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THE HARP OF TRUTH

A short story for
learning to learn



The Harp of Truth

- **Topic:** Developing critical thinking skills
- **Reading:** 20 minutes
- **Level:** 8-12 years old

SUMMARY

Nina is a young musician, always eager to discover new instruments. When she finds an ancient lyre, she doesn't expect the power of this instrument: the lyre awakens a mythological oracle, who sends her in search of the Harp of Truth.

The words of the oracle are sometimes wise, sometimes deceptive: Nina will have to use her listening, analytical and critical thinking skills. Accompanied by Pilos, a mischievous young satyr, Nina embarks on this quest!

KEY WORDS

Contradict, critical thinking, make choices, oracle, question, satyr

Chapter 1: The Forgotten Melody

In a small village on the banks of the River Euripe, **Nina** spends her days playing the accordion, bassoon and percussion. She dreams of a life as an artist, performing on the world's greatest stages: Broadway, Paris...

Our story begins the day Nina finds a mysterious **lyre** that seems to have been abandoned in the ruins on the outskirts of the village. She looks around, but no one seems to notice the lyre. Without missing a beat, Nina plucks a string, then two. Ouch, it's out of tune. Nina plays a few more notes and an **oracle** comes out of the lyre.

'If you have called me, it must be to know the Truth, she sings. I am **Kaliope, the prophetic oracle**. I am looking for the Harp of Truth, she says. An instrument of immense power, capable of revealing the secrets of the universe.'

Nina's eyes widen, her musician's heart racing at the thought of such an instrument.

'I can see three possible paths, each with its own risks and promises', Kaliope adds.

1. The first path leads through the forest of illusions, where the trees themselves try to lead you astray.
2. The second descends into the echoing cavern, where sound itself becomes a weapon.
3. The third lies in the heart of the stars.



Nina swallows, her fingers unconsciously scratching the lyre. 'Reassure me, I don't have to go?'

'Oh dear', says Kaliope, smiling. 'Apollo has put his trust in you, so make sure you don't disappoint him.'

Nina's jaw drops in shock. Apollo? The god of music and prophecy. But why her?

‘Your music has touched the heart of the god himself. He believes you alone can unlock the secrets of the Harp. Good luck!’

Without another word, she disappears.

Chapter 2: The Satyr

Nina is confused with all the information she just received:

1. An oracle asks her to find a missing Harp.
2. This Harp hides the secret of the universe.
3. Apollo, the god of music himself, has designated her to find the instrument.
4. And most importantly, three dangerous paths are possible.

Lost in her thoughts, she doesn’t notice the creature who steps towards her. Its upper body is that of a man, while its lower body is covered in a goat's fur. A pair of small horns protrude from his curly hair, and his eyes shine with wisdom. It is none other than a **satyr**.

‘Greetings, young musician’, he said cheerfully. ‘I am **Pilos, a servant of Apollo**. I have been sent to guide you in your quest for the Harp of Truth. Let's not waste any more time, let's go!’

Chapter 3: The Forest of Illusions

Nina and Pilos set off towards the forest of illusions, the lyre firmly strapped to Nina's back. As they approach the edge of the forest, the trees seem to lean inwards.

‘Stay close to me’, warns Pilos.

They enter the forest, and Nina immediately senses a change in the atmosphere. The light fades, shadows dance in the distance, and she swears she can hear faint whispers on the breeze.

The whispers become louder and more insistent. Nina picks up snatches of conversation; it's as if the trees are talking to her, guiding her towards the Harp!



With confident steps, Nina follows the whispering voices. But she soon realises that something is wrong: the trees are whispering directions that **contradict** each other. After several detours, she returns to the starting point.

‘It’s impossible!

- Is it? Pilos asks. Or are you listening to everything without questioning it?
- What do you mean?
- Think critically. Not all voices deserve your attention.’

