HERCULES' STRENGTH AMAZES EVERYONE. BUT CAN MUSCLES ALONE MAKE HIM A HERO?

BY SARI BODI AND KAREN TROTT | ILLUSTRATIONS BY TOM GARRETT

LOOK FOR WORD NERD'S 8 WORDS IN BOLD

Scene 1

All Chorus: The strongest man who ever lived was born in Ancient Greece.
Chorus I: Stronger than Superman?
Chorus II: When he was a baby, he was stronger than Superman!
Chorus III: Which caused some problems between his father, the great god Zeus—
Chorus I: —and the goddess Hera, his jealous stepmother.
Hera: Look at your son. To pluck apples, he uproots the entire tree.
Zeus: (proudly): Nine months old and already stronger than 10 men.
Hera: He is ruining Mount Olympus, home of gods and goddesses. He must be sent away.
Zeus: He's my son!
Hera: But he's not mine. His mother is a mere human, not a goddess like me.
Chorus II: Just then Chiron, a centaur, gallops in.
Chorus III: On four legs. After all, he's half man, half horse.
Chiron: (stamping his hooves): Master! The bab...
Hercules has brought a lion into the house. He's playing with it as if it were a kitten.

Hera: You see, Zeus? He is putting everyone in great danger.

Chiron: The servants fear for their lives.

Zeus (sadly): Chiron, take my son Hercules to the mountains. Train him well. Harness his strength.

**Scene 2**

All Chorus: Hercules grows into a strapping young man.

Chorus I: His strength never fails to surprise his teacher, Chiron.

Chiron: Hercules, I saw you shoot that arrow, but where did it go?

Hercules: I believe it hit the moon, master.

Chiron (jaw dropped): So it did. Now see if you can hit that vicious wolf that's about to attack us!

Chorus II: In the coming years, Hercules rides the entire countryside of wild beasts.

Chorus III: Admired far and wide for this success, he returns to his father's palace.

Hercules: Father, have I now earned the right to become a god, immortal like you?

Zeus: That requires more than just physical strength and fame.

Hercules: What more can I do?

Zeus: You must discover for yourself how to become a true hero.

Chorus I: But now Hera interrupts.

Hera: Hercules needs someone to challenge him with tasks worthy of his strength. I know just the person: my cousin, King Eury.

Chorus II: Little does Zeus know, Hera has a plan.

**Scene 3**

All Chorus: Hera wants to get away with murder—literally.

Chorus III: She pulls King Eury aside.

Hera: Eury, you must help me get rid of Hercules once and for all.

Eury: Has he won Zeus' favor?

Hera: So much that Zeus ignores my children, even though they are gods.

Eury: We'll devise 12 impossible tasks. I'll tell him that he must complete them before he can be a hero.

Hera: Yes! One of them is bound to destroy him.

Eury: First, I will send him to kill the Nemean (neh-MEE-uhn) lion.

Hera (excitedly): Its fur is so thick, no spear can pierce it!

Chorus I: Hercules takes the challenge. He returns to King Eury and Hera wearing the Nemean lion's skin.

Eury: You succeeded!

Hera (aside): Rats! Let's try another.

Eury: Hercules, now you must destroy the nine-headed Hydra that has poisonous breath.

Chorus II: Hercules dashes off.

Hera: Little does he know, when you cut one head off that monster, two grow back!

Chorus III: Faster than you can say "Greek yogurt," Hercules is back at Eury's palace.
Hercules: Done. Here are arrows dipped in 
- Hydra poison.
Eury: Well then, for your next task, seek out 
the wild boar.
Hera: He has tusks as sharp as swords.
Eury: And bring him back.
Eury and Hera: Alive!
Chorus I: Hercules outsmarts the wild boar by 
chasing it until it's too tired to continue.
Chorus II: He slings it over his shoulder and 
carries it back to the palace.

