

Internet link: for a link to a website where you can see how the Romans worshipped their gods, go to www.usborne-quicklinks.com

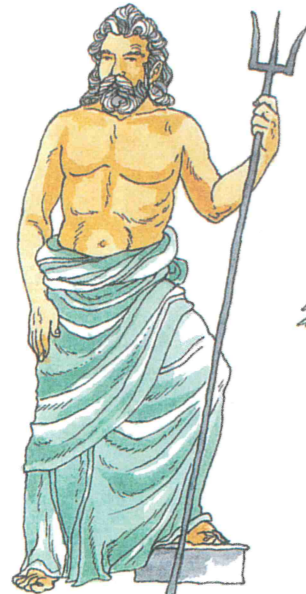
What did the gods do all day?

Although they had special powers, they often behaved like ordinary people. They argued, got jealous and even tried to trick each other.

There is a famous story about Roman gods and goddesses on the next page, and more pictures of them below.



Diana (Artemis).
Goddess of hunting
and the moon.



Neptune (Poseidon).
God of the sea.

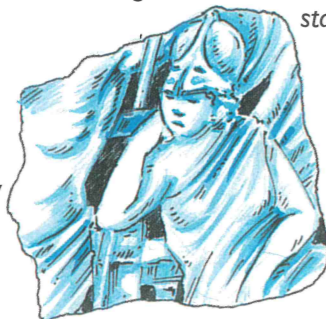


Venus (Aphrodite).
Goddess of love and
beauty.

Who were these gods and goddesses?

Here are images of three Roman gods or goddesses. They are taken from a carving, a statue and a wall-painting. By looking at their clothes and what they are holding, archaeologists can tell who they are supposed to be. Can you?

A carving



A marble statue



Part of a wall-painting



Did they sacrifice animals?



This animal is about to be sacrificed to Mars, the god of war.

Yes. Animals were often killed and given as gifts to particular Roman gods. Animals were also used by religious fortune tellers. By looking at the insides of a sacrificed animal, some Roman priests believed that they could see into the future.

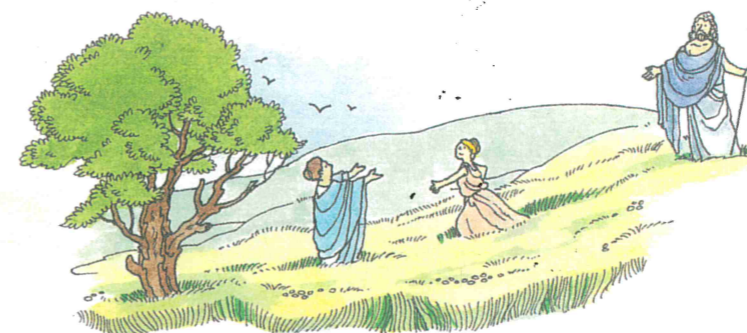
The sad goddess and the seasons.

Long long ago, when the gods still walked upon the Earth, Ceres, the goddess of crops and harvests, had a daughter. Her name was Proserpina and she was dazzlingly beautiful.

One day Dis, the god of the Underworld, saw Proserpina and instantly fell in love with her. He knew that she would not choose to live with him in his gloomy world of the dead, so he seized her, and took her to the Underworld in his chariot.

Ceres hunted high and low for her missing daughter. Nothing else mattered to her. She left the plants and crops to die so people began to starve. When she found out what Dis had done, she pleaded with Jupiter, king of the gods, to return Proserpina to her.

Jupiter agreed, so long as Proserpina hadn't eaten the food of the dead while living in the Underworld. In fact, Proserpina had been so sad that she hadn't eaten a single thing... until Dis tricked her into tasting six pomegranate seeds, so that she would have to stay with him forever.



Jupiter was furious that Dis had deliberately tricked Proserpina, so he allowed her to go back to her mother. This was on the condition that she returned to Dis for six months of every year. That was one month for each of the pomegranate seeds she had eaten.

Whenever Proserpina was released, her mother was happy and the crops and plants began to grow. This became known as spring and summer time. Whenever Proserpina had to return to the Underworld, her mother became sad again and leaves fell from the trees and later died. This was autumn and winter. And that is how we come to have different seasons.