

CYRUS THE GREAT



**BIOGRAPHY WORKBOOK
SERIES FOR HIGH SCHOOL**

CYRUS THE GREAT OF PERSIA
(LIVED C. 600-530 B.C.E.; REIGNED 559-530 B.C.E.)

The early life of Cyrus the Persian, like that of many another famous conqueror, is lost in a cloud of fable. According to the Greek historian Herodotus, to whom we owe the earliest account, Astyages the King of Media was warned in a dream that some danger threatened the kingdom from the offspring of his daughter Mandane, who as yet was unmarried. In order to remove the danger, whatever it might be, as far as possible from his throne, Astyages married his daughter to a Persian

named Cambyses, who took her with him to his own country. But after his daughter's marriage Astyages had another dream, which was interpreted by the priests to mean that his daughter's child was destined to reign in his stead.

1. The daughter of Astyages was called _____.
 - a. Cambyses
 - b. Harpagus
 - c. Herodotus
 - d. Mandane

CREATIVE EXPRESSION: Illustrate the dream of Astyages.



Alarmed by this prophecy, Astyages sent for his daughter. When in the course of time she bore a son, he ordered his trusty lieutenant Harpagus to carry the child to his own house and kill it. Harpagus took the infant as he had been ordered to do, but moved by the pleadings of his wife, he determined to commit the rest of his bloody instructions to other hands. He therefore called one of his herdsmen, Mitridates, and ordered him to expose the child on the bleakest part of the mountain and leave it to perish, threatening him with the most terrible penalties in case of disobedience.

2. What was the name of the herdsman of Harpagus?
- Astyages
 - Cambyses
 - Cyrus
 - Mitridates

But the herdsman and his wife were no more proof against pity than Harpagus and his wife had been, and while they stood swayed between their

wish to save the child and their fear of disobeying Harpagus, fortune happily provided an escape for them. The wife of the herdsman brought forth a dead child, and this they determined to substitute for the living infant, and to bring up the grandson of Astyages as their own. The exchange was accomplished, and after some days the servants of Harpagus, sent to inquire if their master's commands had been obeyed, were shown by the herdsman the body of a dead child exposed on the rocks and still wearing the rich clothes and ornaments in which it had been brought to his house. Harpagus was thus enabled to assure Astyages that he was safe from the threatened danger, and might enjoy his throne in peace.

3. Why were the herdsman and his wife able to allow Mandane's infant son to live?

WORD SEARCH PUZZLE

A	H	C	P	R	O	P	H	E	C	Y	R
C	Y	R	U	S	E	X	P	O	S	E	E
O	E	I	D	R	K	I	N	G	H	J	T
B	B	A	S	T	Y	A	G	E	S	F	S
N	O	I	M	T	N	A	F	N	I	K	A
M	A	N	D	A	N	E	L	E	W	G	M

Astyages	master
Cyrus	obey
expose	Persia
infant	prophecy
king	reign
Mandane	wish

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When the child of Mandane was ten years old, an accident brought him to the knowledge of the king, and restored him to his birthright. One day he was playing with the children of his neighbors, and in a certain game where it was necessary to make one of the players king, Cyrus was chosen. All the others, as his subjects, promised to obey his commands. But one of the boys, the son of a rich noble of the court of Astyages, refused to do as he was bid by Cyrus, and according to the rule of the game, he had to submit to a beating at the hand of the boy-king. Angry at this treatment, he complained to his father, who, indignant in his turn, went to Astyages, and reproached him with the blows his son had received at the hands of the son of one of the king's slaves.

4. In the children's game described, what happens to a player who refuses to obey the king's commands?

Cyrus was brought before the king; but when he was asked how he had dared to treat the son of a nobleman in such a way, the boy, nothing daunted, answered that he had done only what was right: the

rules of the game were known to all who had joined in it, the other boys had submitted to the penalties, the son of the nobleman alone had refused, and he had been punished as he deserved.

"If any wrong has been done by me," he said, "I am ready to suffer for it."

Struck by the boldness of the lad, and by something in his looks, Astyages dismissed him for a time, and promised the nobleman that he should be satisfied for the insults offered to his son. He then sent for the herdsman Mitridates and wrung from him a confession of what he had done.