So, Nina tries filtering them by using the **Three-Question Test**:

1. Is this information coming from several sources, or just one?
2. Does it make sense, or does it seem exaggerated?
3. Is it trying to help me or just make me react emotionally?

Nina closes her eyes and listens differently. Some voices are urgent, chaotic, contradicting each other. Others repeat the same idea, steady and calm. She grips her lyre and plays a single, clear note. The forest hums in response. The loudest whispers fade. Only a few voices remain, soft but certain.

She smiles, ‘now I see the way.’

She steps forward, this time following only the voice that passes the **Three-Question Test**. Between two great trees, a path appears.

‘Well done, young musician! By confronting the **contradictions**, **you were able to sort them out and choose logically**. Now let’s follow this path!’

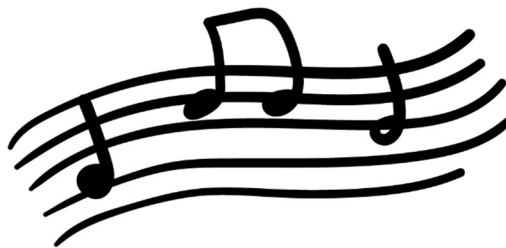
Chapter 4: The Echoing Cavern

There is no trace of the harp, but the path leads them to a cave. Discouraged by this failure, Nina's heart is not really in the adventure anymore.

‘You may not have found the Harp of Truth, but you have learned what **critical thinking** is:

- thinking,
- comparing
- finding your own way.

They reach the entrance of the cavern, but a heavy stone blocks the way. They push with all their strength and finally squeezes through. Inside, the air is thick, the darkness pressing in. A strange melody guides them deeper—but something feels off.



The walls begin to close in. A large stone falls in front of Pilos, isolating him from Nina. She has no other choice than stopping this alone.

Her heart pounds. She takes a deep breath. **Panic won't help her think clearly.**

– Focus, she tells herself. The melody is the key. But which part can I trust?

She listens carefully. The tune repeats, but **some notes seem twisted, distorted by the cave's echoes**. Not everything she hears is reliable. She remembers a technique Pilos taught her during the way: the **"Traffic Light" Method**:

STOP – Be cautious

- Not all information is reliable. Some voices are too loud, some try to distract you.
- Ask yourself: Is this exaggerated? Does it sound too good (or too scary) to be true?

THINK – Analyse and compare

- Look for patterns. What stays the same every time? What changes?
- Ask yourself: What do I already know? Are there other clues?
- Take a step back: Could emotions or illusions be influencing me?

GO – Trust and move forward

- Once you've filtered out distractions and checked your clues, trust your thinking.
- Follow the signals that remain clear and consistent.

Slowly, she filters the notes. Then, with confidence, she plays only the correct melody on her lyre.

The walls stop. The cavern falls silent, and Pilos manages to come to meet Nina again. He applauds, relieved. 'Well done, Nina! You've understood. In this chaos of information, you've been able to **make choices**: distinguish the reliable elements from those that cloud your judgement.'

Nina smiles, a little proud of herself. She gets it now: not all information is trustworthy—she needs to sort them out before she acts.

Chapter 5: The path of truth

As the two friends step out of the cavern, they take a deep breath. The night air feels lighter, yet the weight of their quest still lingers.

'There's only one clue left – the stars', Nina murmurs.

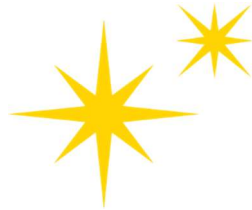
Braving an enchanted forest and an eerie cave, Nina has done it. But finding the Harp of Truth in the stars? That seems impossible.

'Apollo was counting on me... and I can't even find the Harp, she says', her voice shaking.

Pilos shakes his head. 'The truth isn't just about finding the right answer. It's also about **how** you look for it.'

Nina stays silent. His words make sense, but the feeling of failure still clings to her. She lifts her head, searching for clarity in the night sky. Then, something catches her eye—a constellation, shaped like a harp! ‘Pilos, look! It’s there!’ she exclaims.

