

Myths and Legends: Poseidon, the Greek god of the sea

By E.M. Berens, adapted by Newsela staff on 10.14.16

Word Count **638**

Level **780L**



"Poseidon at Sea," oil on canvas painting, circa 1640. Photo by VCG Wilson/Corbis via Getty Images.

Greek mythology is thousands of years old. The Greeks made up the gods to explain the weather, disasters and events in history. Myths were created about gods and goddesses that had supernatural powers, but acted like humans.

Can Be Quiet, Or Violent

The ancient Greeks believed that Poseidon is the brother of Zeus. He is known as the god of the sea. Like the sea, he can be calm and quiet or angry and violent.

Poseidon has the power to cause mighty storms, waves as high as mountains, hurricanes and thick mists that hide both land and sea from sailors. He also has the power to quiet the waves and save sailors.

The symbol of his power is called a trident. It looks like a fork with three spikes. The trident can make earthquakes, raise up islands from the bottom of the sea and cause wells to fill with water. When Poseidon is angry, he can send terrible floods.

Less Kind Than His Brother Zeus

Poseidon looks a lot like his brother Zeus. But the sea-god doesn't have the kindness seen in the face of Zeus. Poseidon has a curly beard and wears a headband around his dark, messy hair. His body looks strong. He usually is seen standing in his chariot made of shells. It is pulled by sea-horses, with golden manes and bronze flashing hoofs.

He lives in a beautiful palace at the bottom of the sea. The outside of the building is of bright gold. The inside has high and beautiful columns. They hold up a round, dome ceiling. Everywhere there are silvery fountains. There are feathery sea-plants, rocks of pure crystal that shine with rainbow colors and white sand dotted with jewels and pearls. At night it is lit up by glow-worms. He has another palace on Mount Olympus that he visits when he must attend a meeting of the gods.

Poseidon rules the ocean, but he can still be a servant to his brother Zeus. He once helped when Zeus was attacked by Giants.

Once Poseidon was part of a secret plan to take away Zeus's power. The plan failed. Poseidon was punished by not being allowed to return to the sea for a year.

He Married A Sea Girl

Poseidon married a sea-girl named Amphitrite. He made himself look like a dolphin to make her fall in love with him. Later, his wife became jealous of a beautiful woman Poseidon liked. His wife changed her into a monster with 12 feet, six heads and the voice of a barking dog.

The Cyclops were the sons of Poseidon and Amphitrite. They had only one eye in the middle of their foreheads. The leader of the Cyclops was the man-eating monster Polyphemus.

Poseidon was the father of seven other children. He had two giant sons named Otus and Ephialtes, who were 45 feet tall and 15 feet wide when they were 9 years old. They tried to climb to heaven by piling mountains on top of one another, until Apollo killed them with his arrows.

The Greeks believed Poseidon created the horse. Athene and Poseidon were arguing about naming a city in Greece. The gods decided that whoever gave the world the best gift could name the city. Poseidon struck the ground with his trident, and a strong and beautiful horse appeared. Athene created the olive-tree with her magic wand. The gods said her gift was the sign for peace and plenty. Poseidon's horse was a symbol of war. So Athene got to name the city, Athens.

Poseidon's symbols are the trident, horse, and dolphin.

The Romans worshiped Poseidon under the name of Neptune. They gave him all the same powers.

The Romans built a temple for Neptune.

From "The Myths and Legends of Ancient Greece and Rome" by E.M. Berens.

Quiz

- 1 Based on information in the article, which of these statements about Poseidon is TRUE?
- (A) He protected Zeus from getting his power taken away.
 - (B) He named the city of Athens.
 - (C) He is always calm and quiet.
 - (D) He lives in a palace on the bottom of the sea.
- 2 Which sentence from the article BEST supports the idea that Poseidon has great power?
- (A) When Poseidon is angry, he can send terrible floods.
 - (B) Poseidon has a curly beard and wears a headband around his dark, messy hair.
 - (C) Poseidon was punished by not being allowed to return to the sea for a year.
 - (D) The Cyclops were the sons of Poseidon and Amphitrite.
- 3 What is the relationship between Poseidon and Zeus?
- (A) They are brothers who rule the sea.
 - (B) They are brothers who have power over Greece.
 - (C) They are brothers who have had conflicts.
 - (D) They are brothers who always protect each other.
- 4 How did Poseidon first become involved with Amphitrite?
- (A) Poseidon turned himself into a dolphin, and Amphitrite fell in love with him.
 - (B) Poseidon became jealous of Amphitrite, and she turned into a monster.
 - (C) Poseidon and Amphitrite had the Cyclops children together.
 - (D) Poseidon argued with Amphitrite over naming a city in Greece.