Vocabulary Words Derived from Greek and Roman Mythology

Quiz 1

1. Adonis (n.)
   Origin— from Adonis, handsome youth loved by Aphrodite
   Definition— very handsome young man
   Ex.— Joanna’s old boyfriend wasn’t very handsome, but her new one is quite an Adonis.

2. Aegis (n.)
   Origin— from aegis, protective shield of Zeus
   Definition— shield or protection; sponsorship
   Ex.— An international force under the aegis of the United Nations was sent to the troubled area.

3. Amazon (n.)
   Origin— from the Amazons, mythological race of warrior women
   Definition— tall, strong, bold woman
   Ex.— The laborious work that pioneer women had to do would have challenged an Amazon.

4. Ambrosial (adj.)
   Origin— from ambrosia, the “not mortal” food of the gods
   Definition— extremely delicious; excellent
   Ex.— The ambrosial aroma of the roast made me hungry.

5. Atlas (n.)
   Origin— from Atlas, giant who supported the heavens on his shoulders
   Definition— book of maps
   Ex.— For reliable information about national boundaries, consult an up-to-date atlas.

6. Auroral (adj.)
   Origin— from Aurora, Roman goddess of the dawn
   Definition— pertaining to or resembling dawn; rosy; radiant
   Ex.— The darkness waned, and a faint auroral glow appeared in the east.
7. **Bacchanalian (adj.)**
   - **Origin**—from Bacchus, Roman god of wine
   - **Definition**—jovial or wild with drunkenness
   - **Ex.**—Some fans celebrated the Iron Bowl with a bacchanalian party.

8. **Cassandra (n.)**
   - **Origin**—from Cassandra, given the power of prophecy by Apollo
   - **Definition**—one who prophesies doom or disaster; pessimist
   - **Ex.**—Many say we will lose, but the coach urged us to pay no attention to those Cassandras.

9. **Chimerical (adj.)**
   - **Origin**—from the Chimera, fire-breathing monster with a lion’s head, goat’s body, and serpent’s tail
   - **Definition**—fantastic; unreal; impossible; absurd
   - **Ex.**—At first Robert Fulton’s plans for his steamboat were seen as chimerical nonsense.

10. **Draconian (adj.)**
    - **Origin**—from Draco, Athenian lawmaker who had a harsh code of laws
    - **Definition**—cruel; harsh; severe; ironhanded
    - **Ex.**—The victors in the war imposed Draconian restrictions on their slaves.

11. **Echolalia (n.)**
    - **Origin**—from Echo, maiden who loved Narcissus. He rejected her and she pined away until nothing was left of her but her voice.
    - **Definition**—automatic and immediate repetition
    - **Ex.**—The echolalia of infants is part of the process by which they learn to speak.

12. **Elysian (adj.)**
    - **Origin**—from Elysium, mythological paradise where after death the blessed (mortals favored by the gods) dwell
    - **Definition**—delightful; blissful; heavenly
    - **Ex.**—Students yearn for the Elysian leisure of summer vacation.
13. Eristic (adj.)
   
   Origin—from Eris, goddess of discord
   Definition—prone to controversy; argumentative
   Ex.—It is difficult to reach an agreement with anyone who has an eristic temperament.

14. Fauna (n.)
   
   Origin—from Faunus, Roman god of animals
   Definition—animal life; animals of a particular region or period
   Ex.—Careless use of pesticides threatened to remove the bald eagle from our nation’s fauna.

15. Flora (n.)
   
   Origin—from Flora, Roman goddess of flowers
   Definition—plant life; plants of a particular region or period
   Ex.—Pollution is harming not only the residents in the city but also its flora and fauna.

16. Forum (n.)
   
   Origin—from forum, place of assembly for judicial/public business in an ancient Roman city
   Definition—medium or place for open discussion and expression of ideas
   Ex.—A dictatorship permits no forum where ideas can be openly and freely discussed.

