

Myth Man's Award-winning Homework Help

PANDORA

The First Woman on Earth



painting by John William Waterhouse

*"...the woman opened up the cask,
And scattered pains and evils among men."
--Works and Days, Hesiod*

❖ QUICK INTRODUCTION ❖

When Zeus, the king of the Olympian gods, was young and trying to establish his rule, he was challenged by a group of ferocious Titans, who tried to keep him from gaining power. A long and terrible war ensued, with all the Olympian gods joined against the Titans, who were led by

Cronus and Atlas.

After ten years of fighting, and with the help of the Cyclopes and the Hecatoncheires (The Hundred-Handed-Ones), Zeus and his fellow Olympians defeated the Titans. Only a few Titans, including Themis, Prometheus and his brother Epimetheus, fought on the side of Zeus - against their fellow Titans - and once Zeus won, he rewarded them.

But soon Prometheus made Zeus very angry by stealing fire from Mount Olympus and giving it to the race of mortal men living on earth, who were cold and hungry. Zeus had warned Prometheus not to give fire to men, and was outraged that anyone had the nerve to ignore his command.

Still, he would seem ungrateful if he appeared to forget the important role that Prometheus and his brother Epimetheus had played in the war against the Titans, and he couldn't just kill the brothers, so he cunningly devised a scheme to get even!

PANDORA IS CREATED

In revenge, Zeus ordered Hephaestus, the god of smiths, to craft a gorgeous woman out of earth and water. The beautiful goddess of Love, Aphrodite, was asked to pose as a model, just to make sure the woman was perfect. Once this was done, the Four Winds (or some say Hephaestus himself) breathed life into her and there she lay sleeping, brand spanking new!

The first mortal woman on earth was to be bestowed with unparalleled charm and beauty, and her unknown mission would be to bring mischief and misery upon the human race. Zeus then summoned the other Olympians and asked them each to give this new creation a gift.



*Creation of Pandora, interior of Cylinx,
470-460 B.C., British Museum, London, England*

Aphrodite adorned her with beauty, grace and desire; Hermes, the Messenger god, gave her cunning and boldness; Demeter showed her how to tend a garden; Athena taught her manual dexterity and to spin; Apollo taught her to sing sweetly and play the lyre; Poseidon's gift was a pearl necklace and the god of the sea promised her that she would never drown.

But Zeus also made her foolish, mischievous and idle. This was the first woman, divine in appearance but quite human in reality.

The gods called her Pandora, which means "All-gifted", or "The gift of all", because each god had given her a power by which she would work the ruin of man, and because of the many presents bestowed upon her at Olympus.

Lovely Pandora was created to become the wife of the Titan Epimetheus, who was the not-very-bright brother of Prometheus, the one who had gotten on Zeus' bad side. Before sending her to earth, the gods held a big banquet and Hermes, the Messenger god, presented Pandora with a splendidly crafted jar (some say a box), adorned with wonderful

images. But Hermes warned Pandora that she must **never open the jar (box)**!

She must NEVER open the box...And then Zeus' wife, Hera, gave her the quality of **curiosity**! Tell me, is that fair?

They also gave her silvery raiment and a broidered veil, and in her hair they placed bright garlands of fresh flowers and a wonderful crown of gold. Her gowns were most sumptuous and she was truly a vision from heaven.

When Pandora was finally brought out and shown to the gods, resplendent in all the finery she had received, great amazement and wonder took hold of them, such was the effect of her beauty...



picture by Stephanie Pui-Mun Law

🌟 PANDORA COMES TO EARTH 🌟

Prometheus (whose name means 'forethought') had warned his brother Epimetheus ('afterthought') never to accept any gift from Zeus, knowing that the king of the Olympians bore a heavy grudge against him.

However, Hermes took her by the hand and escorted Pandora down to earth, safely guiding her down the slope of Mount Olympus. When the Messenger god delivered her before Epimetheus, the foolish Titan was overwhelmed by her exquisite beauty - Indeed Pandora was the most beautiful woman ever created!

"Glorious Zeus feels bad for the sorrow and disgrace that has plagued your family." said trickster Hermes to the Titan. "To make up for it, and to demonstrate that there are no hard feelings toward you for your brother's folly, Zeus presents you with this gift -- This beautiful woman named Pandora, the fairest in all the world, is to become your wife."

Epimetheus, instantly forgetting his wiser brother's admonitions, eagerly accepted the lovely gift from Zeus and made her his wife. Pandora settled into their large home and took on the wifely duties, baking and spinning and tending the garden. She thought herself the happiest bride in the world as she played melodious tunes on the lyre and joyfully danced for her new husband.

But Pandora daily was tortured by curiosity. Hey, how would you like to receive a beautiful wedding present, shiny and inviting, only to be told you could never open it? Talk about torture! That's not fair!

At first she kept the golden box on the table and daily polished it so that visitors might admire its beauty. The brilliant sunlight sparkled from the precious box, beckoning her it seems, begging to be opened.

So inviting...so inviting...Hera's gift, curiosity, was like a cruel curse. Pandora wondered what the box contained. Her imagination created intriguing scenarios, for the box was so beautiful on the outside, how could it not hold exquisite treasures inside? Surely Hermes was kidding when he said never to open it, he's such a joker, thought Pandora.

"I bet Hermes really wanted me to open the box," she mused, "he's probably watching right now, waiting for me to look inside so that I can be delightfully surprised and thank him. Surely he's hidden a splendid surprise inside..."



(Artist Unknown)

But deep inside her, Pandora knew that her promise must not be broken. Her better sense finally overcame her ardent curiosity and she removed the box from the table and concealed it in a dusty hidden storeroom. This made matters worse - she found herself walking by the storeroom and pausing at the doorway, as if the mysterious golden box was calling to her. Sometimes she would enter the room and hold the box for a guilty moment, then rush out and lock the door. This was killing her!

Desperate, Pandora took the box and locked it inside a heavy wooden chest. She placed chains around the chest, dug a hole, and buried it in her garden. With great effort she rolled a huge boulder on top of the "grave", determined to forget all about this object of her obsession.

She couldn't sleep that night. No matter how she tried, her thoughts kept returning to the buried golden box. She put on her robe and went out to the garden. As if in a trance, Pandora found herself drawn to the boulder. She reached out and touched the stone and like magic it

moved, revealing the hole. This must be a sign from Hermes!

"You must never open the box!" As she dug the earth to get to the box, the Messenger god's words rang in her mind. "Never open the box!"

Pandora wanted to obey the command of the gods, and she really wasn't wicked, but at last she could no longer contain her curiosity. Taking the little golden key from around her neck, she fitted it into the keyhole and gently opened the box. Just a tiny bit, so that she could have a little peek, you see, and then she was going to close it up again. Just a little, tiny peek...It was her wedding gift, after all...



painting by John William Waterhouse

Bad move. No sooner had Pandora opened the box, that she realized her mistake. A foul smell filled the air and she heard swarming and rustling inside. In horror she slammed the lid shut, but alas it was too late! The evil had been unleashed!

You see, the vindictive gods had each put something harmful inside the box. All the plagues and sorrows known to humanity were released once Pandora opened the jar. Old Age, Sickness, Insanity, Pestilence, Vice, Passion, Greed, Crime, Death, Theft, Lies, Jealousy, Famine, the list

went on and on...every evil, that until then had been trapped inside the gift from the gods, was now loosed upon the earth.



Illustration by Padraic Colum (1881–1972) from
*The Golden Fleece and the Heroes
Who Lived before Achilles, 1921.*

First the scourges stung Pandora and Epimetheus on every part of their body, then the evils scattered throughout the world and mixed with the good, so that they were indistinguishable, and humans had a hard time telling between the two extremes. Entering a house, these monster hang from the rafters and bide their time, waiting for the perfect moment to swoop down and sting their victim, bringing pain, pestilence, sorrow and death.

Woe was Pandora! The poor girl was terror-stricken at what she had caused, and at this unexpected eruption of evil. But just as she thought all was lost, one little Sprite, a solitary good thing, hidden at the bottom of the jar, flew out.

It was **Hope!** Deep down inside the hateful jar was the only thing that has sustained humanity in times of sorrow, pain and misery - Hope. The endless Hope that things will soon get better. And it's this Hope that keeps us going to this very day, our sole comfort in times of misfortune.

But before you go blaming all of society's ills on poor lovely Pandora, the first woman and the ultimate pariah, first consider the following question: Would you have been disciplined enough to keep the jar/box shut, or

would you, like Pandora, let your curiosity get the best of you?

Hey, if it was MY wedding gift, I'd be opening it! Just so I could send a Thank You note!

❖ EPILOGUE ❖

Here's an interesting aside: At a still later period, rather than **all the ills** of the world, the box was said to have contained **all the blessings** of the gods. These were meant to have been preserved for the future benefit of the human race. Pandora was instructed never to open the box, but once again her curiosity got the better of her, and she had a peek.

The winged blessings at once took flight and escaped, rarely to be seen again. If only Pandora had kept the box closed! Who knows what our world would be like!



Image from an ancient Greek vase

"And in her breast, the messenger, killer of Argos, created lies; deceiving words, a deceitful heart, just as Zeus with his angry mutterings had wished. Then the herald of the gods gave her the power of speech and the name of Pandora, because that name represented all the inhabitants of Olympus who, with this gift, made a present of misfortune to mankind."

Hesiod, *Theogony*



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