

Before You Read

This selection also appears in *Elements of Literature*.

Echo and Narcissus

retold by Roger Lancelyn Green

LITERARY FOCUS: RECURRING THEMES

You can probably think of a story whose main character accomplishes something great against all odds. Chances are that you have also read a story about the power of love. Stories are told by people all over the world, and they've been told throughout history. No matter where or when in history we live, people share the same kinds of dreams, fears, and needs. That is why the same **themes**—insights about life—come up again and again in stories. A theme that occurs over and over in literature is called a **recurring theme**.

READING SKILLS: USING CONTEXT CLUES

All readers, even skilled ones, come across unfamiliar words from time to time. Skipping over these words may lead to confusion. Using a dictionary to look up every unfamiliar word you come across would soon become tiring and would slow down your reading. An easier way to figure out a word's meaning is to use **context clues**, the words and sentences that surround an unfamiliar word and help you understand what the unfamiliar word means.

As you read "Echo and Narcissus," use the questions below to help you figure out word meanings.

- Does the surrounding text give clues to the word's meaning?
- Is there a familiar word or word part within the unfamiliar word?
- How is the word used in the sentence?
- Does the meaning I've guessed make sense in the sentence?

SKILLS FOCUS

Literary Skills

Understand recurring themes.

Reading Skills

Use context clues.

Vocabulary Skills

Use context clues.

VOCABULARY DEVELOPMENT

PREVIEW SELECTION VOCABULARY

You may be unfamiliar with these words from “Echo and Narcissus.” Take a few minutes to preview the words before you begin to read.

detain (dē-tān') v.: hold back; delay.

Echo was asked to detain Hera, so Hera's husband, Zeus, could wander about.

vainly (vān'lē) adv.: uselessly; without result.

Echo tried vainly to attract the young man's attention.

unrequited (un'ri-kwīt'id) v. used as adj.: not returned in kind.

Unfortunately, Echo's love was unrequited, for Narcissus loved only himself.

parched (pärdht) v. used as adj.: very hot and dry.

Narcissus's throat was parched, so he eagerly knelt to drink the cool water.

intently (in-tent'lē) adv.: with great concentration.

Narcissus gazed intently at his reflection in the pool.

USING CONTEXT CLUES

In the Reading Skills for this selection, you learned how to use **context clues** to figure out the meaning of unfamiliar words when you're reading. Context clues include *definitions, examples, restatements, and contrast words*. The chart below gives examples of context clues for one of your vocabulary words. The context clues are in italics.

Definition	My skin was parched , <i>dry and hot</i> , after the desert hike.
Example	The poor little dog must have been parched . He <i>drank his water thirstily</i> .
Restatement	The land was so parched that it wasn't fit for crops. The <i>dried out</i> soil would produce no grain this year.
Contrast	Our neighbor's lawn was parched , but we <i>watered ours regularly to keep it nice and green</i> .

ECHO AND NARCISSUS

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IDENTIFY

Pause at line 5. Underline two words that describe Echo. Circle the words that tell who Hera was.

IDENTIFY

Re-read lines 13–15. Underline the details that tell why Hera becomes angry with Echo.

VOCABULARY

detain (dē-tān') v.: hold back; delay.

INFER

Pause at line 19. Underline the punishment that Hera gives Echo. What does this punishment reveal about Hera's character?

Up on the wild, lonely mountains of Greece lived the Oreades,¹ the nymphs or fairies of the hills, and among them one of the most beautiful was called Echo. She was one of the most talkative, too, and once she talked too much and angered Hera, wife of Zeus, king of the gods.

When Zeus grew tired of the golden halls of Mount Olympus, the home of the immortal gods, he would come down to earth and wander with the nymphs on the mountains. Hera, however, was jealous and often came to see
10 what he was doing. It seemed strange at first that she always met Echo, and that Echo kept her listening for hours on end to her stories and her gossip.

But at last Hera realized that Echo was doing this on purpose to **detain** her while Zeus went quietly back to Olympus as if he had never really been away.

“So nothing can stop you talking?” exclaimed Hera. “Well, Echo, I do not intend to spoil your pleasure. But from this day on, you shall be able only to repeat what other people say—and never speak unless someone else speaks first.”

20 Hera returned to Olympus, well pleased with the punishment she had made for Echo, leaving the poor nymph to weep sadly among the rocks on the mountain-side and speak only the words which her sisters and their friends shouted happily to one another.

She grew used to her strange fate after a while, but then a new misfortune befell her.

