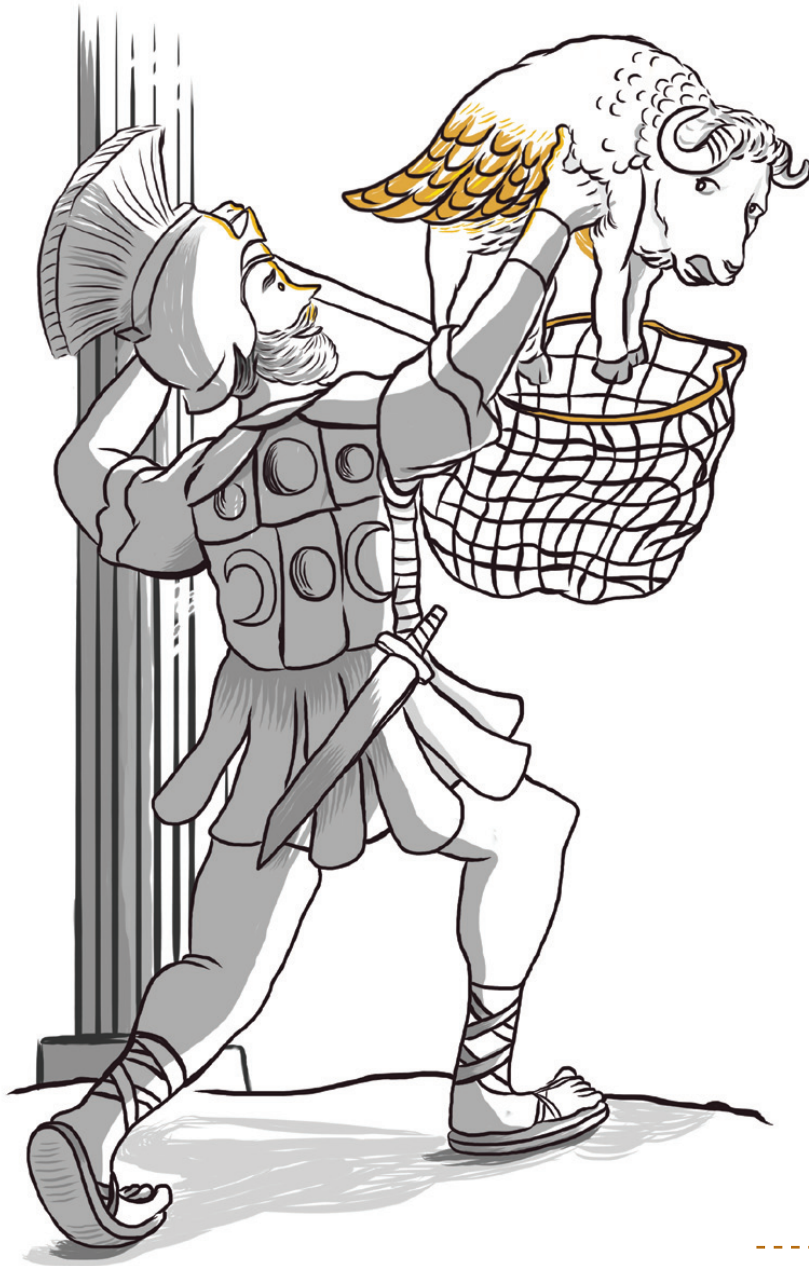


MYTHS and MOTIVATIONS

of the Gold Rush

Societies have valued gold since ancient times. Mythology and legends of the world have always had old tales of everyday people stopping at nothing to get it, or having their lives ruined once they attained it.



Jason and the Argonauts

Long ago in Ancient Greece, a man named Jason set out on a quest to find the Golden Fleece. Jason was the son of a king—he had all the money he could ever want—but the Golden Fleece was different. It was made from the golden hair of a winged ram, and legend said that whoever possessed the Golden Fleece would be given power, fortune, and happiness.

Jason gathered a band of brave heroes who called themselves the Argonauts. Together, they searched all over the country for the Golden Fleece. They abandoned their friends and families in order to follow their obsession. After years of searching, Jason and the Argonauts finally found the fleece, but it was guarded by a fierce dragon. Jason distracted the dragon with a special potion and stole the Golden Fleece. The travelers returned home safely, but it was only then that Jason learned his lesson: Nothing magically brings anyone power, fortune, and happiness, not even the coveted Golden Fleece.

Fun Fact: Gold Seekers and '49ers were also called "Argonauts" as a tribute to this tale.



El Dorado

If legends are to be believed, somewhere in South America a lost city of gold is waiting to be found. Juan Martinez, a Spanish lieutenant, was one of the first men to begin spreading rumors of this fantastical treasure. Martinez claimed that in 1542, he was seized by natives and taken to the mythical city of El Dorado where the people, the buildings, and the streets were all covered in gold.

Many famous explorers spent much of their time and money looking for what Martinez accidentally discovered. It was not hard to see why—any man who found El Dorado would be instantly famous and wealthy. Sir Walter Raleigh went on two separate expeditions to find the city of gold, and both attempts were equally unsuccessful. El Dorado may still be out there, awaiting discovery...

Bonus Activity: Draw a picture of the lost city of gold on the back of this worksheet.



King Midas

King Midas was a good ruler who cared for his subjects, and the gods of Ancient Greece thought he should be rewarded. They told him they would grant one wish, so King Midas wished everything he touched would turn to gold.

At first, this seemed like a great idea. Gold was the ultimate symbol of power, and soon King Midas would have more gold than anyone. However, days later, King Midas accidentally turned his entire city, all his food, and every member of his family into gold. Miserable, he begged the gods to take away his golden touch. The gods pitied the sad king and reversed the effects of the wish. King Midas spent the rest of his reign content without the massive piles of gold he had once desired.

Bonus Activity: What does it mean when we say someone has “the Midas touch”?
