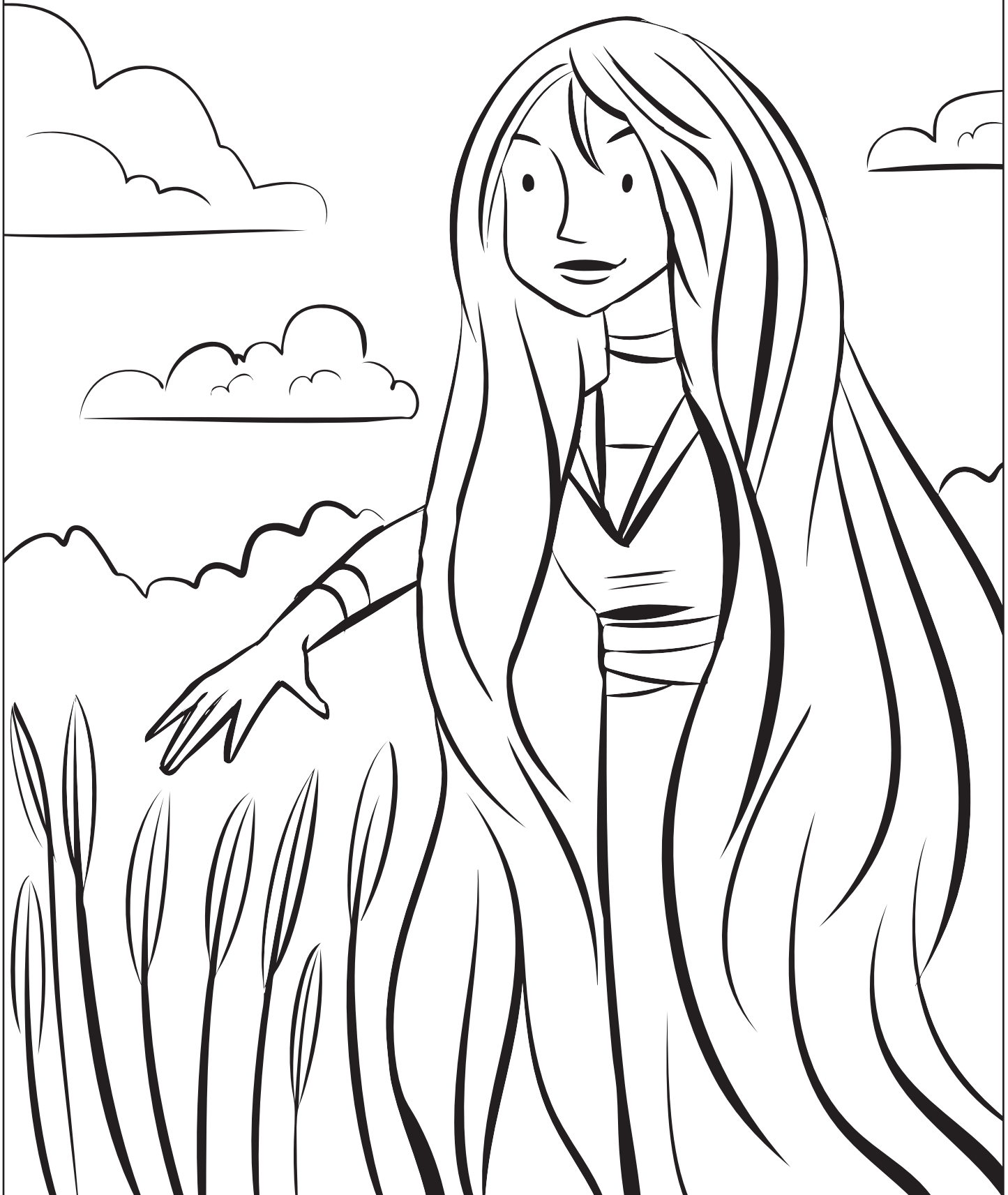
**How does this myth explain what rain is?**

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# Sif



# Loki







“Oh, I don’t know,” said Loki in a mocking voice. “It ran off into the woods to chase a mare. Someone must have changed into one in order to lure it away.”

The stranger fell silent and began to rumble with rage. He couldn’t believe he had been tricked! All of a sudden, he sprouted up into his true form—he was a giant!

Quickly, Loki changed into a bird and flew back to Asgard to warn the others. “Wait,” said Thor. “This time, I think I have an idea.”

The giant arrived minutes later, fuming and angry. Thor readied his mighty hammer, then summoned up a huge lightning bolt to strike the giant on the head.

\***mare**: a female horse.

