

PANDORA'S FIRE

A DRAMA IN ONE ACT BY
Judith Walsh White



CLASSROOM STUDY GUIDE

Introduction

Pandora's Fire is a wonderful mix of Ancient Greek choral storytelling with a modern twist.

Playwright Bio

Judith White is a teacher, playwright, poet, director, composer, and actor. A graduate of Mary Washington University, she has studied theater at Oberlin, American Conservatory Theatre in San Francisco, Northwestern University, and Studio Theater, Washington, D.C.

White was a finalist for poetry in the 2012 Faulkner-Wisdom Creative Writing Competition in New Orleans, and was Director of Drama and Speech for 26 years at the Holton-Arms School, Bethesda, Md., where she was profiled in *The Washingtonian*.

She continues to mentor teachers throughout the D.C. area and abroad through the Center for Inspired Teaching. In 2005, she traveled to Gujarat, India to train teachers for the women's cooperative, Kala Raksha. White has written numerous plays for children throughout her career, taking her inspiration from folk and fairy tales, Native American stories, children's books, and her students' imaginations.

A student of ancient myths, she has written four plays based in world mythology, including *Pandora's Fire* and *Ariadne's Thread* for Traveling Players Ensemble in Northern Virginia. She will direct her most recent work, *Perseus and the Rock Star*, this summer.

Synopsis

Everybody knows the story of Pandora. She was given a box that was not to be opened under any circumstances, but her curiosity got the better of her and she is to blame for releasing jealousy, grief, greed, and disease into the world. But is that the whole story?

Characters

PYRRHA [F]: Pandora's daughter, married to Epimetheus, Prometheus's son.

CHORUS LEADER (One Monologue) [A]: Later revealed to be Hope.

CHORUS (Two monologues) [A]: As many as you wish. They can also double some of the roles below.

ZEUS [A]: God of the sky, ruler of the Olympian gods.

PROMETHEUS [M]: Titan who was given the task of making men out of clay. Man's greatest benefactor.

EPIMETHEUS [M]: Prometheus' foolish younger brother. (Think prologue and epilogue.)

APHRODITE [F]: Greek Goddess of love and beauty.

HERMES [A]: Zeus' personal agent and messenger.

HAEPHAESTOS [M]: Greek god of blacksmiths, craftsmen, artisans, sculptors, metals, fire, and volcanoes.

PANDORA (One Monologue) [F]: A gift from the gods, custom-made to punish Prometheus.

DEMONS/TORMENTORS: Figures who taunt Pandora.

GAIA [F]: The original earth mother.

Themes

Betrayal, Love, Parenting/Family, Religion, Relationships, Obedience, Peer Pressure, Personal Responsibility, Revenge

Pre-Read Questions

- ★ Have you ever heard of Pandora? What do you know about her?
- ★ What Greek myths or gods do you know?
- ★ What does the word "fire" make you think of?
- ★ What modern stories do you know that were inspired by Greek myths?

- ★ Have you ever done something you were told not to? Why?
- ★ What does it mean to be good versus bad? What makes a person bad?

Pre-Read Activities

Making Inferences

- ★ Based on the title and students' knowledge of Greek mythology, have them draw what they think a poster of the show would look like.
 - » How will "fire" be represented in the play?
 - » What characters do they think will be in the play?
 - » What do they think is going to be the main conflict of the play?
- ★ After making these inferences, have students present their drawings and ideas.

Research Project

- ★ In small groups students will research a Greek god (Zeus, Aphrodite, Hades, etc.). Who were they? What did they represent in Ancient Greece? What are their stories?
- ★ After completing their research, students will create a presentation in which everyone in the group must take part. It can be:
 - » A live oral presentation with a visual component such as a slide deck
 - » An original scene theatricalizing their findings
 - » A recorded presentation (filmed scene, or oral presentation with visual component)

Myth Adaptation Exercise

- ★ Divide students into groups. Give each group a version of a Greek myth of your choosing.
- ★ Discuss the definition of adaptation, and adaptations that students may know.

- » Adaptation definition: to make something suitable for a new purpose, to modify, to alter
- ★ The goal of the exercise is to have students adapt the myth into a scene. They don't have to tell the whole myth; perhaps they pick what they consider to be the most important moment. They don't have to specifically use the words of the story, but the scene must be connected to the myth.
- ★ Remind students that they are making something suitable for a new purpose. That means the scene must have characters and a conflict, and take place in a specific location.
 - » Who are the characters?
 - » What is the conflict?
 - » What location can the scene take place in, as indicated by the myth?
- ★ The scene should be approximately one minute, no longer. The point is for students to work quickly. Again, students do not have to stage the whole myth.
- ★ Give groups time to discuss, create, rehearse, and present.
- ★ Afterward, discuss the similarities and differences of the scenes. Hopefully there will be differences! This will show students that there is not just one way to adapt material.
- ★ Also, discuss the process. What were the challenges? How did they modify and alter for a new purpose?

