**Herakles and Olympia: The 12 Labours of Herakles**

**POWERPOINT NOTES**

1. What is represented on the fragment of pottery from the Great North Museum? It shows Herakles’ head. What is he wearing? (lion skin) Why does this tell us it is Herakles? (because in Herakles’ first labour he kills a fierce lion and then skins it and wears the skin from then on as a cloak). In the second image which is on the inside of a drinking cup Herakles is shown taking wine from a giant pot (pithos) with a jug. He wears his lion skin. What is he holding in his other hand? (a club). The lion skin and club are the main things that identify Herakles. Herakles was the son of Zeus.
2. This pot on the left is a drinking cup. It is shaped to represent the head of Herakles you can see the lion skin tied round his neck and pulled over his head. Herakles’ face pops out of the lion’s mouth – you can see the lion’s big pointed teeth. We can see him wresting the lion with his bow and arrows hanging up in the tree in the image on the right.
3. Herakles is famous for his 12 Labours. He had to carry out these labours for King Eurystheus of Argos in recompense for a fit of madness in which he had killed his children. Half of the labours take place in the Peloponnese (Southern Greece) and the other half occurred outside mainland Greece. The goddess Athena helped Herakles to carry out his labours.

The completion of the 12 labours meant that Herakles would become immortal and take his place with the gods on Mount Olympos this is what we see here – Herakles is going up to Mount Olympus on a chariot with Athena. Down below is his funeral pyre.

1. The Greek poet Pindar (who was born around 518 BC) tells us in one of his poems that Herakles was responsible for founding the Olympic Games. The ancient tomb of Pelops is at Olympia.
2. At Olympia (where the Olympic Games first took place) there is a big Temple to Zeusand on the temple the 12 Labours of Herakles are shown. They appear on the metopes inside the front and back porch (shown in blue on the plan). The metopes are the square panels on a temple. The black and white pictures show what the temple would have looked like – the picture on the right shows what is left of the temple today. Parts of the metopes have survived (they fell off the temple and were buried in the ground) and now they are in the Museum at Olympia.
3. This picture shows six of the metopes high up above the porch. They would have been painted in very bright colours so you could see them. Now the paint has all worn off. All 12 metopes are shown in the drawing – this is how archaeologists think they would have looked – lots of bits are missing now. Athena, Herakles’ helper, appears on 4 of the metopes (1, 3,10 and 12)

Now we will look at the 12 Labours:

1. **Nemean lion**

Herakles’ first job was to kill a giant lion which was eating people in the kingdom of Argos. The lion had such a thick skin that Herakles could not use his weapons (club/bow and arrow) so he had to wrestle the lion with his bare hands and strangle it. When he had killed the lion Herakles used one of its claws to skin it. From then on he wore the lion’s skin as a cloak with the paws tied around his neck and its head like a hood. You can see that on this metope only the lion and part of Herakles and Athena’s head and arm survive.

1. **Lernaean Hydra**

The Hydra was a many-headed water-snake which lived in a swamp near Argos. Each time Herakles cut off a head two more replaced it. Herakles’ nephew helped him by burning the stumps with a fiery torch as Herakles cut off the heads.

1. **Stymphalian Birds**

These man eating birds were destroying the crops near Lake Stymphalos. Herakles shot them with his arrows and scared them away with a bronze rattle made by the blacksmith god Hephaestus.

1. **Cretan Bull**

Herakles had to travel to the island of Crete to capture a wild and vicious bull. He released it once he had shown it to Eurystheus.

**Keryneian Stag**

Herakles had to capture a shy and elusive deer which belonged to the Goddess Artemis. It took him a year to track it down.

**Amazons**

Herakles travelled to the Black Sea to bring back the belt of the queen of the Amazons.The queen was happy to give Herakles the belt but Hera, the jealous wife of Zeus, interfered and there was a great battle.

1. **Erymanthian Boar**

A wild boar was causing havoc and Eurystheus demanded that Herakles capture it and bring it back to him alive. When Herakles returned Eurystheus was so terrified that he hid in a large storage pot.

**Diomedes’ Horses**

Herakles travelled to Thrace, to the north of Greece, to capture the man-eating horses of Diomedes. He tamed the horses by feeding them their cruel master.

9. **Cattle of Geryon**

Herakles journeyed beyond the boundaries of the Greek world to fetch the red cattle of Geryon. He had to kill the herdsman and a two headed, snake tailed dog first. Then he had a terrible battle with Geryon a triple bodied warrior.

1. **Golden Apples of the Hesperides**

These golden apples grew in a garden at the end of the earth and were guarded by nymphs, called the Hesperides, and a serpent.Herakles asked the giant Atlas (who held up the sky) to get the apples for him while he supported the sky in exchange. Here you can see what the metope might have looked like when it was painted.

1. **Cerberus**

Herakles had to go down to the underworld to fetch Cerberus the triple headed guard dog. He was guided by Hermes, the messenger of the gods. With the permission of Hades, king of the underworld, and his wife Persephone he borrowed the dog to show Eurystheus.

1. **Augean Stables**

King Augeas of Elis owned lots of herds of cattle whose stables had never been cleaned. Eurystheus demanded Herakles clean them in a day. He diverted the course of a local river to complete this labour.

The metopes on the Temple of Zeus place some of the labours in a different order to the traditional order, deliberately ending with the Augean stables which were in the locality of Olympia.

For further information see the following websites:

<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/Herakles/labors.html>

<http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/hera/hd_hera.htm>

**Now try the Herakles comic strip**