Learning how Harpagus had deceived him, Astyages acquitted Mitridates, and turned all his vengeance upon Harpagus as the chief offender. How cruelly he punished him must not be told here, for pity, but it was such a barbarous revenge as could never be forgiven. And though Harpagus pretended to make light of it, yet it was only that by keeping fair with the king he might bide his time, and repay cruelty with cruelty.

5. Why is Astyages initially apprehensive about punishing Cyrus?

But now, as Cyrus in our story has grown to man's estate, and is ready to show the world of what stuff he is made, it will be well to explain in a few words, what was the state of things in that part of the world where he was to play his part.

The mighty Kingdom of Assyria in its greatest estate had stretched from the Indus on the east, to the Mediterranean on the west. But when Nineveh, the capital and chief city of the empire, had been destroyed by the Medes—a subject people living on the north-eastern borders of the kingdom, but who had risen in rebellion against their rulers—Assyria was broken in pieces, and several minor kingdoms rose on her ruins.

6. What was the capital city of ancient Assyria?

Of these the chief were Media and Babylonia in the east, and Lydia in the west. Babylonia rose to a great height of power and splendor under Nebuchadnezzar. The Medes, a brave and warlike people, never attained to so high a degree of civilization as the Babylonians, nor did they ever have a monarch whose fame equaled that of Sardanapalus, the king of Assyria, of Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylonia, or of Croesus, the king of Lydia. But under a succession of astute and hardy warriors, who held the throne for something over one hundred and fifty years, their dominion was gradually extended until it stretched from the Indus to the centre of Asia Minor. Their greatest achievement had been the destruction of Nineveh in 606 B.C.E.

7. Under what king did Babylonia rise to a great height of power and splendor?

8. What group destroyed Nineveh in 606 B.C.E.?

Lydia, the remaining province, touched the Median kingdom on the east, and on the west was only separated, in the beginning, from the Mediterranean by the narrow strip of territory occupied by the Greek colonies, which for a time acted as a bar to the encroachments of the Lydian monarchs and their conquerors.

9. What province separated the Median kingdom from the Greek colonies?

When Cyrus came to manhood, these kingdoms, the successors of the Assyrian monarchy, were all flourishing in wealth and power. Media was ruled by

Astyages, his grandfather—to accept the legendary history as it has come down to us. Babylonia, the greatest of the three, was governed by Nebuchadnezzar. Lydia was ruled by Crœsus, a monarch wise above his peers, whose name has long been a synonym for unbounded wealth, and whose story, though not beyond the bounds of credibility, reads more like a fable of romance than a tale of sober fact.

10. Who ruled ancient Lydia at this time?

Crœsus was the brother-in-law of Astyages, and in close alliance not only with the Medes, but with the Babylonians, the Egyptians, and the Greeks. Crœsus was at the height of his power and was looking forward to still greater increase of his dominions, when in an evil hour he struck against the growing greatness of Cyrus, and was crushed in the encounter. Had he been less arrogant, the doom he wrought for himself might have been delayed, but it could not have been wholly averted. Nothing could have long withstood the greed of Cyrus for universal dominion.

11. Who, according to the above paragraph, was arrogant and greedy?

We have seen what good cause Harpagus had to hate Astyages. But he nursed his revenge with crafty wisdom, and knowing himself powerless to act openly and alone, he tried what stratagem might do to bring about his aim, which was no less than the overthrow of Astyages by means of the tyrant's grandson, Cyrus. He did not take open measures until he knew he had allies enough at his back, and could strike with a sure aim.

Harpagus worked with the great Median chiefs in private, stirring them up against Astyages by appeals of all sorts: to their ambition, their greed, their discontent, their private wrongs. When he had secured the consent of enough nobles to his plans, he called upon Cyrus, as one who had chiefly suffered from the tyranny and cruelty of the king, to lead the proposed revolt in person. He knew that Cyrus had been gradually strengthening his own kingdom of Persia in preparation for the ambitious schemes of conquest he was nursing, but there was danger in correspondence with one who stood to Astyages in the double relation of a feared and hated grandson, and the chief of a rival people.

If we may believe Herodotus, Harpagus had recourse to a strange expedient to communicate his design to Cyrus. Disemboweling a dead hare, Harpagus inserted a letter in the cavity, and sent the animal to Cyrus as a present. When the letter came to the hands of Cyrus he eagerly accepted the offers it contained of

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leadership in the proposed revolt, and joined his forces with those of the disaffected Medes. Astyages was overthrown and his kingdom taken possession of by Cyrus.

