



The Lightning Thief

by Rick Riordan

About the novel

The Lightning Thief is a fantasy-adventure story about Percy Jackson, a 12-year-old boy who discovers that his ADHD, dyslexia and other troubles at school and home may be related to his background. He is a “half-blood” – half human, half Greek god. Percy’s mother eventually realizes the only place safe from the monsters trying to kill him is Camp Half Blood, run by camp director Mr. D, aka Dionysus, the god of the grape harvest, winemaking and wine, of ritual madness, fertility, theatre and religious ecstasy in Greek mythology.

After being acknowledged by his father, Poseidon, and consulting the oracle, Percy embarks on a quest. “Find the most powerful weapon in the universe. And get it back to Olympus before the summer solstice, in ten days.” He is joined by his friends – a satyr named Grover, and Annabeth, another half-blood and daughter of Athena. The reason? To stop a war that is brewing between Zeus, Hades and Poseidon.

As the story unfolds, Percy is forced to reflect on destiny and choices, friendship and betrayal, character and conduct. He wrestles with different ways to explain his experiences – different stories of reality.

Part of the story takes place in the fabulous Lotus Hotel and Casino where people can lose themselves, sometimes for years, even decades. Percy “wakes up” in time to save himself and his friends so they can fulfil their mission and solve the lightning bolt mystery that threatens civilization. But is the quest itself not a gamble? After all, the oracle speaks to Percy through the voices of his step-father (who does little more than play poker, drink beer and smoke cigars) and his poker buddies. What is the difference between the gamble of the quest and getting lost in the casino? Or is there a difference?

About the author

Rick Riordan, a former Greek mythology teacher, used to make up bedtime stories for his son Haley, who was diagnosed with ADHD and dyslexia. Haley couldn’t get enough of the stories, so Riordan made up new tales and created Percy Jackson and the Olympians, publishing the first book in his best-selling pentalogy in 2005.

Instructional strategies

1. Ask students to review the section in which Percy and his friends are in the Lotus Hotel and Casino (pp. 257-263). Have students work in groups to discuss the following questions before reviewing them as a class.
 - a. Why do Percy and his friends lose track of time in the casino?
 - b. What were people “too busy” with in this place that they seemed to lose themselves? How were the people in the casino similar to, or different from, Smelly Gabe and his poker buddies?
 - c. Percy and his friends were at a casino, but they were playing games. What is the difference (if any) between gaming and gambling?
 - d. Is losing oneself in pleasure a bad thing? Explain.
 - e. Percy and his friends were given free passes at the Lotus Hotel and Casino. Would their experience have been different if they had had to pay? Explain.
2. Have students write a paper comparing the experience of Percy and his friends in the Lotus Hotel and Casino with that of Odysseus and his crew in the land of the Lotus-Eaters (from Greek mythology). In particular, have them discuss the similarity or difference between losing oneself by ingesting something

like a drug (Odysseus' crew) or by playing games (Percy and his friends). You could have students look up Homer, *The Odyssey*, Book 9 or just use the excerpt below.

And while we still grieved for our fallen comrades, Zeus sent a storm that knocked us to our knees. We rode it out as best we could. I might even then have rounded the southern cape and made for home had not a new gale driven us across seventeen days of open sea.

We found ourselves at last in the land of the Lotus-eaters. These folk are harmless enough, but the plant on which they feast is insidious. Three of my men tasted it and all they wanted was more. They lost all desire for home. I had to force them back to the ships and tie them down while we made our getaway.

3. Facilitate a class discussion, or have students write a paper and then discuss, on the topic: Percy accepts a quest in which he seeks to win against the odds and must face many challenges and risks – is this quest a gamble? In the discussion you might pose questions like:
 - a. Is it significant that Smelly Gabe and his poker buddies deliver the answer for the oracle?
 - b. Why does Percy accept the quest? Is it in some sense his way of coping? Is he trying to lose himself or find himself? Is there a difference?
 - c. Do the stories Percy tells himself help or harm him? How so? How do the stories we tell ourselves shape us?
 - d. Why does Smelly Gabe spend all his time playing poker, drinking beer and smoking cigars?
 - e. Can gambling, or losing oneself in a game, be a way of coping? Is this likely to lead to self-discovery?
 - f. Are risks taken in the quest to make sense of our lives different than risks taken to make money or score points? If so, how?
 - g. What strategies or techniques do you use to make sense of your life?

Gambling literacy

Big ideas

- Gambling can be a fun recreational activity but can also lead to significant harm
- We can learn how to control gambling by examining the different ways people have thought about it, engaging in critical self-reflection and listening to each other

Competencies

- Assess the complex ways in which gambling is linked to human culture and impacts the health and wellbeing of individuals, families, communities and societies
- Assess the ways in which material goods are distributed in society, how those goods are valued and how this is related to gambling policies and behaviours
- Explore and appreciate the diverse cognitive, social, emotional and physical factors that impact gambling behaviour
- Develop personal and social skills to reflect on and manage personal behaviour and choices related to gambling

For a complete look at the gambling literacy competencies, as defined by the Centre for Addictions Research of BC, see: www.uvic.ca/research/centres/carbc/assets/docs/iminds/hs-gambling-curriculum.pdf



Links to Curriculum

First Peoples' principles of learning

- Learning is holistic, reflexive, reflective, experiential, and relational (focused on connectedness, on reciprocal relationships, and a sense of place)
- Learning involves recognizing the consequences of one's actions.
- Learning involves generational roles and responsibilities.
- Learning is embedded in memory, history, and story.
- Learning requires exploration of one's identity.

English Language Arts 8

Big ideas

- Exploring stories and other texts helps us understand ourselves and make connections to others and to the world
- Texts are socially, culturally, and historically constructed
- Questioning what we hear, read, and view contributes to our ability to be educated and engaged citizens

Competencies

- Apply appropriate strategies to comprehend written, oral, and visual texts, guide inquiry, and extend thinking
- Think critically, creatively, and reflectively to explore ideas within, between, and beyond texts
- Recognize and identify the role of personal, social, and cultural contexts, values, and perspectives in texts
- Construct meaningful personal connections between self, text, and world
- Respond to text in personal, creative, and critical ways