

# Demeter and Persephone: A Reader's Theater

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Characters:

Narrator 1

Narrator 2

Narrator 3

Demeter

Persephone

Zeus

Hades

Hermes

Boy

**Narrator 1:** Zeus, the King of the Gods presented Demeter, the goddess of the harvest, grain, and fertility with a beautiful daughter named Persephone. As Persephone was raised among the flowers in the fields of her mother, she began to blossom into a flower herself.

**Narrator 2:** Persephone was as strong, yet as flexible as the stem of a plant with skin as soft as petals, and beautiful eyes like pansies. She began caring for the flowers in the fields for her mother. She spent her time creating new flowers and giving them names.

**Persephone:** Mother, I am off to the fields with my paint pot to make the world more glorious with my beautiful flowers.

**Demeter:** As I am the goddess of planting and harvesting, and a fine lady of growing things, I couldn't be more proud of you, Persephone. My love for you is immense.

**Narrator 1:** Across a stream, through a grove of trees, and into a little glade, Persephone wandered, a bit further than her normal route had ever taken her.

**Narrator 2:** Carrying her paint pot, she began giving faces to a stand of tall waxy lilies with her paintbrush. Persephone hummed softly as she worked.

**Persephone:** (humming) Oh! I haven't ever noticed this strange bush in the meadow before. The leaves are thick, green and glossy. The berries on the branches look like drops of blood. It is ruining the looks of my field of beautiful flowers with its ugliness.

**Narrator 1:** With a mighty pull, Persephone seized the plant. The bush did not move.

**Narrator 2:** The strange bush was firmly rooted. However, the young Persephone was used to getting her own way. Again she pulled with all of her might. Up came the bush and with it long roots came dragging out of the ground, leaving a big gaping hole behind.

**Narrator 3:** Immediately a fierce rumbling began and the gaping hole began spreading and opening like a huge mouth. As the noise grew with great intensity, out leapt six black horses pulling a golden chariot. In the chariot stood a tall figure with a flowing black cape and a black crown on his head.

**Hades:** (evil laughter) Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha!

**Narrator 1:** Persephone was snatched away by Hades before she even had time to scream.

**Narrator 2:** Plunging deep into the hole again, the ground swallowed them up. Just as quickly as the ground had opened, the hole was closed again.

**Demeter:** Persephone! Persephone! Where are you? (begins to panic) Persephone!

**Narrator 3:** All night long Demeter searched for Persephone. Only silence answered her.

**Narrator 1:** As dawn broke across the sky, Demeter came upon an uprooted bush. Leaping from her chariot, she noticed something in the grass that seemed to pierce her heart.

**Demeter:** (crying) Oh, please....no! It is Persephone's little paint pot. She would never have left her paint pot behind willingly.

**Narrator 2:** As the sun continued to rise, the birds began chirping. The chirping turned to gossip about the girl, the bush, the hole, the chariot, and the black rider.

**Narrator 3:** Demeter listened to the birds and wept. She knew Hades, the dark god of the underworld, had captured her lovely Persephone.

**Narrator 1:** Demeter's sorrow soon turned to furious anger as she fled to Zeus.

**Demeter:** Zeus! Zeus! Persephone has been captured by Hades and has been taken down to the dark underworld. Until she is returned to me, I will cause a famine to come upon the land. I will see to it that there will be a devastating shortage of food in the land as the plants will all wither and die causing animals and people to starve.

**Zeus:** Compose yourself, Demeter! This may be a nice arrangement for both Hades and Persephone.

**Demeter:** Never! Anyone but Hades. This must not be. Persephone is a spring child. She needs sunshine or she will wither and die.

**Narrator 2:** As Demeter was speaking to Zeus, she noticed Zeus was holding a new thunderbolt. She realized the bearer of the gift was Hades. The gift had been offered in exchange for Persephone. Demeter felt betrayed and defeated.

**Demeter:** I will return to my Earth.

**Narrator 3:** Weeks passed. Zeus' sleep was interrupted by loud sighs from Earth below. As he looked down he saw a terrible sight.

**Zeus:** Nothing is growing! The blazing sun continues to parch the fields, shriveling the wheat, corn, and barley. The soil is hard and cracked. There is no green anywhere. Cattle and people are starving. Something must be done.

**Narrator 3:** Through their hunger and pain, people lifted their faces to Mount Olympus and prayed for Zeus to help them.

