Name _____ Date _____

Arachne the Weaver

Myth or legend · 3rd–5th grade

In a small village in ancient Greece lived a young woman named Arachne. She could weave cloth more beautifully than anyone. Her threads were so fine and her pictures so lifelike that people traveled for days just to watch her work.

"You must have been taught by Athena herself," the visitors said. Athena was the goddess of wisdom and weaving. But Arachne tossed her head. "Nobody taught me. I am better than Athena. If she wants to, she can come and weave against me."

The next day, an old woman with a cane came to Arachne's door. "Be careful, child," she said softly. "Be proud of your gift, but do not insult the gods." Arachne only laughed. "Let Athena come, if she dares!"

At once, the old woman stood up tall. Her gray cloak fell away, and there stood Athena, shining and calm. "I have come," she said. The villagers gasped, but Arachne did not take back her words. The contest began.

The two weavers worked all day. Athena wove the gods on their mountain, wise and strong, with small scenes at the edges warning what happens to people who challenge them. Arachne wove pictures that made fun of the gods, and her work was perfect. Not a single thread was out of place.

Athena could find no mistake, but she was angry at Arachne's pride and disrespect. She touched Arachne's forehead. Arachne began to shrink. Her arms became thin legs, and soon she was a small spider hanging from a thread.

"You love to weave," said Athena, "so weave forever." And that, the Greeks said, is why spiders spin such beautiful webs. Even today, scientists call spiders arachnids, after the proud weaver.

Questions

1. What was Arachne's great talent?

2. Who was the old woman with the cane?

3. What warning did the old woman give?

4. Which word best describes Arachne?

5. This myth also explains something in nature. What?

6. Was Athena's punishment fair? Why or why not?

7. What is the difference between being proud of your work and boasting?

The lesson in my own words

Answer Key

1. Weaving.
2. Athena in disguise.
3. Be proud of your gift, but do not insult the gods.
4. Proud.
5. Why spiders spin webs.
6. Answers will vary.
7. Answers will vary.

Lesson: Be proud of your talents, but don't let pride make you unkind or boastful.