**Could the Harp of Truth really be hidden among the stars?
Or... is the lesson something else?**



She remembers the forest and the cave: the whispers, the false notes. Not everything was true—but she learned to filter the right information.

Pilos takes a compass out of his pocket. **The Thinking Compass** —a mental tool to **orient herself** when she feels lost:

NORTH: What do I already know for sure?

EAST: What new clues have I gathered?

SOUTH: Are my emotions clouding my judgment?

WEST: What’s the bigger picture?

She closes her eyes and follows her mental compass.

- **North:** I know I’ve followed every clue carefully.
- **East:** The Harp is in the stars, not on land. That must mean something.
- **South:** I feel like I’ve failed, but is that really true? Or am I just doubting myself?
- **West:** The lesson was never about an object—it was about **learning to trust my own reasoning.**

Her eyes sparkle with excitement. ‘Maybe the Harp of Truth isn’t an object’, she whispers. Maybe it’s a lesson in knowing when I’ve gathered enough clues and thought things through.

‘Now that’s real thinking!’ Pilos grins. ‘Apollo didn’t send you to find a golden harp. He sent you to learn how to listen—to the world, to others, and to **yourself**.’

Nina smiles. The constellation still shines above, but its meaning is clearer now. Truth isn’t just something you find—it’s something you **build** by questioning, thinking, and listening to yourself.



Today, I learnt...

The truth is **not always simple or unique**. To find our way, we must learn to **listen carefully, question what we hear, and think for ourselves**. Critical thinking is like navigating a journey—you need the right tools to stay on course.

1. We filter what we hear.
2. We then adjust the confidence we have in it, to compare and verify its accuracy.
3. We take the time to reflect on our own knowledge and what can influence our judgement (with our **metacognition**).

MASTER YOUR MIND

Question 1

When Nina meets the oracle, she gives her a different version of the whereabouts of the Harp of Truth.

If you were in Nina's shoes, how would you know which path to choose?

1. I'd choose the most convincing path.
2. I'll write down everything she said and try to see if the story matches up.
3. I'd ask for someone else's advice to get an outside view.



All these approaches show a way of thinking. Do you recognise the one you usually use?

Question 2

When Nina discovers that the directions she has received are a trap, she remains calm and reflects on the clues the oracle has given her.

If you were faced with a difficult puzzle, what would you do to get ahead?

1. I would ask someone I trust for help.
2. I'd go back and check the clues I'd already found.
3. I'll try several solutions quickly to see if one works.



These strategies show different ways of dealing with challenges. Do you think any of them suit you?

Question 3

Now it's your turn to play. Draw your own mind map starting from this question:

When you have to solve a problem or make a decision, how do you feel?



Each way of approaching a problem has its strengths and challenges.

TOOLBOX

These tools can help you in the way you learn.

We all learn in different ways.

Choose the tool that best suits your needs.

You can download the tools on the website of the project

1/ Mind Map

Objective: Organising thoughts and planning

Use this tool when you want to prepare for a presentation, review a lesson, write a story, or think through a problem. It helps you organise your ideas and see how they connect.

2/ My Debate Helper

Objective: develop critical thinking, reasoning, and evaluate arguments

You can use this tool before and after a group debate or discussion to help you plan what you'll say, pay attention to how it's going, and think about what you learned.

3/ Traffic light

Objective: monitor and regulate your thinking

This exercise helps you slow down, think carefully, and understand better before speaking, asking a question, or solving a problem



CogniQuest is a project created by organisations and schools from Belgium, Croatia, France, Greece and Poland.

Together, they have developed tools to help you think about your thinking. This is called metacognition - a fancy word that means “learning how to learn”.

Through these tales, you’ll discover different ways to solve problems, stay focused, and reflect on how you learn best.

Explore the whole CogniQuest collections on the website of the project:

www.cogniquet.eu



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