**How are the gods like people? How is Asgard like Earth?**

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**How are the gods different from people? How is Asgard different from Earth?**

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**What do you think the lesson of this story is?**

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# Cú Chulainn



Cú Chulainn (pronounced “Koo Hullin”) is a hero in Irish mythology. Like many other mythological heroes, such as Achilles and Heracles of Greek myth, Cú Chulainn is a demigod—the child of a god and a human. He has the ability to turn into a terrifying, near invincible monster during battle. However, as a monster, he goes into a frenzy and does not recognize friend from foe.

Cú Chulainn’s mother is Deichtine, the princess from Ulster, an area in northern Ireland, and his father is Lugh, a god of light and healing, similar to the Greek god Apollo. Cú Chulainn spends his youth with a foster family and learns how to be a great warrior.

## The Hound of Culann

A famous legend of Cú Chulainn shows how he earned his name, which means “Culann’s Hound.” When he was born, he was named Sétanta. When Sétanta is a boy, the king of Ulster is impressed by his skills as a warrior and invites him to a feast held at the home of Culann the Smith. Sétanta arrives late to the feast. The king forgets about him and does not stop Culann from leaving his ferocious hound to protect the house while they eat.

When Sétanta came to the Smith’s home, the hound attacks him, and he kills it in self defense. The guests come to see what happened, and Culann is devastated. Sétanta swears to raise a new hound to replace it, and to guard Culann’s home himself in the meantime. From then on, Sétanta is called Cú Chulainn.

*Use a dictionary to find the definitions of the words below. Circle the adjectives that describe Cú Chulainn:*

**feeble**

**stalwart**

**faint**

**gallant**

**cowardly**

**base**

**timid**

**daring**

**dutiful**

**noble**

**audacious**



# Táin Bó Cúailnge: An Irish Epic

Táin Bó Cúailnge, which means “The Cattle Raid of Cooley” and is also called The Táin (pronounced “toy-n”), is an Irish epic tale about a war in the 1st century A.D. between the lands of Ulster and Connacht, and the legendary hero who fought for Ulster, Cú Chulainn.



Ailill and Medb were king and queen of Connacht. One day, as they sat on their thrones, they began comparing their riches. In every possession the king and queen were equally wealthy, except for one thing—King Ailill had a great bull called Finnbhennach. In the whole world, only one other bull was worth as much as Finnbhennach, and its name was Donn Cúailnge. Donn Cúailnge belonged to Dáire mac Fiachna, the cattlelord of Ulster.

Queen Medb became jealous of her husband’s wealth, and sent messengers to negotiate with Dáire to keep his legendary bull in her own herd for a year. At first, Dáire was willing, but when he learned that Medb planned to take the bull by force even if he didn’t accept the offer, he was offended and sent the messengers away.

So the queen of Connacht raised up an army and rode out with them to capture the bull. Meanwhile, the entire Ulster army was cursed with a crippling illness by the goddess Macha, who hated the Ulster king. None could lift a sword except for one valiant warrior, Cú Chulainn, who was only seventeen years old.

Cú Chulainn met the army out on the ford, and invoked the right of single combat—fighting one person at a time. Queen Medb sent man after man to face him, and he defeated every one. Cú Chulainn defended Ulster this way for many months.



