

Pandora's Box

Is it a gift—or a curse?

About the Story

Lexile: 890L (captions)

For qualitative complexity factors, go to Scope Online.

Learning Objective: to analyze the theme of a classic myth and compare it with ideas in a poem

Key Skills: text structure, inference, foreshadowing, character, symbolism, tone, theme, synthesis

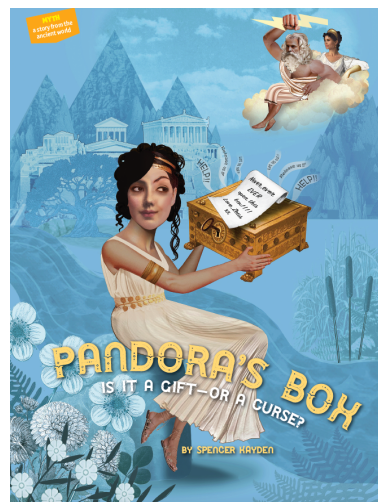
Essential Questions:

- How does curiosity shape our world?
- How do we explain what we don't understand?
- What can we learn about a society from its stories and myths?

Standards:

The article and lesson support these Common Core anchor standards: R.1, R.2, R.3, R.6, R.9, R.10, W.2, W.9, SL.1, SL.2, L.4, L.6

For more standards information—including TEKS—go to Scope Online.



Your Teaching Support Package

Find your full suite of support materials at scope.scholastic.com.

Audio:

- Text-to-speech
- Vocabulary
- Pronunciation guide
- Poem

Video:

- Poem read-aloud

Connected readings from the Scope archives:

- *Gods Versus Giants*
- *The Doomed Quest*
- *Into the Burning Sun*
- *Hunting a Snake-Headed Monster*

Skill Building Activities to print, project, or share digitally:

- Preparing to Write: The Power of Curiosity
- Close Reading and Critical Thinking
- Theme Anticipation Guide
- Genre Exploration
- Vocabulary: Definitions and Practice
- Pronunciation guide to names in the play
- **Core Skills Workout:** Text Evidence*
- Poetry Analysis
- Choice Board
- Quiz*
- Contest Entry Form

*Available on two levels

Step-by-Step Lesson

Close Reading, Critical Thinking, Skill Building

1. Preparing to Read

20 minutes

Do Now: Anticipation Guide. (10 minutes)

- Project the **Theme Anticipation Guide** on your whiteboard or share the Google Form version with each student (both available in your Resources tab). Have students decide whether they agree or disagree with each statement, then discuss. After reading the play, ask students to share whether any of their answers have changed and, if so, why. You might also have them complete the **Theme Anticipation Guide** as one of the characters.

Preview Vocabulary (5 minutes)

- Project **Vocabulary: Definitions and Practice**. Review the definitions as a class. Highlighted words: *fanfare*, *flourish*, *exasperated*, *ornate*, *smite*, *spiteful*. Optionally, share the interactive link directly to your LMS and have students preview the words and complete the activity independently beforehand. Audio pronunciations of the words and a read-aloud of the definitions are embedded in the slides.

Practice Pronunciation (5 minutes)

- Project our **Pronunciation Guide** and play its audio at Scope Online to teach students how to pronounce the names of characters in the play.

2. Reading and Discussing

45 minutes

- Have a volunteer read the As You Read box on page 27 of the magazine or at the top of the digital story page.
- Break students into groups to discuss the following close-reading and critical-thinking questions.

Close-Reading Questions

(15 minutes)

The following questions can be shared in printable or interactive form.