17. Hector (v.)
   
   Origin—from Hector, bravest of the Trojans
   Definition—intimidate with threats; bully
   Ex.—The sheriff refused to turn the suspect over to the hectoring mob.

18. Herculean (adj.)
   
   Origin—from Hercules, a hero of superhuman strength
   Definition—very difficult; requiring great strength
   Ex.—Among the herculean tasks confronting our nation is the rebuilding of roads and bridges.
19. Hermetic (adj.)

**Origin**—from Hermes, Zeus’ swift messenger; Greek name for Thoth, Egyptian god who was the inventor of a magic seal to keep a vessel airtight

**Definition**—airtight; secret; magical; mysterious

**Ex.**—To get a pill from a new bottle, you must break the hermetic seal.

20. Iridescent (adj.)

**Origin**—from Iris, goddess of the rainbow

**Definition**—having colors like the rainbow

**Ex.**—Children enjoy blowing iridescent soap bubbles.

21. Jovial (adj.)

**Origin**—from Jove (Jupiter), king of the Roman gods

**Definition**—jolly; merry; good-humored

**Ex.**—Our jovial host entertained us with amusing stories about her family.

22. Labyrinthine (adj.)

**Origin**—from Labyrinth, a fabled maze in Crete

**Definition**—full of confusing passageways; intricate; complicated

**Ex.**—Out-of-towners may easily lose their way in New York City’s labyrinthine subway passages.

23. Laconic (adj.)

**Origin**—from Lakonikos, meaning “Spartan.”

**Definition**—using words sparingly; terse; concise

**Ex.**—All I received in response to my request was the laconic reply, “Wait.”

24. Lethargic (adj.)

**Origin**—from Lethe, river in Hades whose water, when drunk caused forgetfulness of the past

**Definition**—unnaturally drowsy; sluggish; dull

**Ex.**—For several hours after the operation, the patient was lethargic due to the anesthetic.
25. Lucullan (adj.)
   Origin—from Lucullus, Roman host who gave lavish banquets
   Definition—sumptuous; luxurious
   Ex.—Many Thanksgiving dinners are Lucullan feasts.

26. Marathon (n.)
   Origin—from Marathon, where Greeks defeated Persian invaders in 490 BC. Pheidippides raced to Athens with news of the victory.
   Definition—1. long-distance foot-race of 26 miles 385 yards
   2. an endurance contest
   Ex.—Runners from all over the world compete in the Boston marathon.

27. Martial (adj.)
   Origin—from Mars, god of war
   Definition—warlike; pertaining to war
   Ex.—The Helvetians were a martial people who tried to conquer southern Gaul.

28. Mentor (n.)
   Origin—from Mentor, to whom Odysseus entrusted the education of his son
   Definition—1. wise and trusted advisor  2. tutor; coach
   Ex.—The retiring supervisor decided to stay on for a month as a mentor to her successor.

29. Mercurial (adj.)
   Origin—from Mercury, the Roman Hermes
   Definition—1. quick; vivacious; active; lively  2. unstable; subject to rapid and unpredictable mood changes
   Ex.—Her mercurial disposition causes her to quickly go from friendliness to hostility.

30. Myrmidon (n.)
   Origin—from the Myrmidons, martial tribe that accompanied Achilles
   Definition—obedient and unquestioning follower
   Ex.—Hitler’s myrmidons were the SS, who would execute his orders.
31. Narcissistic (adj.)
   Origin—from Narcissus, a young man who fell in love with his own image, which led to his death
   Definition—in love with oneself; egocentric
   Ex.—Narcissistic people tend to see no desirable qualities in others.

32. Nectar (n.)
   Origin—from nectar, the “death-overcoming” drink that made the gods immortal
   Definition—something exceptionally delicious to drink
   Ex.—The juice of those mangoes is like nectar.

33. Nemesis (n.)
   Origin—from Nemesis, goddess of vengeance
   Definition—1. due punishment for evil deeds.  2. one who inflicts such punishment
   Ex.—Napoleon crushed many opponents but Wellington was his nemesis.