12. How did Harpagus communicate his plan to Cyrus?

Herodotus draws a striking picture of the exultation of Harpagus over the success of his revengeful projects, and of the disdain with which Astyages reproached him for having called on another to do what, trusted and confided in as he was by his monarch, he might have accomplished for himself, and reaped the harvest which he had surrendered to another. Cyrus had the wisdom to spare the life of Astyages, and to attach him to his person as councilor and friend. Harpagus he made his lieutenant, and much of his success was owing to this man's wisdom and bravery. After the defeat of Astyages, Cyrus advanced against the lesser tribes that had owed allegiance to the Median king, and having reduced them one by one to submission, the power of the once mighty empire of the Medians passed to the inheritance of the Persians in the year 559 B.C.

13. Imagine that you are Cyrus. Would you participate in the plan of Harpagus to overthrow Astyages? Why or why not?

When Croesus heard of the overthrow of his brother-in-law by the hands of Cyrus, and of the setting up a great new monarchy on the ruins of the fallen kingdom, his own ambitious projects were blown into fresh activity by the desire for private revenge. Misled by his own interpretation of the oracle he consulted as to the likelihood of success in an expedition against the Persians, he advanced to withstand the conquering march of Cyrus. His first success was against the Syrians of Cappadocia, a people subject to Cyrus, as having formed a part of the Median Kingdom. Cyrus, with a powerful army, came at once to the assistance of

his new subjects, and meeting the forces of Crœsus on the plain of Cappadocia, a fiercely fought, but indecisive battle took place, which resulted in the retreat of Crœsus to his capital, Sardis, to seek the assistance of his allies and prepare to meet Cyrus with a larger force.

14. What was the capital city of ancient Lydia?

In overweening confidence in his own success, Crœsus dismissed his mercenary troops, and sent messengers to Babylon, to Egypt, and to Sparta, calling on them to come with troops to his assistance within five months. No sooner had he shut himself up in Sardis, and dismissed his mercenaries, depending upon his own forces until assistance should come from his allies, than Cyrus advanced against him so swiftly that there was no escape from a battle.

Crœsus, believing in his fortune, and trusting to the excellence of his cavalry, boldly took the field. But Cyrus, using stratagem where perhaps courage would not have availed, put his camels in front of his line, and massed his own horsemen behind them. The horses of Crœsus, maddened by the unaccustomed smell of the camels, refused to advance. But the Lydians, dismounting, fought so bravely on foot with their spears, that it was not until after a long and fierce combat that they were forced to retreat and seek safety within the walls of Sardis.

The army of Cyrus invested the city. However, it was so strongly fortified on all sides but one as to be impregnable by assault; and the side left unprotected by art was supposed to be amply protected by nature, since it abutted on the very edge of a steep precipice.

But, after the siege had lasted fourteen days, a Persian sentinel saw one of the garrison descend the precipice to recover his helmet that had rolled down. No sooner had he thus unwittingly showed the way, than the sentinel followed with a number of his fellow-soldiers and, reaching the top of the cliff in safety, attacked the guards, all unsuspecting, and gained an entrance to the city. The gates were opened to the Persians, and Crœsus with all his vast store of treasure became the prey of the conqueror.

The fall of Sardis and the Lydian monarchy was followed by the subjection of the Greek cities of Asia Minor, a task which Cyrus left to the hands of Harpagus, while he himself turned eastward to pursue his conquests in Upper Asia and in Assyria. His greatest achievement in this quarter was the taking of Babylon. This he accomplished in the reign of Belshazzar, one of the successors of Nebuchadnezzar, perhaps his son, by turning the Euphrates, which ran through the middle of the city, out of its course; and when its bed was dry he entered the city by this road and captured it with little resistance.

MAP WORK



18. Which of the following modern countries was **not** once under the rule of Cyrus the Great?
 - a. Egypt
 - b. Israel
 - c. Iraq
 - d. Turkey
19. Color the Mediterranean Sea blue.
20. Color the Black Sea black.
21. Color the Caspian Sea green.
22. Color the Red Sea red.
23. Color the Persian Gulf, Gulf of Oman, and Arabian Sea yellow.
24. Ancient Persia is generally equivalent to what modern country?