- 1. If the story were presented in chronological order, where would the events in Scene 1 go? Why do you think the playwright structured the play the way she did?** (text structure)
Chronologically, the events in Scene 1 fall between the events in Scenes 7 and 8. The playwright may have started the story as she did to establish the conflict of Pandora trying to resist opening the box. She may also have wanted to grab our attention by making us wonder: What's in the box? Will Pandora open it?
- 2. In Scene 5, a stage direction states that Hera winks at Zeus as she gives Pandora the gift of curiosity. Why does Hera wink? Why is this stage direction important?** (inference, foreshadowing)
In Scene 4, Hera conspires with Zeus on how to make humans suffer for Prometheus's disobedience. She plants the idea of blaming someone else for the misery Zeus will inflict. The scene ends without Zeus and Hera revealing the details of their plan. When Hera winks at Zeus in Scene 5, readers can infer that curiosity won't really be a gift for Pandora; the wink is a hint that Pandora and her curiosity will somehow bring suffering to humans.
- 3. Consider what Epimetheus shares with Pandora in Scene 6 about the meaning of his and his brother's names. Give an example of how each brother lives up to his name.** (character)
It's clear that foresight is not Epimetheus's strong suit when he is tasked with giving gifts to the animals and runs out of gifts before he gets to the humans. Prometheus, on the other hand, clearly understands what may happen or be needed in the future. He teaches humans how to use fire so that they may flourish, and he warns them of fire's dangers. He also foresees that Zeus may harm Epimetheus out of spite and warns Epimetheus not to accept any gifts from the gods. However, Epimetheus does not understand that when Zeus appears with Pandora—who Zeus claims is a newcomer and needs someone to show her around—he is being presented with exactly the type of "gift" Prometheus warned him about. Epimetheus also shows no sign of guessing the danger of the box Zeus gives to him and Pandora as a wedding gift.
- 4. Two common symbols used in literature are darkness and light. How does the playwright use these two symbols in Scene 9? What feelings or ideas does each symbol convey?** (symbolism)
When Pandora opens the box in Scene 9, dark-winged creatures with devilish faces fly out. The creatures are Deceit, Greed, Envy, and Disease, and they leave a trail of thick smoke as they fly out the window. After Pandora slams the box shut, a golden light shines out through a crack. When she lifts the lid again, Hope, a golden butterfly with shining wings, comes out and transforms the trail of smoke into shimmering light. In this scene, darkness conveys negativity, evil, death, and suffering, while light conveys positivity, goodness, life, and hope.

5. **Reread the end of scene 9. What is its tone? What big idea does the playwright leave you with?** (tone, theme) *The tone is optimistic. The playwright leaves us with the thought that even though there is suffering in the world, there is also hope to counteract it.*

“Pandora, Ungifted”

- Read the poem as a class. Optionally, have students listen to poet Jennifer Dignan read the poem aloud while they follow along. A **video read-aloud** as well as an **audio read-aloud** are located in the Resources tab in Teacher View and at the top of the story page in Student View.
- As a class, discuss the following close-reading and critical-thinking questions, some of which apply to the play and the poem.

Close-Reading Questions

(5 minutes)

The following questions can be shared in printable or interactive form.

1. **Analyze the poem’s title. How does it relate to the play?** (synthesis) *In Scene 5, Zeus tells Pandora that her name means “all-gifted.” Dignan’s title is a play on the meaning of Pandora’s name, and it raises the question of what Pandora would be like if she had not been given the gift of curiosity.*
2. **What does the poem suggest about curiosity? How?** (theme) *The poem lists things that curiosity allows for or leads to: personal expression, learning, wonder, fulfilling friendships. These are all positive things that bring meaning, joy, and quality to life, suggesting that curiosity is a gift that we should nurture and appreciate.*

Critical-Thinking Questions

(5 minutes)

The following questions can be shared in printable or interactive form.

1. **A scapegoat is a person who is blamed for the wrongdoings, mistakes, or faults of others. What makes Pandora a scapegoat? For whom does she take the blame?** *In the story, Pandora is a scapegoat for Zeus, because he sets her up to take the blame for releasing evil into the world. Pandora can also be seen as a scapegoat for humankind: According to the myth, she is responsible for everything we do wrong and for all suffering, because she released creatures into the world that make us unhappy and cause us to do bad things.*

2. **How could “Pandora’s Box” be interpreted as excusing people from responsibility for their bad behavior?** *According to the myth, it is Pandora’s fault that there is evil in the world. The myth presents evil as an outside force that makes us do wrong, rather than as something inside of us.*
3. **What do you think: Is curiosity good or bad?** *Answers will vary. Students may offer that curiosity is good because it drives us to explore new places and discover new interests. It’s also what leads us to pursue knowledge and make advances in our understanding of the universe. It helps us solve problems and leads us to invent new things. But curiosity can be bad when it leads us to behave in ways that might do harm, like conducting a dangerous experiment or not respecting someone’s privacy.*
4. **One of the takeaways from the myth is that hope can make life bearable even when terrible things happen. Can you think of an example from your life, from another work of fiction, or from a nonfiction story that you’ve read that supports this idea?** *Answers will vary.*

3. Skill Building and Writing

30 minutes

- Have students complete **Preparing to Write: The Power of Curiosity**. This activity will help them organize their ideas in preparation for the writing prompt on page 31 in the printed magazine and at the bottom of the digital story page.
- Alternatively, have students choose a culminating task from the **Choice Board**, a menu of differentiated activities.

Other read-aloud plays from the Scope archives based on ancient myths:

- [Gods Versus Giants](#) (based on the Norse myth “The Apples of Life”, September 2019)
- [The Doomed Quest](#) (based on the Mesopotamian myth of Gilgamesh, May 2017)
- [Into the Burning Sun](#) (based on the Greek myth of Daedalus and Icarus, February 2020)
- [Hunting a Snake-Headed Monster](#) (based on the Greek myth of Perseus and Medusa, September 2018)