*Greek mythology evolved thousands of years ago. There was a need to explain natural events, disasters and events in history. Myths were created about gods and goddesses that had supernatural powers, human traits and human emotions.*

**Holding A Trident**

To the ancient Greeks, Poseidon is the son of Kronos and Rhea, and the brother of Zeus. He is god of the sea in the Mediterranean around Greece. Like the sea he can be calm and quiet at times, and then raging and violent.

Poseidon in the earliest ages of Greek mythology was the symbol for water, but later, as nations built great ships that moved across the waters, he became the king of the sea and the powerful ruler over all the creatures that lived in the oceans. He possesses the power of causing mighty and destructive stormy tempests, in which the waves rise mountains high, and the wind becomes a hurricane. On the other hand, he alone can still the angry waves, soothe the troubled waters, and grant safe voyages to mariners. For this reason, Poseidon was always toasted with whiskey and wine before a voyage, and after sailors returned safely from the sea, there would be sacrifices and thanksgivings offered to Poseidon.

The symbol of his power is the fisherman's three-pronged spear which is called a trident. It can produce earthquakes, raise up islands from the bottom of the sea and cause wells to spring forth out of the Earth.

Poseidon was worshiped as the god of fishermen in countries bordering on the seacoast, where fishing was the most important industry. When Poseidon was angry, he would send disastrous floods, which completely destroyed whole countries and were usually accompanied by terrible marine monsters that swallowed up those that survived the floods. It is likely that these sea-monsters are the poetical figures that represent the demons of hunger and famine, which always follow great floods.

**God Of The Sea Resembled His Brother Zeus**

Poseidon resembles his brother Zeus in features, height and general looks; but the sea-god lacks the kindness and patience of his mighty brother. Poseidon's eyes are bright and piercing, and the lines of his face are somewhat sharper, which goes more with his angry and violent nature. His hair waves in dark, disorderly masses over his shoulders; his chest is broad, and his body looks powerful; he wears a short, curling beard, and a band around his head. He usually appears standing erect in a graceful shell-chariot, drawn by hippocamps, or sea-horses, with golden manes and bronze, flashing hoofs, who bound over the dancing waves with such wonderful swiftness that the chariot scarcely touches the water. The monsters of the deep, acknowledging their mighty lord, dance and skip playfully around him, while the sea joyfully smooths a path for his chariot.

Poseidon inhabits a beautiful palace at the bottom of the sea at Aegea, and has another on Mount Olympus, which he visits when he must attend a meeting of the gods.

His wonderful palace beneath the waters has spacious halls with high ceilings where thousands of his followers could assemble. The exterior of the building is of bright gold, which, cleaned by the waves, shines brightly; in the interior, high and beautiful columns supported the gleaming round, dome ceiling. Everywhere fountains of glistening, silvery water play; everywhere groves and high fences with feathery-leaved sea plants appear, while rocks of pure crystal glisten with all the varied colors of the rainbow. Some of the paths are strewn with white sparkling sand, dotted with jewels, pearls and golden-brown amber. This delightful home is surrounded on all sides by wide fields, where there are whole groves of dark purple coral, tufts of beautiful scarlet-leaved plants and sea-anemones of every tint. Here grow bright, pinky sea-weeds, mosses of all hues and shades and tall grasses, which, growing upwards, form emerald caves that little sea creatures love, while fish of various kinds playfully dart in and out. At night it is lit up by the glow-worms of the deep.

Although Poseidon rules with absolute power over the ocean, he bows submissively to the will of the great ruler of Olympus, his brother, Zeus. Poseidon came to his brother's aid when there was an emergency. At the time when Zeus was harassed by the attacks of the Giants, Poseidon proved himself a most powerful ally when he killed the hideous giant named Polybotes.

There were times, however, when Poseidon challenged his brother Zeus. He joined with the goddesses, Hera and Athene, in a secret plan to take away his power. The plan failed and Hera, the wife of Zeus, was severely punished, and Poseidon was not allowed to return to the sea for a year. It was at this time that, with Apollo, he built the walls of Troy.

**He Made Himself Look Like A Dolphin To Win His Wife**

Poseidon married a sea-nymph named Amphitrite. He made himself look like a dolphin to make her fall in love with him. Later his wife became jealous of a beautiful maiden called Scylla, who was in love with Poseidon. Amphitrite threw some herbs into a well where Scylla was bathing, which changed her into a monster with 12 feet, six heads with six long necks and the voice of a barking dog. This awful monster lived in a high cave and would swoop down upon a passing ship killing one sailor with each of her six heads.

The Cyclops were the sons of Poseidon and Amphitrite. They were a wild race of Giants that had only one eye in the middle of their foreheads. They led a lawless life and were the workmen of another god, Hephaestus, the god of fire, whose workshop was in the heart of the volcanic Mount Aetna.

The sea-god was also the father of two giant sons called Otus and Ephialtes. Whenonly nine years old they were said to be 45 feet tall and 15 feet wide. These powerful, youthful giants challenged other gods. During the war of the Gigantomachia, they tried to climb to heaven by piling mighty mountains one upon another. They were stopped by Apollo, who destroyed them with his arrows.

The Greeks believed that Poseidon created the horse. Athene and Poseidon got in a violent argument about naming the city that would eventually be called Athens. The Olympian gods decided that whoever presented

mankind with the most useful giftwould win the right to name the city. Poseidon struck the ground with his trident and the horse appeared in all his untamed strength and graceful beauty. Athene, with her wand, created the olive-tree. The gods said her gift was the sign for peace and plenty, while Poseidon's horse was a symbol of war. Athene called the city Athens, afterherself.

Poseidon tamed the horse for the use of mankind, and he was believed to have taught men the art of managing horses by the bridle. The Greeks had horse and chariot races that honored Poseidon.

The sacrifices to Poseidon were generally black and white bulls, and also wild boars and rams. His symbols are the trident, horse and dolphin.

**Romans Called Him Neptune**

The Romans worshiped Poseidon under the name of Neptune, and gave him all the same powers. The Roman commanders before any naval expedition would make a sacrifice to Neptune.

A temple was built to him in Rome, and the festivals in his honor were called Neptunalia.

*From "The Myths and Legends of Ancient Greece and Rome" by E.M. Berens.*

Directions: After reading and annotating the article, write a short paragraph that explains the central idea of the article. Use at least two details from the article to support your response. (7-8 sentences)

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