

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

# Medea

## Background

Medea was of a people at the far edge of the Black Sea; for the Greeks of Euripides' time, this was the edge of the known world. She was a powerful sorceress, princess of Colchis, and a granddaughter of the sun god Helios. Jason, a Greek hero, led his crew to Colchis in search of the Golden Fleece. King Aetes, lord of Colchis and Medea's father, kept the Fleece under guard. A sorcerer himself, he was a powerful opponent.

The traps set by Aetes made the Golden Fleece all but impossible to obtain. With Medea's aid, Jason overcame these obstacles, and Medea herself killed the giant serpent that guarded the Fleece. Then, to buy time during their escape, Medea killed her own brother and tossed the pieces of his corpse behind the Argo as they sailed for Greece. Her father, grief-stricken by his son's death and his daughter's treachery, had to slow his pursuit of the Argo so he could collect the pieces of his son's body for the proper burial.

Medea and Jason returned to his hereditary kingdom of Iolcus. Jason's father had died, and his uncle Pelias sat, without right, on the throne. Medea, to help Jason, convinced Pelias' daughters that she knew a way to restore the old king's youth. He would have to be killed, cut into pieces, and then put together and restored to youth by Medea's magic. The unwitting daughters did as Medea asked, but the sorceress then explained that she couldn't really bring Pelias back to life. Rather than win Jason his throne, this move forced Jason, Medea, and their children into exile. Finally, they settled in Corinth. The action of the play begins here.

## Essay:

*Write one - three complete paragraphs for three of the following questions. Please write in the space provided below or on the back.*

A. Summarize the ancient Greek tragedy Medea by Euripides beginning where the background leaves off. Describe the plot line in narrative form. How does it end? Include the names of at least three important characters.

B. Throughout Euripides' Medea, references are made to what it means to be Greek and what it means to be an outsider. How does this bear on the action of the play?

C. Think about Medea's role as wife and mother in Greek society. How does this bear on the action of the play and affect your interpretation?

D. Medea is a descendant of the gods, and at the end of the play, Apollo sends a chariot, pulled by dragons, to take her to Athens. The film ends somewhat differently. How does the original ending bear on the action of the play and affect your interpretation? Does the ending used in the film lead you to view the ending differently?

E. Here is how Euripides ends the play:

*CHORUS. Many are the Fates which Zeus in Olympus dispenses;/Many matters the gods bring to surprising ends./The things we thought would happen do not happen;/The unexpected God makes possible;/And such is the conclusion of this story.*

Does this statement help you to decide how to interpret the play?

F. Based on your knowledge of ancient Greek society and Euripides, **reflect on** the important themes or ideas that the Euripides wanted his audience to consider. **React** to the play as a person living in 2012. What can **you** still relate to? Compare and contrast these two viewpoints.