

Handout 1A – Heracles/Hercules and Wonder Woman

Heracles/Hercules

Though the Roman name “Hercules” has endured in the modern era, Heracles, the Greek god and hero, came first. Heracles’ childhood was rocky. His father, Zeus, the king of all gods, sired him with the mortal Alcmene. This infuriated Zeus’ wife Hera, who grew to hate Heracles and wished him dead. However, Heracles’ half-sister Athena tricked Hera into nursing him, and her milk gave him immortality.

The superhuman strength of Heracles became evident early in his childhood. By adulthood, Heracles became renowned for his wits, compassion, prowess, and courage. He loved and was loved by several women, and fathered many children—some of whom he killed during fits of madness caused by the ever-jealous Hera. He always attempted to use his abilities for good.

To the Greeks, and later the Romans, Heracles was the ideal “super male,” a figure that possessed the idealized traits of manhood in mind, body, behavior, and beyond.



Farnese Hercules, 200 BC by Lysippos

Wonder Woman

As comic books gained popularity in the 1930s, new superheroes emerged at a frenetic pace: The Lone Ranger, Captain Marvel, Superman, Batman, Spider-Man...notice a theme? Yes, it is a long list of superdudes.

In the early 1900s comic books were relatively new, quickly gaining popularity, and to some seen as a threat to the moral fabric of American youth. Psychologist William Marston was outspoken regarding the positive potential of comics, and was hired as a consultant for DC Comics as a result. Given the opportunity to create a “positive” character, Marston consulted with his wife Elizabeth and their friend Olive Byrne and introduced Wonder Woman.

Wonder Woman is an Amazon, sculpted from clay, brought to life by Aphrodite, and granted other powers by a host of Greek gods. In her earliest years, she used her physical strength, superior wits, and calm, non-violent demeanor to overcome Nazis. Since then, Wonder Woman helped found the Justice League, with whom she has faced dozens of super-villains. On her own, Wonder Woman continues to foil the plots of many evil characters intent on destroying Earth’s natural environment.



Wonder Woman, 2017, By Source
(WP:NFCC#4)

Despite her many powers, Wonder Woman has had to work harder than most Superheroes. Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, Wonder Woman struggled to overcome many of the hurdles faced by mortal American women in the workplace. Despite superior powers to many of the other characters, Wonder Woman found herself a secretary in early Justice League comics, and, when included on major missions, she seemed to be captured first and rendered powerless far too often. Somehow, she just kept falling “head over heels” in love with men in uniform, too. Wonder Woman, and her writers, seem to have overcome these obstacles in recent years.

QUESTIONS:

Do you think there are similarities between Hercules and Wonder Woman? I what ways?

What differences do you see between them?

Why do you think people who lived thousands of years apart from each other might all be drawn to tales of people such as Hercules and Wonder Woman?