Greek God Character Profile

- ★ Divide students into groups. Each group will create a character profile of one of the following Greek figures: Pyrrha, Zeus, Pandora, Prometheus, Epimetheus, Aphrodite, Hermes, Hephaestos, or Gaia. Have them do some research and then create the following details as if they are applying modern character traits to the Greek god:
 - » Three physical traits

- » Three personality traits
- » Favourite outfit, which includes their favourite colour
- » Favourite/least favourite food, movie, music
- » Pet peeve
- » Secret
- » Motto
- » Living environment
- » Significant relationship or object

Defending a Character

- ★ Divide students into groups of four and assign each group a story in which a Greek mythology character does wrong or does something the Gods told them not to (e.g., Prometheus and Zeus, Sisyphus and Zeus, Ixion and the Gods, Tantalus and Zeus).
- ★ Tell students to research the story and then create a two-minute scene in which they defend the “wrong-doer” and tell the story from their side. They can act out the scene or have a narrator.
- ★ Remind students to get creative. Give them time for rehearsal.
- ★ After each group has rehearsed, have them present their scenes. Once everyone has presented, discuss:
 - » What stood out to you about the scenes you saw?
 - » Did you feel bad for any of the characters who went against the Gods? Why?
 - » Did anything surprise you from any of the scenes you saw?
 - » After watching everyone’s scenes, if you could do your scene over, what would you change? Why?

Close Reading Analysis Questions

Close reading is an analysis tool. Students read a text multiple times for in-depth comprehension, striving to understand not only **what** is being said but **how** it's being said and **why**. Close reading takes a student from story and character to drawing conclusions on author intention. Close reading prompts students to flex their thinking skills by:

- ★ Teaching students to engage with a text.
- ★ Teaching students to be selective. We can't highlight everything in the text, only the most important elements.
- ★ Teaching students to make educated decisions. All conclusions and opinions must be backed up with a text example.

Have students analyze *Pandora's Fire*, individually or in groups, using the following text-dependent questions:

Read One: What is happening?

1. What is the name of Pandora's daughter?
2. What did Prometheus ask Zeus for? What did Zeus say to this request and why?
3. Why did the gods create Pandora?
4. What do the gods give Pandora and Epimetheus for their wedding?
5. What happens when Pandora opens the box?
6. What are the names of the demons in the box?
7. Who is Pandora's mother?
8. List four of the eight torches that exist in humanity.
9. What torch exists within Pandora?
10. What is the name of Pandora's daughter?

11. What item does Pandora give to her daughter to save her?
12. What is the name of the Chorus Leader?

Read Two: How is it happening?

1. What is the significance of starting the show with Pyrrha?
2. How does the Chorus function within the realms of the play?
3. Why do you think the playwright made the choice to have the Chorus address the audience?
4. Why is Zeus important in this story? Do you think what he believes about humans is right? Why or why not?
5. Did Prometheus being punished lead to humans having free will? Why or why not?
6. Do you think the story would've changed if Zeus had given Prometheus fire instead of Prometheus having stolen it? How do you think it would've changed?
7. Do you think the other gods agree with Zeus' plan? Why or why not? Do you think he would punish them for disagreeing?
8. Prometheus states that Zeus is causing problems because his fire was stolen and his pride is hurt. In your own words explain what pride is.
9. In the script Pandora talks about being tempted to open the box. Have you ever been tempted to do something? Do you ever think about what would've happened if you had made a different choice?
10. How do you define curiosity? How is it described in the play? Do you agree?
11. How is hope used in the show? Why is the theme of hope important?
12. What is the purpose of the Greek Chorus in the show?

Read Three: Why is it happening?

1. Do you consider this play an example of a Greek tragedy? Why or why not?
2. What is the central theme of this play?
3. Throughout the story, fire is mentioned many times. Is this literal or metaphorical? Cite the text to support your answer.
4. Why do you believe the playwright called the show *Pandora's Fire*?

Post-Read Questions

- ★ What do you think it means to feed the flame?
- ★ Which character do you relate to the most and why?
- ★ What is one thing you liked/disliked about the play?
- ★ Do you agree with the moral of the story?

Post-Read Activities

Feed Your Flame

- ★ Have students write down ideas and people that inspire them. Give them three to five minutes to write their ideas.
- ★ After time has passed, have them stand up and share one idea that inspires them. As each student explains their inspiration, link a string from the first to the last until every student is holding the string.
- ★ Once all students are holding the string explain to them how they are all connected through different inspirations. Then have everyone chant the last lines of the play.

Design Your Box

- ★ Tell students they are going to create their own Pandora's box. Encourage students to dig deep and identify what they believe would tempt them personally.
- ★ Remind students to get creative with their boxes as well.
- ★ Once students are done designing their boxes, have them show the class their boxes and ideas.
- ★ After everyone has presented, discuss:
 - » How did you decide on what to put in your box?
 - » What surprised you about the boxes your classmates presented? What tempted you from their boxes?
 - » What made a box stand out?

Heads and Tails

- ★ Tell students they will have three minutes of freewrite. Remind students they cannot take their pencil off the paper and that there are no bad ideas.
- ★ Have them free write what they think the demons and flames look like in the play. Remind them of the names of the demons.
- ★ After three minutes have them turn the paper over and draw what they think the flames look like based on their freewrites.
- ★ Encourage students to get creative and use colors they think best represent the character they are creating.
- ★ At the end, ask for volunteers to show the class their drawings. Ask them to explain their thought process and why they chose to use the characters they did.