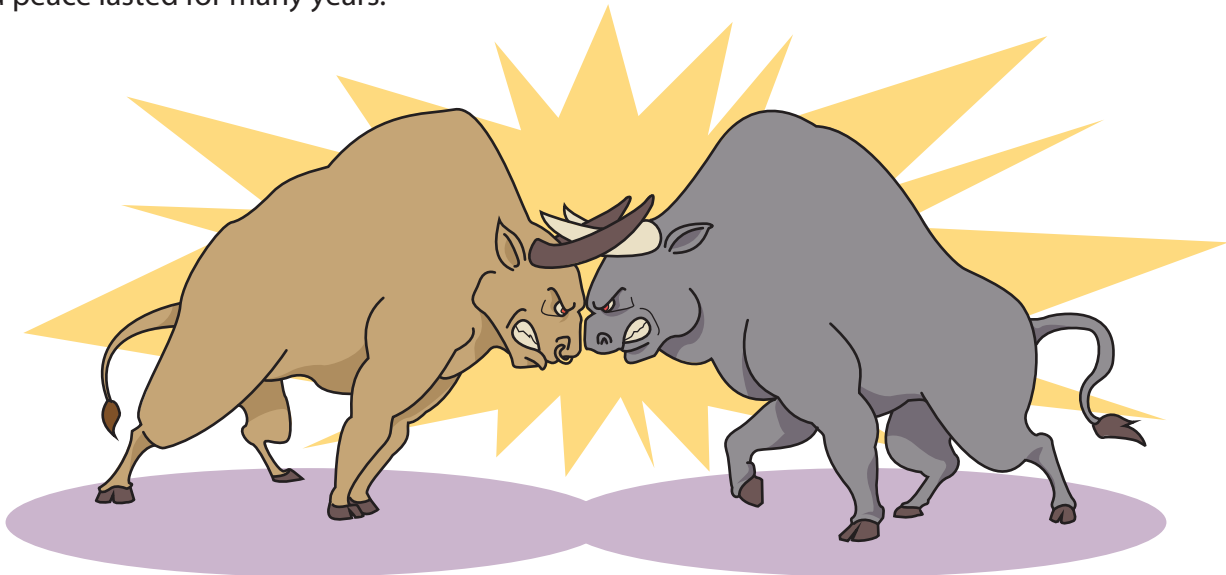


## Táin Bó Cúailnge: An Irish Epic (Continued)

After Cú Chulainn's attack, Queen Medb sent his foster father, Fergus, to fight him. Not wanting to harm Fergus, Cú Chulainn made a deal with him that he would surrender if Fergus surrendered when they met again. Cú Chulainn won the next battle against his foster brother, Ferdiad, after three days of fighting.

The Ulstermen began to recover from their illness. When their strength returned, they prepared for a final battle to put an end to Queen Medb's plans. Fergus led the Connacht army and they fought the Ulstermen as Cú Chulainn was recovering from wounds. Finally, Cú Chulainn joined the battle. Fergus kept his promise and withdrew his forces, causing the Connacht army to retreat. The Ulstermen won the war, but Queen Medb was still able to capture the bull, Donn Cuailnge.

However, when Donn Cuailnge and King Aillil's bull, Finnbhennach, met, they fought, ramming their long horns into one another. Although Donn Cuailnge won, both bulls died from the wounds they had given each other. Aillil and Medb realized that their war had been futile, and that they must make peace with Cú Chulainn and the Ulstermen. The Connacht people returned to their home, and peace lasted for many years.





# Reading Comprehension

1. Why did Morrigan fight Cú Chulainn?

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2. How does Ulster win the war against Connacht?

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3. Is Cú Chulainn similar to any heroes in other stories? What are some qualities he has in common with other well-known heroes from ancient or modern times?

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4. Circle the adjectives that describe Queen Medb.

**placid**

**idle**

**avaricious**

**relentless**

**formidable**

**imperious**

**covetous**

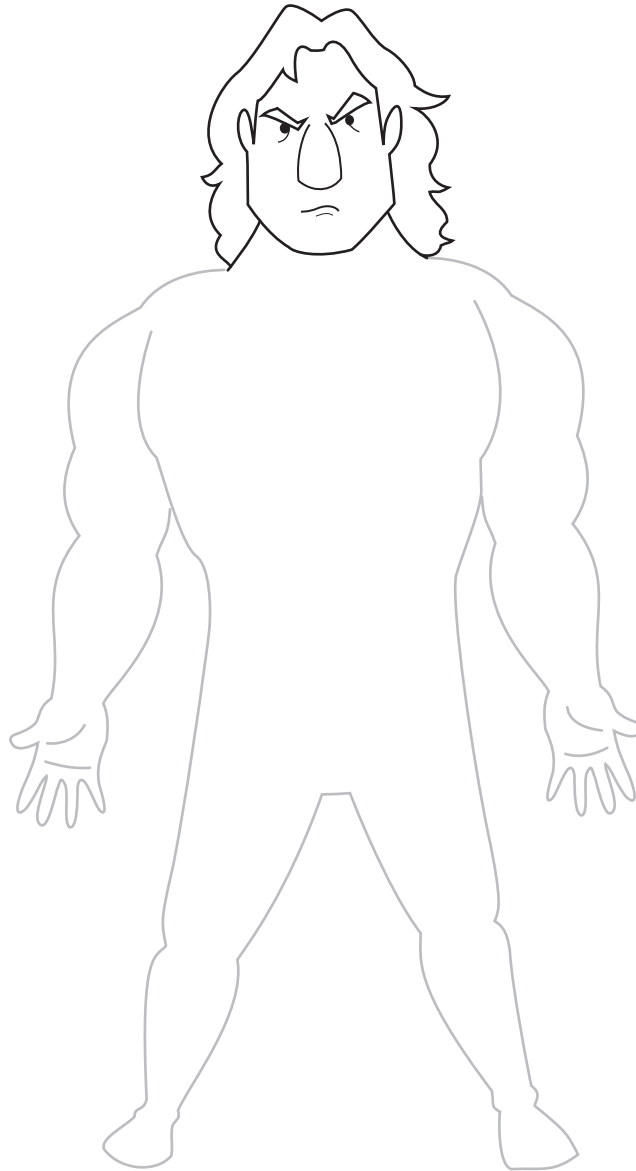
**altruistic**

**blithe**





Finish the picture by drawing Cú Chulainn's superhero costume.