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1. Oreades (ō'rē-ad'ēz).

There was a beautiful youth called Narcissus,² who was the son of a nymph and the god of a nearby river. He grew up in the plain of Thebes³ until he was sixteen years old
 30 and then began to hunt on the mountains toward the north where Echo and her sister Oreades lived.

As he wandered through the woods and valleys, many a nymph looked upon him and loved him. But Narcissus laughed at them scornfully, for he loved only himself.

Farther up the mountains Echo saw him. And at once her lonely heart was filled with love for the beautiful youth, so that nothing else in the world mattered but to win him.

Now she wished indeed that she could speak to him words of love. But the curse which Hera had placed upon
 40 her tied her tongue, and she could only follow wherever he went, hiding behind trees and rocks, and feasting her eyes **vainly** upon him.

One day Narcissus wandered farther up the mountain than usual, and all his friends, the other Theban youths, were left far behind. Only Echo followed him, still hiding among the rocks, her heart heavy with unspoken love.

Presently Narcissus realized that he was lost, and hoping to be heard by his companions, or perhaps by some mountain shepherd, he called out loudly:

50 “Is there anybody here?”
 “Here!” cried Echo.
 Narcissus stood still in amazement, looking all around in vain. Then he shouted, even more loudly:
 “Whoever you are, come to me!”
 “Come to me!” cried Echo eagerly.
 Still no one was visible, so Narcissus called again:
 “Why are you avoiding me?”

2. **Narcissus** (nār-sis'əs).
3. **Thebes** (thēbz).

WORD STUDY

Scornfully, in line 34, describes the way Narcissus laughed. Underline the **context clues** nearby that help you understand that *scornfully* means “in a way that shows contempt or disdain.”

PREDICT

Pause at line 42. What do you think will happen when Echo and Narcissus meet?

VOCABULARY

vainly (vān'lē) *adv.*: uselessly; without result.

FLUENCY

After you've read lines 50–65, practice reading this boxed passage aloud. Use different voices that fit the two characters and their situation.

INTERPRET

Pause at line 77. In your opinion, if Echo could speak normally, would Narcissus's opinion of her change? Explain why or why not.

IDENTIFY

Re-read lines 79–83. Underline the words that tell who Aphrodite is.

IDENTIFY

Re-read lines 84–88. Underline the details that tell why Aphrodite decides to punish Narcissus. Circle the details that tell how she's going to punish him.

VOCABULARY

unrequited (un'ri-kwīt'id) *v.*
used as *adj.*: not returned in kind.

Echo repeated his words, but with a sob in her breath, and Narcissus called once more:

60 “Come here, I say, and let us meet!”

“Let us meet!” cried Echo, her heart leaping with joy as she spoke the happiest words that had left her lips since the curse of Hera had fallen on her. And to make good her words, she came running out from behind the rocks and tried to clasp her arms about him.

But Narcissus flung the beautiful nymph away from him in scorn.

70 “Away with these embraces!” he cried angrily, his voice full of cruel contempt. “I would die before I would have you touch me!”

“I would have you touch me!” repeated poor Echo.

“Never will I let you kiss me!”

“Kiss me! Kiss me!” murmured Echo, sinking down among the rocks, as Narcissus cast her violently from him and sped down the hillside.

“One touch of those lips would kill me!” he called back furiously over his shoulder.

“Kill me!” begged Echo.

80 And Aphrodite,⁴ the goddess of love, heard her and was kind to her, for she had been a true lover. Quietly and painlessly, Echo pined away and died. But her voice lived on, lingering among the rocks and answering faintly whenever Narcissus or another called.

“He shall not go unpunished for this cruelty,” said Aphrodite. “By scorning poor Echo like this, he scorns love itself. And scorning love, he insults me. He is altogether eaten up with self-love . . . Well, he shall love himself and no one else, and yet shall die of **unrequited** love!”

4. **Aphrodite** (af'rə-dīt'ē).

VOCABULARY

intently (in-tent'lē) *adv.*: with great concentration.

INFER

To whom is Narcissus speaking in lines 121–123?

IDENTIFY

“Echo and Narcissus” is an **origin myth**, a story that explains how something came to be. What two things in nature does this myth explain?

bottom of the pool. Drawing out his arms, he gazed **intently** down and, as the water grew still again, saw once more the face of his beloved.

Poor Narcissus did not know that he was seeing his
110 own reflection, for Aphrodite hid this knowledge from him—and perhaps this was the first time that a pool of water had reflected the face of anyone gazing into it.

