

The Story of Echo and Narcissus

When Zeus came to the mountains, the wood nymphs rushed to embrace the jovial god. They played with him in icy waterfalls and laughed with him in lush green glades.

Zeus' wife, Hera, was very jealous, and often she searched the mountainside, trying to catch her husband with the nymphs. But whenever Hera came close to finding Zeus, a charming nymph named Echo stepped across her path. Echo chatted with Hera in a lively fashion and did whatever she could to stall the goddess until Zeus and the other nymphs had escaped.

Eventually Hera discovered that Echo had been tricking her, and she flew into a rage. "Your tongue has made a fool of me!" she shouted at Echo. "Henceforth, your voice will be more brief, my dear! You will always have the last word - but never the first.

From that day on, poor Echo could only repeat the last words of what others said.

One day Echo spied a golden-haired youth hunting deer in the woods. The boy's name was Narcissus, and he was the most beautiful young man in the forest. All who looked upon Narcissus fell in love with him immediately. But he would have nothing to do with anyone, for he was very conceited.

When Echo first laid eyes upon Narcissus, her heart burned like the flame of a torch. She secretly followed him through the woods, loving him more with each step. She got closer and closer until finally Narcissus heard the leaves rustling. He whirled around and cried out, "Who's here?"

From behind a tree, Echo repeated his last word, "Here!"

Narcissus looked about in wonder, "Who are you? Come to me!" he said.

Narcissus searched the woods, but could not find the nymph. "Stop hiding! Let us meet!" he shouted.

"Let us meet!" Echo cried. Then she stepped from behind the tree and rushed to embrace Narcissus.

But the youth panicked when the nymph flung her arms around his neck. He pushed her away and shouted, "Leave me alone! I'd rather die than let you love me!"

"Love me!" was all poor Echo could say as she watched Narcissus run from her through the woods. "Love me! Love me! Love me!"

Humiliated and filled with sorrow, Echo wandered the mountains until she found a lonely cave to live in.

Meanwhile Narcissus hunted in the woods, tending only to himself, until one day he discovered a hidden pool of water. The pool had a silvery-smooth surface. No shepherds ever disturbed its waters - no goats or cattle, no birds or fallen leaves. Only the sun danced upon the still pond.

Tired from hunting and eager to quench his thirst, Narcissus lay on his stomach and leaned over the water. But when he looked at the glassy surface, he saw someone staring back at him.

Narcissus was spellbound. Gazing up at him from the pool were eyes like twin stars, framed by hair as golden as Apollo's and cheeks as smooth as ivory. But when he leaned down and tried to kiss the perfect lips, he kissed only spring water. When he reached out and tried to embrace this vision of beauty, he found no one there.

"What love could be more cruel than this?" he cried. "When my lips kiss the beloved, they touch only water! When I reach for my beloved, I hold only water!"

Narcissus began to weep. When he wiped away his tears, the person in the water also wiped away tears. "Oh, no," sobbed Narcissus. "I see the truth now; It is myself I weep for! I yearn for my own reflection!"

As Narcissus cried harder, the tears broke the glassy surface of the pool and caused his reflection to disappear. "Come back! Where did you go?" the youth cried. "I love you so much! At least stay and let me look upon you!"

Day after day, Narcissus stared at the water, in love with his own reflection. He began to waste away from grief, until one sad morning, he felt himself dying. "Good-bye, my love!" he shouted to his reflection.

"Good-bye, my love!" Echo cried to Narcissus from her cave deep in the woods.

Then Narcissus took his last breath.

After he died, the water nymphs and wood nymphs searched for his body. But all they found was a magnificently beautiful flower beside the hidden pool where the

youth had once yearned for his own reflection. The flower had white petals and a yellow center, and from that time on, it was called Narcissus.

And alas, poor Echo, desolate after Narcissus's death, did not eat or sleep. AS she lay forlornly in her cave, all her beauty faded away, and she became very thin until her voice was all that was left. Thereafter, the lonely voice of Echo was heard in the mountains, repeating the last words anyone said.

Choose one activity to complete

1. A narcissist is someone who loves himself excessively. Pretend that you are a narcissist. Write your autobiography from that point of view (2 pages)
2. A nemesis is anyone or anything that seems to frustrate or defeat someone. Do you have a personal nemesis? Is it a person or a thing? Are there any positive steps you can take to help the situation? Write down three goals you would like to work towards in dealing with your personal nemesis. (1 page)
3. Select one of the characters in the myth and design a personal shield for that person.
4. What causes an echo? Use reference books to find out. Be prepared to report your findings to the class. (1 page)
5. Write a letter to the goddess, Nemesis, to try to persuade her not to punish Narcissus. Or write a letter to Hera to try to persuade her not to punish Echo. (1 page)