34. Odyssey (n.)
   Origin—from the Odyssey, epic poem dealing with Odysseus’ ten years of wandering after the Trojan War
   Definition—long series of wanderings or travels
   Ex.—A travel agent will plan our odyssey to places of interest around the world.

35. Olympian (adj.)
   Origin—from Mt. Olympus, the home of the gods in Greece
   Definition—1. majestic; godlike  2.having to do with the Olympic games
   Ex.—Chief executive officers are given offices and staffs that are equal with their Olympian responsibilities.

36. Paean (n.)
   Origin—from paean, hymn in praise of Apollo, god of deliverance
   Definition—song or hymn of praise, joy, or triumph
   Ex.—When the crisis was resolved, people danced in the streets and sang paean of joy.
37. Palladium (n.)
   Origin—from Pallas Athena, statue of the goddess which prevented the fall of Troy until it was stolen from the city
   Definition—safeguard; protection
   Ex.—The little girl fell asleep clutching her palladium, a worn ragdoll.

38. Panic (n.)
   Origin—from Pan, rural god whose unexpected shout would terrify.
   Definition—sudden, overpowering terror
   Ex.—Panic ensued when someone yelled, “Fire!” in the theater.

39. Philippic (n.)
   Origin—from Philippics, orations by Demosthenes denouncing King Philip of Macedon
   Definition—tirade; bitter denunciation
   Ex.—In an hour-long philippic, the legislator denounced the lobbyists who opposed her bill.

40. Plutocratic (adj.)
   Origin—from Plutus, god of wealth
   Definition—having great influence because of one’s wealth
   Ex.—Owning 51% of the company, three plutocratic investors decided its policies.

41. Procrustean (adj.)
   Origin—from Procrustes, villain who made people fit the length of his bed, either stretching them or cutting off their legs
   Definition—cruel or inflexible in enforcing conformity
   Ex.—The judge dispensed a procrustean kind of justice, imposing a $5000 fine on anyone who was arrested.

42. Protean (n.)
   Origin—from Proteus, sea god who could easily change shape to avoid capture
   Definition—variable; readily assuming different shapes or forms
   Ex.—The amoeba, a protean organism, continually changes its shape.
43. Pyrrhic (adj.)
   **Origin**—from Pyrrhus, who suffered enormous losses in a “victory” over the Romans
   **Definition**—ruinous; gained at too great a cost
   **Ex.**—We won, but it was a pyrrhic victory; our leading scorer broke her leg and has to sit out the rest of the season.

44. Saturnine (adj.)
   **Origin**—from Saturn, who alchemists and astrologers associate with the metal lead
   **Definition**—heavy; dull; gloomy; morose (ant. of mercurial)
   **Ex.**—The assistant was a saturnine scholar who rarely smiled.

45. Siren (n.)
   **Origin**—from the Sirens, whose sweet singing lured mariners to their destruction on the rocks
   **Definition**—1. dangerous, attractive woman  2. apparatus for sounding loud warnings
   **Ex.**—The enemy employed a bilingual siren as a spy.

46. Solon (n.)
   **Origin**—from Solon, noted Athenian lawgiver
   **Definition**—legislator; wise lawgiver
   **Ex.**—The solons are back for the opening of the legislative season.

47. Spartan (adj.)
   **Origin**—from Sparta, whose citizens pursued these traits
   **Definition**—marked by simplicity and avoidance of comfort; marked by self-discipline, bravery and ability to endure pain
   **Ex.**—We were offered Spartan accommodations; the rooms had no beds, just mats on the floor.

48. Stentorian (adj.)
   **Origin**—from Stentor, herald whose voice was as loud as fifty voices
   **Definition**—very loud
   **Ex.**—Speak softly; you don’t need a stentorian voice to be heard in this small room.
49. Stygian (adj.)
   Origin—from Styx, river of the lower world leading into Hades
   Definition—infernal; especially dark; gloomy
   Ex.—A power failure plunged the city into Stygian blackness.

50. Tantalize (v.)
   Origin—from Tantalus, kept hungry and thirsty in Hades
   with food and water just beyond his reach
   Definition—excite a hope but prevent its fulfillment; tease
   Ex.—We removed the dessert from the table so as not to
tantalize our friend who was dieting.

51. Terpsichorean (adj.)
   Origin—from Terpsichore, muse of dancing
   Definition—pertaining to dancing
   Ex.—The reviewers applauded the ballet troupe for its
terpsichorean artistry.

52. Thespian (n.)
   Origin—from Thespis, father of Greek drama
   Definition—pertaining to drama or acting
   Ex.—Shakespeare was not only a playwright but also a thespian.

53. Titanic (adj.)
   Origin—from the Titans, lawless, powerful giants defeated by Zeus
   Definition—of enormous strength, size, or power
   Ex.—By a titanic effort, our football team defeated Good Hope.

54. Sisyphean (adj.)
   Origin—from Sisyphus, sinner condemned to an
   eternity of rolling a boulder uphill then watching it
   roll back down again
   Definition—endlessly laborious; useless; futile
   Ex.—The patients’ lack of education and the high
   cost of medicine make health care a Sisyphean task.
54. Lycanthrope (n.)
   Origin—from Lycaeon, who sacrificed one of his children to Zeus and was turned into a wolf as punishment
   Definition—a werewolf
   Ex.—The horror movie was full of lycanthropes, vampires, and demons.

55. Calliope (n.)
   Origin—from Calliope, the Greek muse of epic poetry
   Definition—a musical instrument that produces sound by sending steam or compressed air through large whistles
   Ex.—Every time I hear calliope music, I think of the circus.

56. Mnemonic (adj.)
   Origin—from Mnemosyne, the goddess of memory
   Definition—a device, such as a formula or rhyme, used as an aid in remembering
   Ex.—I can only remember the names of the Great Lakes by using the mnemonic HOMES.

58. Atlantean (adj.)
   Origin—from the Atlas, a Titan who had great strength
   Definition—having great strength
   Ex.—The man won the contest due to his Atlantean strength.

59. Arachnid (n.)
   Origin—from Arachne, a great weaver who Athena turned into a spider
   Definition—an eight-legged insect-like creature, such as a spider, scorpion, or tick
   Ex.—I am afraid of any type of arachnid.

60. Chaos (n.)
   Origin—from Chaos (Khaos), the first of the Protogenoi and the god of the air
   Definition—great disorder or confusion
   Ex.—The desk was a chaos of papers and unopened letters.
61. Euthanasia (n.)

**Origin**—from Thanatos, the Greek daemon personification of Death

**Definition**—act of causing death painlessly, so as to end suffering

**Ex.**—Advocates of "mercy killing," insist that many doctors practice euthanasia.

62. Hypnosis (n.)

**Origin**—from Hypnos, the Greek personification of sleep

**Definition**—a trancelike condition in which the subject is in a state of altered consciousness and responds to the suggestions of the hypnotist

**Ex.**—The entertainer used hypnosis on his audience members to make them do funny things.

63. Zeal (n.)

**Origin**—from Zelos, god of great enthusiasm

**Definition**—intense enthusiasm; devotion; fervor

**Ex.**—The zeal of the cheering section helped motivate our football team to win the state championship.

64. Chronology

**Origin**—from Chronos, Greek primordial god of time

**Definition**—the arrangement of events in their order of occurrence of time

**Ex.**—Please show the chronology of the founding of the 13 colonies on your timeline.

65. Halcyon (adj.)

**Origin**—from Alcyone, daughter of Atlas

**Definition**—tranquil, happy, idyllic; usually with nostalgic reference to earlier times

**Ex.**—The halcyon days of youth are spent in carefree play.

66. Nocturnal (adj.)

**Origin**—from Nyx, primordial goddess of the night

**Definition**—of, relating to, or occurring in the night

**Ex.**—Owls are nocturnal and hunt at night.
67. Zephyr (n.)

Origin—from Zephyr, the Greek god of the West Wind
Definition—a gentle breeze
Ex.—The sun shone and the wind died down to little more than a zephyr.

68. Oracle (n.)

Origin—from Oracle, (1)a person through whom a deity is believed to speak (2)a shrine in which a deity reveals hidden knowledge
Definition—a person of great knowledge or wisdom
Ex.—I will go ask the oracle what I should do when I need help.

69. Achilles heel (n.)

Origin—from Achilles, ancient Greek hero whose only vulnerable spot on his body was his heel
Definition—a weak, vulnerable spot
Ex.—Cookie Monster’s Achilles heel is cookies.

70. Psychology (n.)

Origin—from Psyche, a maiden made immortal and married to Cupid
Definition—the science dealing with the mind and mental and emotional processes
Ex.—We studied the human brain in my psychology class.

71. Harpy (n.)

Origin—from Harpy, loathsome, voracious monster with the head and trunk of a woman and the tail, wings, and talons of a bird
Definition—a scolding, nagging, bad-tempered woman
Ex.—The actress played a shrill harpy who hounded her sister into ending the affair.

72. Fury (n.)

Origin—from the Furies, three terrible winged goddesses with serpentine hair, who punish doers of unavenged crimes
Definition—violent anger; rage
Ex.—Jacob erupted in fury when Sam accused him of lying.
73. Insomnia (n.)

Origin—from Somnus, god of sleep
Definition—the inability to sleep
Ex.—She suffers from insomnia and is extremely tired all day.

74. Cornucopia (n.)

Origin—from the horn that may have been that of a goat which the infant Zeus drank from
Definition—an abundance; “horn of plenty”
Ex.—The website proved to be a cornucopia of information on my research paper topic.

75. Somnambulism (n.)

Origin—from Somnus, god of sleep
Definition—the act of sleepwalking
Ex.—My sister suffers from somnambulism, so we’ve started locking her bedroom door at night so she can’t injure herself.

76. Venerate (v.)

Origin—from Venus, Roman goddess of love
Definition—to look upon with feelings of deep respect
Ex.—Fidel Castro remains more a venerated national father figure than a typical Marxist dictator.

77. Volcano (n.)

Origin—from Vulcan, god of fire
Definition—vent in earth's crust that ejects lava
Ex.—The exploding volcano destroyed the entire city.

78. Muse (n.)

Origin—from Muses, the 9 daughters of Zeus who inspire the creation of literature and the arts
Definition—(1) a source of inspiration (2) a deep meditation
Ex.—In Paris, he hoped to rediscover his poetic muse.
79. Fortune (n.)

**Origin**—from Fortuna, goddess of luck

**Definition**—(1) good luck; success; prosperity  (2) wealth

**Ex.**—(1) They each had the bad fortune to marry the wrong person. (2) Jasper lost his entire fortune at the casino.

80. Argus-eyed (adj.)

**Origin**—from Argus, a giant with 100 eyes

**Definition**—keenly observant; vigilant

**Ex.**—The landmine was immediately spotted by the Argus-eyed Marine.

81. Fate (n.)

**Origin**—from the Fates, three goddesses that determined the course of human life

**Definition**—final, inevitable outcome; destiny

**Ex.**—Death is the eventual fate of all mankind.

82. Typhoon (n.)

**Origin**—from Typhon, the most deadly monster of Greek mythology

**Definition**—a violent tropical cyclone originating in the West Pacific

**Ex.**—The typhoon that occurred last year in Taiwan killed thousands.

83. Vestal (adj.)

**Origin**—from Vesta, goddess of the hearth, home, and family

**Definition**—chaste; pure; stainless; virtuous

**Ex.**—Nuns are very vestal women.

84. Morphine (n.)

**Origin**—from Morpheus, the god of dreams

**Definition**—a highly potent narcotic derived from opium and used in medicine to relieve pain

**Ex.**—The patient was given morphine to ease his pain.