

Words from Classical Mythology

1. ambrosial (adj.) – exceptionally pleasing to taste or smell; extremely delicious; excellent (from *ambrosia*, the literally “not mortal” food of the gods)

The *ambrosial* aroma of the roast whetted our appetites.

2. auroral (adj.) – pertaining to or resembling the dawn; rosy (from *Aurora*, goddess of the dawn)

The darkness waned, and a faint *auroral* glow began to appear in the east.

3. bacchanalian (adj.) – jovial or wild with drunkenness (from *Bacchus*, the god of wine)

At 2 A.M. the neighbors called the police to quell the *bacchanalian* revelry in the upstairs apartment.

4. chimerical (adj.) – fantastic; unreal; impossible; absurd (from the *Chimera*, a fire-breathing monster with a lion’s head, goat’s body, and serpent’s tail)

At first, Robert Fulton’s plans for his steamboat were derided as *chimerical* nonsense.

5. fauna (n.) – animal life; animals of a particular region or period (from *Fauna*, Roman god of animals)

Our careless use of pesticides threatens to remove the bald eagle from our nation’s *fauna*.

6. flora (n.) – plant life; plants of a particular region or period (from *Flora*, Roman goddess of flowers)

Pollution is harming not only the residents of the area, but also its *fauna* and *flora*.

7. forum (n.) – any medium or place for open discussion and expression of ideas – a public meeting, a radio or TV discussion, editorial page, etc. (from *Forum*, the marketplace and place of assembly for the people in Ancient Rome)

A dictatorship permits no *forum* where ideas can be freely and openly discussed.

8. herculean (adj.) – very difficult; requiring the strength of *Hercules* (a hero of superhuman strength)

Among the *herculean* tasks confronting our nation is the rebuilding of roads, bridges, and tunnels.

9. hermetic (adj.) – airtight (from *Hermes*, messenger of the gods and reputed inventor of a magic seal to keep a vessel airtight)

To get a vitamin pill from a new bottle, you must unscrew the cap and break the *hermetic* seal.

10. laconic (adj.) – using words sparingly; terse; concise (from *Lakonikos*, meaning “Spartan.” The Spartans were known for their terseness.)

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

11. lethargic (adj.) – unnaturally drowsy; sluggish; dull (from *Lethe*, river in Hades whose water, when drunk, caused forgetfulness of the past)

For several hours after the operation, the patient was *lethargic* because of the anesthetic.

12. narcissistic (adj.) – in love with oneself; excessively fascinated and gratified by one’s own physical and mental qualities; egocentric (from *Narcissus*, a handsome youth who didn’t even look at any of the many maidens who loved him. However, when he saw his own image in a pool, he fell madly in love with it. His futile longing for himself caused him such suffering that he died soon thereafter.)

Narcissistic individuals tend to over-evaluate their own merits and to see no desirable qualities in others.

13. nemesis (n.) – 1. Due punishment for evil deeds (from *Nemesis*, goddess of vengeance)

A conviction for tax evasion has been the *nemesis* of many a criminal who had previously escaped justice.

2. One who inflicts such punishment

Napoleon crushed many opponents, but Wellington was his *nemesis*.

14. plutocratic (adj.) – having great influence because of one’s wealth (from *Plutus*, god of wealth)

A handful of *plutocratic* investors, each owning several million shares, determined the policies of the corporation.

15. tantalize (v.) – excite a hope but prevent its fulfillment; tease (from *Tantalus*, who was kept hungry and thirsty in the lower world with food and water very near but just beyond his reach)

We removed the strawberry shortcake from the table so as not to *tantalize* our weight-conscious guest.