

# Kay Walkingstick, *Danaë in Arizona, Variation II*, 2001 Mythology Lesson #1

**Mythology Lesson 1 Overview:** Comparison of the Greek myth, *Danaë*, and American Indian experiences

**Main Idea:** Comparative Mythology. Connecting different cultural interpretations of a Greek myth.

**Grade Level:** Sixth Grade through Ninth Grade

**Subject Areas:** English Language Arts, Greek Mythology, American History, Visual Arts

**Learning Goals:**

- Students will examine connections between Americans Indian experiences in the 19<sup>th</sup> century to an ancient Greek myth by investigating Kay Walkingstick's painting, *Danaë in Arizona, Variation II*.

**Duration:** 60 minutes

**Set Up:**

1. Project the PDF of image for classroom discussion.
2. Print out the summary of the myth *Danaë* and the artist's statement for students to read and refer to during the activity.
3. Teachers should print out Teacher Facilitation Questions for themselves. Instruct students to take notes for a follow up essay.

**Attachments:**

- Lesson 1 Overview
- Image Enlargement
- Background information Artist Statement and Summary of Greek myth *Danaë*
- Teacher Facilitation Questions

## Background Information

### Artist's statement:

One of the major themes of my painting in the last ten years has been to unite the seemingly disparate mythic traditions of Native Americans with Western culture. The Greek myth of Danaë, who was impregnated by a shower of gold, has been painted by many European artists like Rembrandt and Klimt. In my painting she sits calmly meditating next to our sacred American mountains impassively awaiting the will of the gods. Our lives and our stories are not so different whatever our particular place on earth as we attempt to comprehend the unknowable.

-Kay Walkingstick

For more information about Kay Walkingstick's current works and beliefs go to her website:

[http://www.kaywalkingstick.com/statement/index\\_new.htm](http://www.kaywalkingstick.com/statement/index_new.htm)

### Greek Myth: Danaë

Danaë was a princess of Argos in the southern Greece, a daughter of King Acrisius. When her father learned a prophecy that he was destined to be killed by a son of his daughter, he locked Danaë away in an underground, bronze chamber. Her prison, however, was easily infiltrated by the god Zeus who impregnated her in the guise of a golden shower. She conceived and bore him a son named Perseus. As soon as her father learned of this, he placed Danaë and the baby in a chest and set them afloat at sea. The Gods made sure they drifted safely to the island of Seriphos, where a fisherman brought them ashore and welcomed them into his house.

<http://www.theoi.com/Heroine/Danae.html>

**Teacher Facilitation Questions:**

1. This is a diptych made of two paintings displayed side by side. We are going to look at one side at a time.
2. Looking at the right side, which characters from the myth does the artist include in the painting? [Only Danaë]
3. What colors do you see? [Orange/brown, maybe some green and gold]
4. What material is used to make Danaë's prison in the Greek myth? Bronze metal is a yellowish brown and sometimes orange color.
5. The artist used actual gold leaf to create this part of the image and not gold paint. Gold leaf is a thin of tissue of hammered gold applied to the canvas.
6. Why did the artist make her body gold?
7. The right side illustrates one moment of the story about Danaë.
8. Describe what is happening on this side of the painting, where is Danaë? [Only focus on the right side]
9. At what point of the story is Danaë alone in a bronze colored space?
10. The right side of the painting shows Danaë imprisoned in a bronze chamber, evidenced by the empty bronze colored space surrounding the figure. Kay Walkingstick also states this in her artist's statement.
11. She is already pregnant in this image. There are hints of a round belly protruding in the silhouette just above her hips, although this may be difficult to see in the digital image. She is gold indicating she has already received the "golden shower" from Zeus.
12. What is on the left side of the painting? [Mountains]
13. Per the artist's statement, what do these mountains represent?

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14. How does the artists describe Danaë's thoughts or emotions, in her artist statement?

["In my painting she sits calmly meditating next to our sacred American mountains impassively awaiting the will of the gods."]. This is evidenced in the image by her open body language, relaxed, sitting in a meditative position.

15. With these two paintings the artist is taking the character of Danaë and placing her next to the sacred American mountains of the American Indians.

16. She is making a connection between what happened to the character, Danaë and what happened in history, to the American Indians.

17. What happened to American Indians in the 19<sup>th</sup> century?

18. Follow up the discussion by instructing the students to write a two part essay:

- a. Part one: Describe the painting and look for connections to the myth summary of *Danaë* using the visual evidence they discovered with the teacher led discussion.
- b. Part two: Answer the question, "What aspect of this Greek myth might connect to the history of American Indians and their forced relocation onto reservations during the 19<sup>th</sup> century?"