

**I. READING COMPREHENSION PRE-ASSESSMENT**

*In the following myth, Tantalus defies the gods and receives a unique punishment. Read the myth and answer the questions that follow.*

**TANTALUS**

by Gustav Schwab

1

TANTALUS, son of Zeus, ruled over Sipylus in Lydia. He was very rich in worldly goods and famed for his wealth in both Asia and Greece. If ever the Olympian gods paid honor to a mortal, it was to him. Because of his divine origin, they cherished him as a friend, and at last he was even permitted to dine at the board of Zeus and listen to the words which passed between the immortals. But his vain human spirit could not bear the exquisite burden of unearthly bliss, and he began to sin against the gods in a number of ways: he betrayed their secrets; he filched nectar and ambrosia from their board and distributed it among his companions in the world below; he hid the image of a dog, wrought of precious gold, which another had stolen from Zeus' temple in Crete, and when the king of the gods demanded it back, he swore he had never seen it. Finally, in his matchless arrogance, he invited the gods to his palace as a return for their hospitality, and in order to test whether they really knew all things, he had his own son Pelops slain and prepared for their meal. Only Demeter (1) ate of the gruesome dish--one shoulder-blade. The other gods recognized what had been put before them and threw the torn limbs of the boy into a cauldron, from which Clotho, one of the Fates, drew him forth in fresh beauty. But one shoulder was of ivory!

2

With this, Tantalus had exceeded all bounds of iniquity (2) and the gods thrust him down to Hades, where he was punished with cruel torments. He had to stand in the middle of a lake whose waters came to his chin, yet he suffered burning thirst, for he could not reach the draught so close to his lips. Whenever he bent down to quench his thirst, the water receded, and at his feet lay the dark dry earth. At the same time he had to endure the pangs of hunger. Behind him, on the margin of the lake, grew beautiful fruit trees which arched their boughs over his head. Looking up, he saw juicy pears, red-cheeked apples, glowing pomegranates, plump figs, and green olives. But the moment he reached to pluck them, a strong wind whipped the branches up into the clouds. His last and most terrible torment was the incessant fear of death. A great block of stone hung in the air over his head and constantly threatened to crush him. So impious Tantalus, who scorned the gods, was destined to threefold, perpetual suffering in the underworld.

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<sup>1</sup> Demeter -- the Greek goddess of agriculture and fertility

<sup>2</sup> iniquity -- sinfulness

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**According to the myth, what is one reason Tantalus is initially honored by the gods?**

- A. He is the child of a god.
- B. He has achieved great success.
- C. He helps the gods administer justice.
- D. He has encountered much misfortune.

**According to the myth, why does Tantalus begin to “sin against the gods”?**

- A. The gods take away his wealth.
- B. He has an argument with the gods.
- C. He begins to believe he is as good as the gods.
- D. The gods tell him he can no longer dine with them.

**Based on the myth, what do the first two “cruel torments” Tantalus experiences have in common?**

- A. They are a reflection of his crimes.
- B. They are a constant source of temptation.
- C. They force him to perform physical labor.
- D. They force him to make amends to the gods.

**Based on the myth, what is suggested by the treatment Tantalus receives in Hades?**

- A. Gods should never trust a mortal.
- B. Certain fates are worse than death.
- C. A person's family should be honored.
- D. A person's mistakes should be forgiven.

**Read the definition of tantalize in the box below.**

tantalize: To excite another by exposing something desirable while keeping it out of reach: TEASE
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Which aspect of Tantalus's life prompted the creation of the word tantalize?

- A. his immense wealth
- B. his matchless arrogance
- C. his form of punishment
- D. his contempt for the gods

## Writing Pre-Assessment

In a well-developed, 3-paragraph composition, write a review of a book or movie that you have read or seen recently. Include (not necessarily in this order):

- \*main characters

- \*conflicts

- \*plot summary (what happens?)

- \*would you recommend this book/movie to a friend? Why/Why not?

Try your best to make your review interesting and unique.

Use the space below to organize your thoughts: