ANCIENT GREEK LITERATURE
Because the Greeks loved myths and stories, it is no surprise that they created great works of literature. Early Greek writers produced long epic poems, romantic poetry, and some of the world’s most famous stories.
Among the earliest Greek writings are two great epic poems, *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*, by a poet named Homer. Like most epics, both poems describe the deeds of great hero's. The heroes in Homer’s poems fought in the Trojan War. In this war, the Mycenaean Greeks fought the Trojans, people of the city called Troy.
*The Iliad* tells the story of the last years of the Trojan War. It focuses on the deeds of the Greeks, especially Achilles, the greatest of all Greek warriors. It describes in great detail the battles between the Greeks and their Trojan enemies.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CiQ4j-D5o4o
The Odyssey describes the challenges that the Greek hero Odysseus faced on his way home from the war. For 10 years after the war ends, Odysseus tries to get home, but many obstacles stand in his way. He has to fight his way past terrible monsters, powerful magicians, and even angry gods.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PgLAFdKSJ_M
Both the Iliad and the Odyssey are great tales of adventure. But to the Greeks Homer’s poems were much more than just entertainment. They were central to the ancient Greek education system. People memorized long passages of the poems as part of their lessons. They admired Homer’s poems and the heroes described in them as symbols of Greece’s great history.
Homer’s poems influenced later writers. They copied his writing styles and borrowed some of the stories and ideas he wrote about in his works. Homer’s poems are considered some of the greatest literary works ever produced.
Lyric Poetry

Other poets wrote poems that were often set to music. During a performance, the poet played a stringed instrument called a lyre while reading a poem. These poets were called lyric poets after their instrument, the lyre. Today, the words of songs are called lyrics after these ancient Greek poets.
Most poets in Greece were men, but the most famous lyric poet was a woman named Sappho (SAF-oh). Her poems were beautiful and emotional. Most of her poems were about love and relationships with her friends and family.
Fables

Other Greeks told stories to teach people important lessons. Aesop (EE-sahp), for example, is famous for his fables. Fables are short stories that teach the reader lessons about life or give advice on how to live.
In most of Aesop’s fables, animals are the main characters. The animals talk and act like humans. One of Aesop’s most famous stories is the tale of the ants and the grasshopper.
Another popular fable by Aesop, “The Tortoise and the Hare,” teaches that it is better to work slowly and carefully than to hurry and make mistakes. “The Boy Who Cried Wolf” warns readers not to play pranks on others. Since we still read these fables, you may be familiar with them.
Greek Literature Lives

The works of ancient Greek writers such as Homer, Sappho, and Aesop are still alive and popular today. In fact, Greek literature has influenced modern language, literature, and art.
Language

Probably the most obvious way we see the influence of the Greeks is in our language. Many English words and expressions come from Greek mythology. For example, we call a long journey an “odyssey” after Odysseus, the wandering hero of Homer’s poem. Something very large and powerful is called “titanic.” This word comes from the Titans, a group of large and powerful gods in Greek myth.
Many places around the world today are also named after figures from Greek myths. For example, Athens is named for Athena, the goddess of wisdom. Africa’s Atlas Mountains were named after a giant from Greek mythology who held up the Sky. The name of Aegean Sea comes from Aegus, a legendary Greek king. Europe itself was named after a figure from Greek myth, the princess Europa. Even places in space bear names from mythology. For example, Jupiter’s moon Io was named after a goddesses daughter.
Literature and the Arts

Greek myths have inspired artists for centuries. Greek painters and sculptors have used gods and heroes as the subjects of their works. Writers have retold ancient stories sometimes set in modern times. Movie makers have also borrowed stories from ancient myths. Hercules, for example has been the subject of dozens of films. These films range from early classics to a Walt Disney cartoon.
Mythological references are also common in today’s popular culture. Many sports teams have adopted the names of powerful figures from myths, like Titans or Trojans. Businesses frequently use images or symbols from mythology in their advertising. Although people no longer believe in the Greek gods, mythological ideas can still be seen all around us.