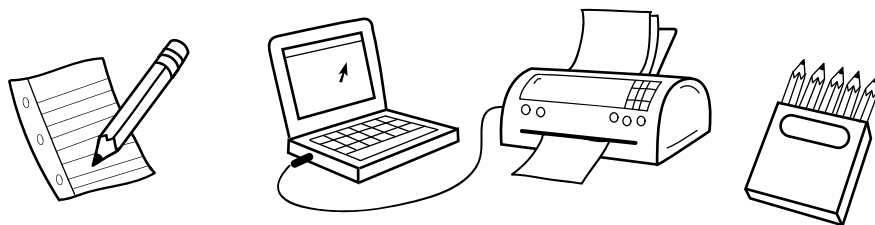
# Write an Epic Poem

Epic poems were a popular form of story-writing in the ancient world. This type of story, in which the main character goes on a long journey and endures many tests and trials, is still used today. *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy, *Star Wars*, and *Harry Potter* are all epic journeys—and kids and adults of all ages are familiar with them.

This activity will help any young writer create his very own epic poem. Don't worry about the idea that most epics were in the form of poetry—poetry doesn't need to rhyme! Focus on creating an engaging and adventurous story, and the epic poem is sure to be a winner.

## What You Need:

- Paper and pencil
- Computer and printer
- Colored pencils or markers



## What You Do:



1. Choose an epic hero. It can be you, a family member, or a god or goddess from ancient history.
2. The epic hero must be charged with a task. He, or she, can guard something, learn something, or search for something as he endures his epic journey, but there should be some purpose to his adventure.
3. Decide who your hero's helpers will be. They are usually mythical creatures, with special powers, but the decision is up to you. Use your imagination to come up with a unique plot and characters.
4. With the help of your parent or another person, outline your epic poem according to the three phases: exile, journey, and return home. Brainstorm ideas about why your epic hero needs to leave home, what he is going to encounter along the journey, and how he will successfully complete the quest.
5. Now it's time to begin writing the story! The structure, length, and style are entirely up to you.
6. When you're all done, feel free to decorate the borders of the epic poem with drawings of the characters or setting.

### Tips for Parents:

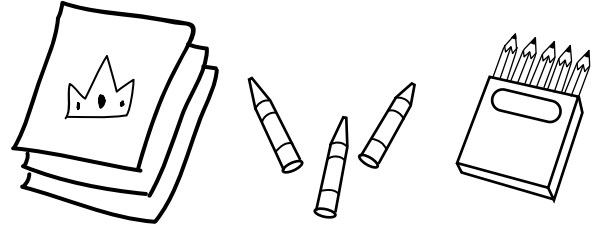
Writing an epic story or poem can be especially helpful for kids who might be experiencing a hard time or facing a move to a new city or state. You can encourage your child to make the poem an allegory for adolescence or school. Children experiencing challenges may find hope or an optimistic outlook in creating a positive resolution to the epic hero's story.

# Picture the Story

It can be difficult to add detail and description to a new story. Comparing the process of writing to drawing a picture can help kids understand the importance of using detail and description in their writing. This activity will help your child "see" how to improve stories.

## What You Need:

- A story that your child is currently working on writing
- A blank piece of paper
- Crayons or colored pencils



## What You Do:

1. Use a black crayon to draw a large rectangular frame about two inches wide on the perimeter of the blank paper. In the width of the frame, write the following question words, spreading them out so that they look like artsy decorations on the frame: Who? What? Why? How? When? Where? What color? How big?

2. Read your child's story aloud to him. As you read, have him illustrate his story in the blank space in the center of the frame. Tell him he can only draw what he hears you read in the story.

3. When you're finished, discuss the drawing with your child. What's missing in the picture? What details could be added that would make the story in the picture more interesting? If he needs ideas, refer to the question words that you wrote earlier in the width of the frame.

4. As he adds details to his drawing, have him use words to describe those details to you aloud. You may want to jot down notes for him, to keep track of ideas.

5. Then, have him go back to his story, and write these extra details.

6. Finally, turn the completed drawing over, face down, and read your child's improved story aloud to him again. Ask him to picture the story in his head as you read it aloud. Say, "Can you picture it?" Then turn over the picture, and ask him to decide if the picture on the paper represents the picture in his head. If he feels they match



Great job!

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