

ARACHNE AND THE WEAVING CONTEST

*Arachne and the Weaving Contest is a story from Greek mythology. Greek myths often explain the origin of something in the natural world through stories about the many deities, heroes, and mythological creatures that were part of ancient Greek culture. This myth features Athena, the Greek goddess of wisdom and crafts, who was viewed as intelligent, athletic, talented, and also incredibly vain. Mortals that **provoked** her often had unhappy endings to their stories.*

Long ago, there was a mortal woman named Arachne who was famous for her weaving. People from all over would come to watch her nimble and graceful fingers flicker across the cloth as she wove her beautiful fabrics. All the attention and praise for her hard work eventually made Arachne quite **conceited**. One day, she bragged that her weaving was better than that of the goddess Athena.

By and by, Athena heard about Arachne's boast. So, disguised as an old woman, Athena went to Arachne's home. "You should not compare yourself to the gods," the old woman warned. "If you apologize, Athena might let you live."

"Ha!" snorted Arachne. "If Athena thinks she can compete with me, she is sadly mistaken. I dare her to try to match the magnificence of my work. Everyone knows I am the best weaver that ever lived." Upon hearing Arachne's challenge, Athena let her disguise melt away and the goddess stood, glowering, in front of Arachne.

"I accept your challenge," Athena stated **imperiously**, "but the loser must agree to never weave on a loom or touch a spindle again." Arachne's face reddened for just a moment, but she nodded, still holding to her foolish pride. The women sat down at their looms and began to weave, and a crowd gathered to watch the contest. All day, the hands of the mortal and the goddess danced across the looms.

By the time the sun began to set over the mountains, it was clear that Arachne's cloth was glorious. To insult and mock Athena, she had woven a gorgeous tapestry showing the gods punishing mortals who defied or dishonored them.



Although stunning and flawless, Arachne's tapestry could not compare to Athena's. The goddess had woven dazzling images of the gods in all their glory, dressed in exquisite colors that human eyes had never beheld. The sparkling waves seemed to ripple across the fine **gossamer** cloth; the sun's rays looked so real that those standing close could actually feel the warmth of sunbeams radiating from the fabric.

Arachne hung her head. Although her pictures were beautiful, they were not as realistic as Athena's. The goddess was the obvious winner of the contest.

Tears filled Arachne's eyes as she imagined the life before her, never being able to touch a loom or spindle again.

Athena herself was amazed at Arachne's talent. Not even her wrath at the girl's **impertinence** could **wholly** overcome her wonder. For an instant, she stood entranced; then she touched Arachne's forehead with her spindle.

"Weave on, Arachne," she said. "Since it is your glory to weave, you and yours must weave forever."

In that moment, Arachne's human form shrank to that of the very first spider, and so remained. As a spider, she spent all her days weaving and spinning, and even now you may still see her handiwork among the rafters.



Arachne's name and fate have endured through the ages in the modern scientific name for spiders, *arachnids*.

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Answer the questions about “Arachne and the Weaving Contest.”

1. What is the theme of this myth?

- a. Cheaters never prosper.
- b. Slow and steady wins the race.
- c. Hard work always brings a reward.
- d. Vanity can lead to trouble.

2. What details from the story help to convey this theme?

3. The conflict type featured in this myth is character vs. _____.

- a. character
- b. nature
- c. society
- d. self

4. Circle three words that best describe Arachne as she is characterized in the myth.

- talented loyal overconfident wise
athletic humble hardworking curious

5. How does Arachne react to the old woman’s warning?
How does her reaction affect the rest of the story?

6. In your opinion, was Arachne’s ultimate punishment appropriate? Why or why not?

7. Draw a line to match each word from the text to its synonym.

- | | |
|--------------|------------|
| provoked | arrogantly |
| wholly | smug |
| conceited | angered |
| gossamer | completely |
| imperiously | disrespect |
| impertinence | silky |

8. Fill in the chart below with similarities and differences between Arachne and Athena.

SIMILARITIES	DIFFERENCES