Perseus and the Medusa

Perseus was the son of the Greek god Zeus and the mortal woman Danae. One day the king of the island where Perseus lived asked him if he would help get rid of the terrible monster Medusa, who was terrorizing his kingdom. Medusa had writhing, twisting snakes for hair, and a single glance from her could turn a human into stone. Perseus agreed to help, but first he asked for help from the gods. Athena gave him a shiny shield. Hermes gave him shoes with wings. "Only fly over her when she is sleeping," he told Perseus, "and never look directly at the snakes on her head."
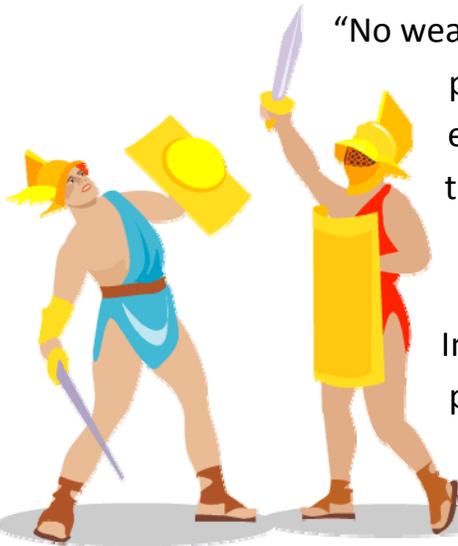
Perseus used the gifts of the gods to defeat Medusa. Using the shield to see her reflection and without looking directly at her, he managed to cut off her head. On his way back to his kingdom with Medusa's head, he found the beautiful Andromeda chained to the rocks at the seaside. She had been put there to appease the sea nymphs, who were angry with Andromeda's mother for believing herself to be more beautiful than they. Perseus flew down to her. Before she could finish telling him her story, a huge monster rose out of the sea to devour her. "If I save her," Perseus said to her parents, "You must let us be married." They agreed, and Perseus killed the sea monster.

Everyone rejoiced, except for Phineus, who was already betrothed to Andromeda. "You should have been the one to save her then," said Andromeda's father. "But instead you left her for dead, chained to the rocks. So she will be Perseus's bride."

But Phineus was angry. He and his friends attacked Perseus. They battled for some time. But Perseus became tired of the uneven fight. "If you are my friend, avert your eyes!" he cried. Then he pulled Medusa's head from his sack and held it up. One by one Phineus's friends turned to stone. Phineus begged to be saved.

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"No weapon will touch you," Perseus said. "Instead, you will be preserved here forever to remind everyone of these events." And with that, Perseus held Medusa's head up to Phineus, who was turned immediately to stone.

In Greek Mythology, the mortals are often helped or punished by the gods. Answer the following true or false questions about the role of the Gods in the story of Perseus. After each question, write the line from the story that supports your answer.

Circle the correct answer.

1. Perseus received help from the god Hermes.   True or False

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2. The sea nymphs were angry with Andromeda.   True or False

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3. The gods punished Phineus.   True or False

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