

ECHO AND NARCISSUS

retold by Roger Lancelyn Green

IDENTIFY

Pause at line 5. Underline two words that describe Echo. Circle the words that tell who Hera was.

IDENTIFY

Re-read lines 13–15. Underline the details that tell why Hera becomes angry with Echo.

VOCABULARY

detain (dē-tān') v.: hold back; delay.

INFER

Pause at line 19. Underline the punishment that Hera gives Echo. What does this punishment reveal about Hera's character?

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Up on the wild, lonely mountains of Greece lived the Oreades,¹ the nymphs or fairies of the hills, and among them one of the most beautiful was called Echo. She was one of the most talkative, too, and once she talked too much and angered Hera, wife of Zeus, king of the gods.

When Zeus grew tired of the golden halls of Mount Olympus, the home of the immortal gods, he would come down to earth and wander with the nymphs on the mountains. Hera, however, was jealous and often came to see
10 what he was doing. It seemed strange at first that she always met Echo, and that Echo kept her listening for hours on end to her stories and her gossip.

But at last Hera realized that Echo was doing this on purpose to **detain** her while Zeus went quietly back to Olympus as if he had never really been away.

"So nothing can stop you talking?" exclaimed Hera. "Well, Echo, I do not intend to spoil your pleasure. But from this day on, you shall be able only to repeat what other people say—and never speak unless someone else speaks first."

20 Hera returned to Olympus, well pleased with the punishment she had made for Echo, leaving the poor nymph to weep sadly among the rocks on the mountain-side and speak only the words which her sisters and their friends shouted happily to one another.

She grew used to her strange fate after a while, but then a new misfortune befell her.

1. **Oreades** (ō'rē-ad'ēz).

There was a beautiful youth called Narcissus,² who was the son of a nymph and the god of a nearby river. He grew up in the plain of Thebes³ until he was sixteen years old and then began to hunt on the mountains toward the north where Echo and her sister Oreades lived.

30

As he wandered through the woods and valleys, many a nymph looked upon him and loved him. But Narcissus laughed at them **scornfully**, for he loved only himself.

Farther up the mountains Echo saw him. And at once her lonely heart was filled with love for the beautiful youth, so that nothing else in the world mattered but to win him.

40

Now she wished indeed that she could speak to him words of love. But the curse which Hera had placed upon her tied her tongue, and she could only follow wherever he went, hiding behind trees and rocks, and feasting her eyes **vainly** upon him.

One day Narcissus wandered farther up the mountain than usual, and all his friends, the other Theban youths, were left far behind. Only Echo followed him, still hiding among the rocks, her heart heavy with unspoken love.

Presently Narcissus realized that he was lost, and hoping to be heard by his companions, or perhaps by some mountain shepherd, he called out loudly:

50

“Is there anybody here?”

“Here!” cried Echo.

Narcissus stood still in amazement, looking all around in vain. Then he shouted, even more loudly:

“Whoever you are, come to me!”

“Come to me!” cried Echo eagerly.

Still no one was visible, so Narcissus called again:

“Why are you avoiding me?”

WORD STUDY

Scornfully, in line 34, describes the way Narcissus laughed. Underline the **context clues** nearby that help you understand that *scornfully* means “in a way that shows contempt or disdain.”

PREDICT

Pause at line 42. What do you think will happen when Echo and Narcissus meet?

VOCABULARY

vainly (vān'lē) *adv.*: uselessly; without result.

FLUENCY

After you've read lines 50–65, practice reading this boxed passage aloud. Use different voices that fit the two characters and their situation.

2. **Narcissus** (nār·sis'əs).

3. **Thebes** (thēbz).

INTERPRET

Pause at line 77. In your opinion, if Echo could speak normally, would Narcissus’s opinion of her change? Explain why or why not.

IDENTIFY

Re-read lines 79–83. Underline the words that tell who Aphrodite is.

IDENTIFY

Re-read lines 84–88. Underline the details that tell why Aphrodite decides to punish Narcissus. Circle the details that tell how she’s going to punish him.

VOCABULARY

unrequited (un’ri-kwīt’id) v. used as *adj.*: not returned in kind.

Echo repeated his words, but with a sob in her breath, and Narcissus called once more:

60 “Come here, I say, and let us meet!”

“Let us meet!” cried Echo, her heart leaping with joy as she spoke the happiest words that had left her lips since the curse of Hera had fallen on her. And to make good her words, she came running out from behind the rocks and tried to clasp her arms about him.

But Narcissus flung the beautiful nymph away from him in scorn.

70 “Away with these embraces!” he cried angrily, his voice full of cruel contempt. “I would die before I would have you touch me!”

“I would have you touch me!” repeated poor Echo.

“Never will I let you kiss me!”

“Kiss me! Kiss me!” murmured Echo, sinking down among the rocks, as Narcissus cast her violently from him and sped down the hillside.

“One touch of those lips would kill me!” he called back furiously over his shoulder.

“Kill me!” begged Echo.

80 And Aphrodite,⁴ the goddess of love, heard her and was kind to her, for she had been a true lover. Quietly and painlessly, Echo **pined** away and died. But her voice lived on, lingering among the rocks and answering faintly whenever Narcissus or another called.

“He shall not go unpunished for this cruelty,” said Aphrodite. “By scorning poor Echo like this, he scorns love itself. And scorning love, he insults me. He is altogether eaten up with self-love . . . Well, he shall love himself and no one else, and yet shall die of **unrequited** love!”

4. **Aphrodite** (af’rə-dīt’ē).

VOCABULARY

intently (in-tent'lē) *adv.*: with great concentration.

INFER

To whom is Narcissus speaking in lines 121–123?

IDENTIFY

“Echo and Narcissus” is an **origin myth**, a story that explains how something came to be. What two things in nature does this myth explain?

bottom of the pool. Drawing out his arms, he gazed **intently** down and, as the water grew still again, saw once more the face of his beloved.

110 Poor Narcissus did not know that he was seeing his own reflection, for Aphrodite hid this knowledge from him—and perhaps this was the first time that a pool of water had reflected the face of anyone gazing into it.

Narcissus seemed enchanted by what he saw. He could not leave the pool, but lay by its side day after day looking at the only face in the world which he loved—and could not win—and pining just as Echo had pined.

Slowly Narcissus faded away, and at last his heart broke.

“Woe is me for I loved in vain!” he cried.

120 “I loved in vain!” sobbed the voice of Echo among the rocks.

“Farewell, my love, farewell,” were his last words, and Echo’s voice broke and its whisper shivered into silence: “My love . . . farewell!”

130 So Narcissus died, and the earth covered his bones. But with the spring, a plant pushed its green leaves through the earth where he lay. As the sun shone on it, a bud opened and a new flower blossomed for the first time—a white circle of petals round a yellow center. The flowers grew and spread, waving in the gentle breeze which whispered among them like Echo herself come to kiss the blossoms of the first Narcissus flowers.



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