Scene 4
All Chorus: The plot thickens (and so do 
Hercules' muscles).
Eury: If we can't destroy him, maybe we can 
disgust him.
Hera: What do you have in mind?
Chorus III: They call Hercules to the throne 
room.
Eury: Your next task is to remove the 

mountains of manure from the stables of 
King Augeas (aw-GEE-us).
Hercules: Manure!!
Eury: You heard me.
Chorus I: Hercules sets off for the stables.
Hera: Ha! Those manure piles are as high as 
Mount Olympus. He will surely fail.
Chorus II: The smell alone nearly kills our 
hero.
Hercules: This royal manure royally stinks!
Chorus III: But his strength and wits save him.
Hercules: If I toss boulders into this nearby 
river, I can redirect the waters.
Chorus I: The waters flood the stables, 
washing them clean.
Chorus II: King Eury hears of Hercules' 
success.
Eury: Drats! Foiled again, Hera.
Hera: We must make the tasks even harder. 
Have Hercules bring me the golden belt 
from the deadly queen of the Amazons.
Eury: Yes! Then capture the man-eating mares.
Hera (gleefully): Then make him defeat the 
monster Geryon (JAIR-ee-
uhn), who has three bodies 
joined into one. Hercules is 
sure to die.
Chorus III: Again and again, 
they send Hercules off to meet 
his death.
Chorus I: Again and again, he 
fails to die.

Scene 5
All Chorus: While Hercules 
keeps toiling, Hera's blood is 
boiling.
Hera: How is he still alive? We've got only one 
task left!
Eury: I've got it! We'll send him to kidnap 
Cerberus, the three-headed dog that guards 
the underworld.
Hera: That's perfect. No mortal has ever 
returned from there.
Chorus II: Hercules travels through a long, dark cave.
Chorus III: He arrives at the River Styx.
Hercules: I need to get across the river to the underworld.
Ferryman: What's the magic word?
Hercules: Uh . . . gladiator sandals?
Ferryman: No, it's please, you big numskull.
Hercules: Can you please take me across the river?
Ferryman: That's better.
Chorus I: Once across, Hercules makes his way through fiery tunnels.
Chorus II: At last he finds Hades, king of the underworld.

Hades: Hot enough for you?
Hercules: I always sweat like this.
Hades: We don't see many people with a heartbeat down here.
Hercules: I must have taken a wrong turn. Perhaps your dog can show me the way out.
Hades: If you can get these collars over his heads, then be my guest.
Chorus III: Hades hands Hercules three spiked collars and a leash.

Hades: You'll find his lair over by the big mountain of bones. I'm sure he'll be delighted to tear into your juicy human flesh.
Chorus I: Hercules gently approaches Cerberus.
Chorus II: Cerberus cocks his heads to the side.
Hercules: Who's a good doggie?
Chorus III: Hercules speaks to each of the three heads.
Hercules: You are, and you are, and you are.
Chorus I: Cerberus growls and licks his chops.
Hercules (muttering): I hear you only eat live flesh. Well, I don’t intend to become dead meat!
Chorus II: Hercules lunges at the hound and wraps his massive arms around all three necks.
Chorus III: Teeth gnashing and tail slashing, Cerberus howls as Hercules wrestles him to the ground.
Hercules: Now roll over and play dead! Chorus I: Hercules drags the beast back to Eury’s palace.
Hercules (bellowing): Where is King Eury? I’ve brought him Cerberus.
Hera: Eury’s hiding in a giant urn. He’s terrified.
Eury (from inside the urn): Get that dog out of here! And you, Hercules, go away and don’t ever come back!
Chorus II: Hera’s plan has backfired. She seethes.
Hera: The tasks did not vanquish Hercules. He’s even stronger and more celebrated!

Scene 6

All Chorus: Word spreads of Hercules’ legendary feats.
Chorus III: Zeus welcomes him to Mount Olympus.
Zeus: As you’ve learned, my son, a true hero is measured not by the strength of his muscles alone.
Hercules: Yes, Father, but by how he uses them.
Zeus: With the strength of his mind and heart as well. You are now a god for all the ages.
Chorus I: And to this day, Hercules is remembered.
Chorus II: He is among the most famous of the Greek heroes.
Chorus III: Today, herculean tasks are still known as those requiring great strength or effort.

WRITE TO WIN!

Describe Hercules’ character traits. How does he use them to become a great hero? Respond in two clear paragraphs, using examples from the play. Send it to “Hercules Contest” by Oct. 15, 2013. Ten winners will each receive a copy of Hera: The Goddess and Her Glory by George O’Connor. See page 2 for details.