



Zeus and Hera



Hera's name means "protectress" in Greek. Zeus cajoled Hera into marrying him, even though Hera knew that Zeus could not remain true to one wife. She watched him constantly and discovered him hiding in a cloud with Io. To avoid being found out, Zeus changed Io into a pure white heifer. Hera had her servant Argus, who had one hundred eyes, watch over Io. But Zeus sent his son Hermes to free Io. Hermes tricked Argus into falling asleep, releasing Io, who fled to Egypt. Io gave birth to Zeus's son, whom Hera kidnapped. But Io found him, and they returned to Egypt, where she married the king.

Presentation Suggestions

The narrators can be sitting on either side of the stage. Zeus should be in the center with Hera on his immediate right and Io on his immediate left. Hermes and Argus can stand slightly to the back of Hera and Io.

Props

The stage could be decorated with peacock feathers. A mural showing the relationship of Greece to Egypt could decorate that back of the stage. The characters could dress in appropriate clothing, with Argus perhaps wearing a shirt covered with eyes.

Delivery Suggestions

Hera should sound jealous and angry with Zeus when confronting him about his escapades. Zeus should sound persuasive and charming. Argus should sound obedient with Hera and pleased for Hermes's company. Hermes should sound congenial.

Characters

- ☐ Narrator 1
- ☐ Hera
- ☐ Narrator 2
- ☐ Zeus
- ☐ Argus
- ☐ Hermes

Zeus and Hera



Narrator 1: When Zeus fell in love with Hera and proposed marriage, she at first refused him. She resented his practice of taking mortal wives and wanted no part of his rule. But Zeus wanted Hera for himself and was not to be dissuaded. He created a thunderstorm and changed himself into a little cuckoo bird, flying into her arms for protection.

Hera: Your poor little bird, let me warm you.

Narrator 2: Zeus changed back to his godly form, and Hera found herself hugging him.

Hera: Zeus! You tricked me!

Zeus: Hera, you know I'm not going to give up until you marry me, so you might as well agree now.

Hera: I'll marry you, Zeus, but I'm warning you not to make me angry. No more wives, Zeus!

Zeus: You know I'll be true to you, Hera. Now let's prepare for the wedding!

Narrator 1: The wedding was glorious, with all the flowers and trees in bloom to celebrate. But no matter how hard he tried, Zeus couldn't remain true to Hera. He would sneak down to Greece and marry mortal girls while assuming various disguises. He believed that his heirs would inherit his greatness, which could only benefit Greece. Hera was greatly displeased with his philandering practices.

Hera: Zeus, you haven't changed at all. You think that I don't know what you are doing, but I'm always watching you.

Zeus: Hera, you know that the sun rises and sets with you!

Narrator 2: But Hera wasn't convinced of his fidelity and continued to watch Zeus. One day she spied a dark cloud on Earth and became suspicious. She rushed to the cloud, and just as she suspected, she found Zeus. To her surprise, he was holding a little pure white heifer.

Hera: Zeus, what a lovely little heifer. Won't you let me have it?

Narrator 1: Hera suspected that the heifer was Zeus's latest conquest, and indeed it was Io, a lovely young girl. Zeus was caught in his ruse, but he had to pretend that the heifer meant nothing to him.

Zeus: Of course, Hera, you are welcome to the cow.

Narrator 2: Hera tied the heifer to a tree and called for her servant, the giant Argus.

Hera: Argus, I have a task for you. I have tied a little white heifer to the tree in the garden. Use your hundred eyes to make sure that she doesn't get away.

Argus: As you wish, Hera.

Narrator 1: With his hundred eyes, Argus made an excellent watchman, never closing more than half of his eyes at any given time. But he was accustomed to more excitement in his life and watching a cow quickly bored him. Meanwhile, Zeus was plotting to free Io by enlisting the help of his son, Hermes.

Zeus: Hermes, find a way to set Io free. Argus is guarding her, but I know you can figure out how to get by him.

Hermes: Father, I'll be glad to try. Just watch what I do.

Narrator 2: Hermes disguised himself as a flute-playing shepherd, and he went to see Argus.

Hermes: Good morning, Argus. You look like you could use some company.

Argus: You're right about that, young man. A bit of conversation and music would be welcome.

Hermes: Let me play for you, and then perhaps a story would pass the time.

Argus: That would surely help keep me entertained, my friend.

Narrator 1: After playing his flute for a while, Hermes began to tell a tedious story. Soon fifty of Argus's eyes had closed in sleep. As Hermes persisted with his endless story, the other fifty eyes began to droop. When all one hundred eyes were closed, Hermes cut off Argus's head, leaving his eyes closed for all of eternity.

Hermes: Io, I am going to untie you, but I can't break the spell on you. Run home to your father.

Narrator 2: Io ran home, but her father didn't recognize her. She could only moo, so she finally scratched the letters *I* and *O* in the sand with her hoof, and her father realized what had happened. He flew at Zeus in a rage, but Zeus threw down a thunderbolt to ward him off. Meanwhile, Hera realized that Argus was dead and Io was free.

Hera: Io, I'm not done with you yet. I'm sending a gadfly to pester you to death. As for Argus, he may be dead, but I'm going to ensure that he isn't forgotten. His eyes will be put on the peacock's tail, and everyone will admire its beauty forevermore.

Narrator 1: The eyes of Argus were still unseeing, but they looked gorgeous on the peacock, which became quite vain as a result. Meanwhile, Io ran all over Greece, trying to escape from the stinging gadfly.

Narrator 2: Finally, Io ran to Egypt, where the people marveled at her pure white form and worshiped her.

Zeus: Hera, can't you leave Io alone? Look at how you've tormented her, chasing her all the way to Egypt.

Hera: All right, Zeus, I suppose you can change her back to human form now, but you are to have nothing else to do with her. Promise me you'll never look at her again.

Zeus: I promise, and I'll see that she stays in Egypt.

Narrator: Io did stay in Egypt, giving birth to Zeus's son Epaphus. When Hera heard about the birth, she had the child kidnapped. But Io searched for her son, who was being raised by the wife of the king of Byblos, in Syria. She found him and returned to Egypt, where she eventually married the king, Telegonus. She lived in Egypt happily, enjoying the respect of the people.

