

## READING COMPREHENSION

# Tantalus and Eternal Longing

The gods of Greek mythology often did terrible things when they were displeased. (1) Knowing this made most humans *wary* of misbehaving or displeasing the gods. It seems that a king named Tantalus, however, was unconcerned. This is the story of his unusual punishment.

In their home on Mount Olympus, the gods fed on nectar and ambrosia. Nectar, a beverage made with honey, was said to give immortality to anyone who drank it. Ambrosia, the food of the gods, was made from honey, water, fruit, cheese, olive oil, and barley. As with nectar, those who fed on it lived forever.

(2) Many humans had *aspirations* of dining with the gods on Mount Olympus. They imagined themselves enjoying the good food, luxurious surroundings, and the view, not to mention the precious gift of immortality!

(3) But Zeus, the king of the gods, was *reluctant* to invite humans to his table. In fact, in all of history, he invited only one, Tantalus. (4) We do not know what gave Zeus the *inclination* to admit Tantalus to the gods' realm. Some people believe that Tantalus was Zeus's son. (5) Whatever the reason, Tantalus found himself in the *enviable* position of being an honored guest on Mount Olympus. As he ate ambrosia and drank nectar, he listened to gossip at the table, learning many secrets of the gods.

Tantalus should have been grateful for this great privilege. (6) Instead, he proved to be quite *willful* and unworthy of Zeus's hospitality and trust. Some people believe that he told the secrets of the gods to other

humans: (7) According to another version of the story, Tantalus stole the *coveted* nectar and ambrosia and shared them with his friends. Whatever his crime was, it caused Zeus to become extremely angry.



Zeus devised a horrible punishment for Tantalus. He was sent to the terrible region of Tartarus, a place located beneath Hades, the underworld. There, he lived a life of eternal hunger and thirst. Although he stood up to his chin in a pool of water, every time he bent down to take a drink, it drained away. Hanging over his head were trees bearing delicious fruit, but whenever he tried to pick a piece, the wind blew the branch out of his reach. (8) To try to satisfy his longing, Tantalus *persevered* at his task, but over and over again, he met with frustration. (9) How *wistfully* he must have thought of the nectar and ambrosia of his former feasts.

Tantalus now gives his name to an English word. (10) To *tantalize* people is to make them long for something they cannot have.

Each sentence below refers to a numbered sentence in the passage. Write the letter of the choice that gives the sentence a meaning that is closest to the original sentence.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. Knowing this made most humans \_\_\_\_\_ misbehaving or displeasing the gods.  
a. carefully avoid      b. feel jealousy for      c. dislike      d. tend to prefer
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. Many humans had \_\_\_\_\_ dining with the gods on Mount Olympus.  
a. requests for      b. ambitions of      c. resistance to      d. no interest in
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. But Zeus, the king of the gods, was \_\_\_\_\_ to invite humans to his table.  
a. stubborn      b. tempted      c. happy      d. unwilling
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. We do not know what gave Zeus the \_\_\_\_\_ to admit Tantalus to the gods' realm.  
a. lack of interest      b. ambition      c. preference      d. persistence
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. Whatever the reason, Tantalus found himself in the \_\_\_\_\_ position of being an honored guest on Mount Olympus.  
a. ambitious      b. tempting      c. determined      d. desired

- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. Instead, he proved to be quite \_\_\_\_\_ and unworthy of Zeus's hospitality and trust.  
a. jealous                      b. stubborn                      c. ambitious                      d. careful
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. According to another version of the story, Tantalus stole the \_\_\_\_\_ nectar and ambrosia and shared them with his friends.  
a. jealous                      b. persistent                      c. delicious                      d. desired
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. Tantalus \_\_\_\_\_ his task, but over and over again, he met with frustration.  
a. kept at                      b. gave up on                      c. felt sad about                      d. did not want to do
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9. How \_\_\_\_\_ he must have thought of the nectar and ambrosia of his former feasts!  
a. longingly                      b. happily                      c. excitedly                      d. carefully
- \_\_\_\_\_ 10. To \_\_\_\_\_ people is to make them long for something they cannot have.  
a. sadly wish for                      b. carefully watch                      c. tempt but deny                      d. show longing for

Indicate whether the statements below are TRUE or FALSE according to the passage.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. Zeus often invited humans whom he liked up to Mount Olympus to dine.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. Tantalus was punished for his poor judgment.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. *Tantalizing* someone is a good way to make a friend and to gain his or her respect.

## WRITE THE DERIVATIVE

Complete the sentence by writing the correct form of the word shown in parentheses. You may not need to change the form that is given.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. Last year, several students in my class \_\_\_\_\_ to become professional musicians.  
(*aspire*)
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. The puppy's \_\_\_\_\_ expression persuaded Mom to let him sleep on the bed.  
(*wistful*)
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. Your \_\_\_\_\_ to hike with a sore ankle was understandable. (*reluctant*)
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. If you continue to work hard and don't give up, your \_\_\_\_\_ will be rewarded.  
(*persevere*)
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. The nervous animal showed its \_\_\_\_\_ by keeping a safe distance from the hikers at all times. (*wary*)
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. Yesterday at the tryout, many drama students \_\_\_\_\_ the lead role in the play.  
(*covet*)
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. How do you tell the difference between persevering and being \_\_\_\_\_? (*willful*)
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. Earlier this morning, the teacher \_\_\_\_\_ the nervous class by waving the graded tests in the air but refusing to return them. (*tantalize*)
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9. After the earthquake, he was \_\_\_\_\_ to avoid vacationing near fault lines.  
(*inclination*)
- \_\_\_\_\_ 10. I am \_\_\_\_\_ of people who can read really fast. (*envy*)