Narcissus seemed enchanted by what he saw. He could not leave the pool, but lay by its side day after day looking at the only face in the world which he loved—and could not win—and pining just as Echo had pined.

Slowly Narcissus faded away, and at last his heart broke.

“Woe is me for I loved in vain!” he cried.

“I loved in vain!” sobbed the voice of Echo among
120 the rocks.

“Farewell, my love, farewell,” were his last words, and Echo’s voice broke and its whisper shivered into silence: “My love . . . farewell!”

So Narcissus died, and the earth covered his bones. But with the spring, a plant pushed its green leaves through the earth where he lay. As the sun shone on it, a bud opened and a new flower blossomed for the first time—a white circle of petals round a yellow center. The flowers grew and spread, waving in the gentle breeze which whispered among
130 them like Echo herself come to kiss the blossoms of the first Narcissus flowers.



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Echo and Narcissus

Thematic Graph Details in a story can point to its **theme**. For example, if each character in a story loses something, the theme might have something to say about how losses affect people.



Literary Skills
Analyze recurring themes.

One of the possible themes in “Echo and Narcissus” is stated below. Find six details in the story that support this theme. Write the supporting details in the boxes. Then, jot down other stories, poems, or films that have the same theme.

Theme of “Echo and Narcissus” Love can cause people to suffer.		
↓	↓	↓
Supporting Detail 	Supporting Detail 	Supporting Detail
↓	↓	↓
Supporting Detail 	Supporting Detail 	Supporting Detail
Other Works with Same Theme 		

Skills Review

Echo and Narcissus

VOCABULARY AND COMPREHENSION

Word Bank

detain

vainly

unrequited

parched

intently

A. Using Context Clues Fill in the blanks of the paragraph below with words from the Word Bank. Use the context clues to help you.

Tom was asked to help (1) _____ Sacha after school. Sacha's friends were planning a surprise party and wanted him to arrive home later than usual. "Come on, Tom, I'm (2) _____ and need to get some water," said Sacha. Sacha had been in a bad mood lately, thinking that his feelings of friendship were (3) _____. After all, they had forgotten his birthday, hadn't they? Tom was (4) _____ trying to keep Sacha at school, but his efforts were wasted as Sacha raced home. Tom was just in time to see Sacha gazing (5) _____ at the crowd of friends gathered in his living room. "Thanks," he said with a gulp. "I thought you forgot all about me."

B. Reading Comprehension Answer each question below.

1. Why does Hera punish Echo? What does she do to punish her?

2. Whom does Narcissus love? Whom does Echo love? _____

3. Why does Aphrodite make Narcissus fall in love with his own reflection?

4. According to this myth, what two reminders do we have today of Echo and Narcissus? _____

SKILLS
FOCUS

Vocabulary Skills
Use context clues.

Page 100

INTERPRET

The repeated words are “*tlot-tlot*” and “riding.” Students’ responses as to the reason for the repetition will vary. Possible response: The repeated words create a strong, lively rhythm that adds to the excitement of the poem.

IDENTIFY

The climax is when Bess pulls the trigger. She kills herself to save the highwayman. Possible alternative action: She could have called to Tim and told him she loved him and not the highwayman.

Page 101

INFER

Possible response: The highwayman returns to the inn because he is enraged and wants to avenge Bess’s death. Perhaps he wants to die.

INTERPRET

The final two stanzas end the poem on a more hopeful note because they seem to indicate that the highwayman and Bess live on, at least in legend. According to the legend, when the conditions are right, the highwayman returns as a ghost to meet the ghost of Bess, who is waiting for him. If the poem had ended with the death of the highwayman, Bess’s sacrifice would have seemed pointless. It would be a sad poem, not as romantic as it is with the last two stanzas included.

■ Possible Answers to Skills Practice

Theme Web (page 102)

What I learned about Bess—She loves the highwayman. She gives her life to save the highwayman. She is loyal.

What Bess’s actions show about life—Some people will die to save their loved ones.

What I learned about Tim and the troops—Tim loves Bess. Tim is jealous of the highwayman. Tim may have tipped off the troops, who use Bess to catch the highwayman.

What Tim’s actions show about life—Jealousy is a powerful emotion.

What I learned about the highwayman—He loves Bess. When he finds that Bess is dead, he tries to take revenge on her murderers, but they kill him too.

What the highwayman’s actions show about life—Love may cause reckless behavior.

What I learned from the setting—The setting is a dark and gloomy night. The story takes place in England, long ago.