**Narrator 1:** Zeus sent for Demeter.

**Zeus:** Do you still wish for your daughter's return?

**Demeter:** Yes. While she is gone, no crops will grow. No tree will bear. No grass will spring. While she is gone and while I mourn her, Earth will grow dry and shrivel as my heart, and will put forth no green thing.

**Zeus:** Very well. Your daughter shall be restored to you.

**Demeter:** Oh! Thank you, Zeus.

**Zeus:** However, if she has eaten any food while with Hades, she must remain with him. This is the law and even I am powerless to revoke it.

**Demeter:** No food will have passed her lips. She would have been too sad to eat while she has been away from me.

**Zeus:** Then, I will send Hermes, the messenger god, to Hades and demand Persephone's release. (calling out) Hermes!

**Hermes:** Yes, Zeus?

**Zeus:** You must go to Hades at once with this message, and demand the release of Persephone.

**Hermes:** My winged shoes will get me there quickly. I am off, Zeus!

**Narrator 2:** In the meantime, down in the underworld, Persephone had spent her days with the dark king.

**Hades:** Persephone, your beauty causes a gentleness to come upon me. You are worth more than these rubies and diamonds that I adorn you with.

**Persephone:** I will not take your gifts. I will never forgive what you have done to me!

**Hades:** I have had dresses spun of gold and silver for you.

**Persephone:** I want to go home to my mother!

**Hades:** Your throne, my lady, is made of the finest ebony and here is a crown of black pearls.

**Persephone:** I hate you and I always will!

**Narrator 3:** As Persephone spent her days throwing tantrums at Hades, she was secretly and slowly beginning to enjoy the attention Hades gave her.

**Narrator 1:** She enjoyed his gifts and his efforts to please her.

**Narrator 2:** Although she longed for sunshine and flowers, she secretly admired Hades.

**Narrator 3:** But, Persephone still insisted on pouting and she refused to allow a crumb of food to pass her lips.

**Hades:** Please eat, Persephone. I have had my cook prepare you the most delicious meals!

**Persephone:** Never! I will not eat until I am returned to my mother!

**Narrator 1:** In an effort to please Persephone, Hades gave her some ground in which she could plant a garden.

**Narrator 2:** Hades gave her rare seeds to plant with magical blooms that did not need sunlight.

**Narrator 3:** He also gave her a young boy to serve as a helper in her garden. One afternoon as Persephone was gardening she grew especially hungry. It had been so long since she had eaten. She noticed her helper eating something in the distance.

**Persephone:** Boy, what are you eating?

**Boy:** (smiling) A juicy, red fruit. It is a pomegranate.

**Persephone:** I am so hungry.

**Boy:** We are alone. No one will see you. No one will know. Quickly.....eat!

**Persephone:** (eating) I have never tasted anything so...delicious...hmmmm, one, two,

**Narrator 1:** Just as Persephone swallowed the fourth pomegranate seed, a cry that could only be Hermes, the messenger of the gods, split the air.

**Narrator 2:** Persephone raced to Hades' palace.

**Hermes:** Good day...Hades...Persephone.

**Hades:** (scowling) Why are you here?

**Persephone:** Good day, Hermes!

**Hermes:** I bring a message from your mother, Persephone. She wants you home. I'm sure you haven't eaten anything during your stay here. (not giving her time to answer) Let's go!

**Narrator 3:** As the gardener boy rushed to Hades, Persephone and Hermes narrowly escaped.

**Boy:** Hades, Persephone has eaten four pomegranate seeds!

**Narrator 1:** By the time Persephone was home, Hades had already been to visit Zeus.

**Hades:** Persephone has eaten four pomegranate seeds in my kingdom. She must return to me. This is the law, Zeus!

**Zeus:** That is true, it is the law. Because Persephone ate four seeds of the pomegranate she will return to Hades for four months out of every year.

**Demeter:** (crying) My heart will break without my Persephone!

**Persephone:** Don't cry mother! We must be happy for the time that I am here on the earth with you.

**Demeter:** I will be happy while you are here. Flowers will bloom, grass will grow, and the tree will bear fruit. But, as for the months you are away, as my heart is longing for you, Earth will suffer.

**Narrator 1:** Because of Demeter's longing for her daughter, we have the seasons of summer and winter.

**Narrator 2:** Summer is a time for planting and growth. It is the time of Demeter's happiness. Persephone is here on Earth with her mother.

**Narrator 3:** Winter is a time when Earth sleeps under frost. Winter is Demeter's suffering. Persephone spends this time in Hades' underworld.

**Narrator 1:** So it remains...year after year as the seasons change from one to another, the law is fulfilled as Persephone returns to Hades four months of every year.