Greek Mythology Comparison

- ★ Divide students into groups of four and tell each group they are going to compare *Pandora's Fire* to the original Greek myth the play is based on.

- ★ Have them research the original Greek myth and compare it to the version in the play.
 - » What was similar? What was different?
 - » Is there a version you prefer? Why?
 - » What surprises you about the way the playwright adapted the original myth?
- ★ After completing their research, students will create a presentation in which everyone in the group must take part. It can be:
 - » A live oral presentation with a visual component such as a slide deck
 - » An original scene theatricalizing their findings
 - » A recorded presentation (filmed scene, or oral presentation with visual component)

Character Costume Design

- ★ Choose a character and design their costume.
- ★ Based on their personality, what would they wear? What pieces of clothing define them? What colours and textures would they choose?
- ★ Draw a colour costume rendering.

Poster Design

- ★ In the pre-read activity students created a poster based on inferences they made from the title of the show. Have students reflect on the poster they made. What do they like about it? What would they change?
- ★ Now, based on what students read, have them edit the poster they made for the play. They can also choose to design a new one. How would you visualize the play in a single image that would attract an audience? Would you use a box? What box would it be? What font would you use for the title? What information other than the title would you include?

Staged Scenes

- ★ Divide students into small groups and assign each group a scene from the play, or a short moment within a scene.
- ★ Give students time to rehearse.
- ★ Each group will present their moment.
- ★ Discuss the scenes afterward:
 - » How did seeing the scenes acted out differ from reading them?
 - » Why is it important to act in a scene as well as read it?
 - » Did any of the presentations offer a different interpretation of the characters than yours?

Rewrite Adaptation

- ★ Now that students know the story, have them rewrite a section of it. All the gods are modern characters, the situations are modern, and the locations are modern.
- ★ Divide students into groups and emphasize that they must adhere to the definition of adaptation: to make something suitable for a new purpose, to modify, to alter.
- ★ Groups will rehearse and present their new version of the story.

Playwright Process

Playwright Judith White talks about her process writing Pandora's Fire.

Have students read and then discuss/reflect on how their perception of the writing process compares to the playwright's.

What was the inspiration for writing this play?

The quality of 'curiosity' has always been a powerful tool for me as an actor, teacher, director, and playwright. The idea of curiosity harnessed only for the release of bad forces intrigued me. And Pandora, as the young woman who brings this about, held my interest. Imagine my delight in discovering that Pandora was herself a tool of the gods—to get revenge against Prometheus for bringing fire to humanity. The chain of accountability extends to you and me!

What challenges did you encounter during the writing process?

I always begin my process knowing practically nothing, immersing myself in every available source, digesting bit by bit what I discover, and inviting the characters to speak to me. My curiosity about the subject is my compass.

Even though the actors I'm writing for are young people—full of energy and ideas and a multitude of feelings which they are just beginning to understand—I don't think about 'writing for kids.' I just write the best play I can write, including some brain-stretching new vocabulary! It's fun, though, to incorporate a few contemporary bits of dialogue and business.

What was it like to see the play performed?

Seeing the play come to life is one of the greatest joys I've experienced! The director and actors never fail to teach me new things. The energy they bring—their emotions, experiences, and inter-relationships with each other—is a prism through which I view the play with new eyes!

As a playwright, what is your favourite moment/character in the play and why?

I have to say that the transformation of Pandora—her appreciation of the 'gift from the gods,' her changing perspective about her husband Epimetheus, and the intensifying allure of the box—was intoxicating to write. I wrote it in one uninterrupted half hour

and was so happy I had to call my daughter in San Francisco to read it to her. She's also a writer.

Which is harder for you, first drafts or rewrites?

When it comes to rewrites vs. first drafts, I've learned to trust the process. I've learned that a passage of time helps to distill ideas and clarify characters' intentions and actions. I love to cook, and I once wrote a poem comparing writing to soup: 'better the next day.' Some magical transformation takes place during that process. When the director and actors get hold of the play, it changes yet again!

What's your writing process like?

I addressed my process—incorporating the challenges—in #1 Inspiration. Additionally, having trusted the process, allowing the ideas and language to rest and distill, I read the play—on the phone—to yet another California daughter, a midwife. She can point out inconsistencies and bald spots—a midwife to my writing, as well as to thousands of babies! Last, I ask my husband to read the play to me so I can hear the dialogue in another's voice.

My husband and I gave a staged reading of my last two plays—'Eros and Psyche' and 'Orpheus and Eurydice'—at the TPE theater—and responded to questions and comments after the reading. VERY helpful.

What engages you about playwriting?

I'm fascinated by playwriting, having done this in some form or other since I was a child. Giving voice to characters—allowing or inviting them to speak across centuries, recording their actions, feelings, challenges, fears, and loves—is endlessly intriguing to me. I was an only child, and I think I must have spent lots of time in my imagination. This has served me well as a playwright.