What the setting contributes to the story—The gloom of the setting reinforces the tragedy of the events.

Theme: This poem showed me that—People make great sacrifices for love; people can be blinded by love.

■ Possible Answers to Skills Review

Comprehension (page 103)

1. The highwayman rides to the inn to see Bess, the landlord’s daughter.
2. Tim, the ostler, overhears the highwayman talking to Bess.
3. The poem doesn’t say directly how the redcoats knew the highwayman would return to the inn, but Tim probably told them because he was jealous of the highwayman.
4. Bess shoots herself to warn the highwayman that soldiers were waiting for him at the inn.
5. The redcoats shoot the highwayman.

Echo and Narcissus, page 104

Page 106

IDENTIFY

The two words that describe Echo are “beautiful” and “talkative.” The words that identify Hera are “wife of Zeus, king of the gods.”

IDENTIFY

The details that tell why Hera becomes angry with Echo are “But at last Hera realized that Echo was doing this on purpose to detain her while Zeus went quietly back to Olympus as if he had never really been away.”

INFER

Hera’s punishment for Echo: “from this day on, you shall be able only to repeat what other people say—and never speak unless someone else speaks first.” Students’ responses about Hera’s character will vary. Possible responses: Hera is cruel but clever. She is not forgiving.

Page 107

WORD STUDY

The context clues include “laughed at them” and “loved only himself.”

PREDICT

Some students will predict that, when Echo and Narcissus meet, she will fall in love with him, but she won't be able to tell him. It won't matter because he's in love with himself and will reject her. Other students may say that Echo will break through Narcissus's love for himself, and he will love her.

Page 108

INTERPRET

Most students will say that, if Echo could speak normally, Narcissus would still reject her because he is too self-centered to love anyone.

IDENTIFY

The words identifying Aphrodite are "the goddess of love."

IDENTIFY

The details that tell why Aphrodite decides to punish Narcissus are "By scorning poor Echo like this, he scorns love itself. And scorning love, he insults me. He is altogether eaten up with self-love." The details that tell how she is going to punish him are "he shall love himself and no one else, and yet shall die of unrequited love."

Page 109

CLARIFY

Possible response: Narcissus has fallen in love with his own reflection in a pool of water.

Page 110

INFER

Narcissus is speaking to himself, and then he speaks to his reflection in the pool.

IDENTIFY

Possible response: This myth explains the origin of the narcissus flower and also tells how echoes began.

■ Possible Answers to Skills Practice

Thematic Graph (page 111)

Because Echo loves Zeus, Hera punishes her. Echo can no longer talk; she can only repeat what others have said.

Echo falls in love with Narcissus, but Narcissus loves only himself.

Echo flings herself at Narcissus. Narcissus pushes her away, and Echo repeats the words "kill me."

Aphrodite kills Echo painlessly, and she punishes Narcissus.

Narcissus falls in love with his reflection in a pool. Narcissus can't leave his own reflection, and he dies knowing that he loved in vain.

Possible response to Other Works with Same Theme:
Romeo and Juliet

■ Possible Answers to Skills Review

Vocabulary and Comprehension (page 112)

- A.
1. detain
 2. parched
 3. unrequited
 4. vainly
 5. intently
- B.
1. Hera punishes Echo for detaining her while her husband, Zeus, got away. Echo can only repeat what others say and cannot speak unless someone else speaks first.
 2. Narcissus loves himself. Echo loves Narcissus.
 3. Aphrodite punishes Narcissus for scorning Echo.
 4. Echoes—such as those we hear when we yell in a big, empty room—and narcissus flowers are supposed reminders of Echo and Narcissus.

Phaethon, page 113

Page 114

IDENTIFY

The sun is the nonhuman thing that is personified as the Greek god Helios.

Page 115

IDENTIFY CAUSE & EFFECT

The Olympians felt extremes of temperature because the sun was plunging close to and then away from the earth.

INTERPRET

Answers will vary. Students may say that the theme is "The impatience of youth leads to disaster."

■ Possible Answers to Skills Practice

Plot and Theme Map (page 116)

Captions will vary. Possible drawings:

Box 1: Helios in his chariot

Box 2: Phaethon asking Helios if he can drive the chariot

Box 3: Phaethon taking off in the chariot

Box 4: Phaethon out of control in the chariot

Box 5: The Olympians in the freezing cold

Box 6: Zeus throwing a thunderbolt at Phaethon

Possible theme: Young people who are impatient and who show off may wind up in trouble.