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Zeus  (z s)

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n.

Greek Mythology

The principal god of the Greek pantheon, ruler of the heavens, and father of other gods and mortal heroes.

[Greek; see **dyeu-** [in the Appendix of Indo-European roots.](#)]

Word History: Homer's *Iliad* calls him "Zeus who thunders on high" and Milton's *Paradise Lost*, "the Thunderer," so it is surprising to learn that the Indo-European ancestor of Zeus was a god of the bright daytime sky. Zeus is a somewhat unusual noun in Greek, having both a stem *Zēn-* (as in the philosopher *Zeno*'s name) and a stem *Di-* (earlier *Diw-*). In the *Iliad*, prayers to Zeus begin with the vocative form *Zeū pater*, "o father Zeus." Father Zeus was the head of the Greek pantheon; another ancient Indo-European society, the Romans, called the head of their pantheon *Iūpiter* or *Iuppiter*—Jupiter. The *-piter* part of his name is just a reduced form of *pater*, "father," and *Iū-* corresponds to the *Zeū* in Greek: *Iūpiter* is therefore precisely equivalent to *Zeū pater* and could be translated "father Jove." *Jove* itself is from Latin *Iov-*, the stem form of *Iūpiter*, an older version of which in Latin was *Diov-*, showing that the word once had a *d* as in Greek *Diw-*. An exact parallel to Zeus and Jupiter is found in the Sanskrit god addressed as *Dyaus pitar*: *pitar* is "father," and *dyaus* means "sky." We can equate Greek *Zeū pater*, Latin *Iū-piter*, and Sanskrit *dyaus pitar* and reconstruct an Indo-European deity, **Dyēus pāter*, who was associated with the sky and addressed as "father." Comparative philology has revealed that the "sky" word refers specifically to the bright daytime sky, as it is derived from the root meaning "to shine." This root also shows up in Latin *diēs* "day," borrowed into English in words like *diurnal*. Closely related to these words is Indo-European **deiwos* "god," which shows up, among other places, in the name of the Old English god *Tīw* in Modern English *Tuesday*, "Tīw's day." **Deiwos* is also the source of Latin *dīvus* "pertaining to the gods," whence English *divine* and the Italian operatic *diva*, and *deus*, "god," whence *deity*.



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Zeus

detail of a 6th-century bc Greek black-figure amphora showing Athena emerging from the head of Zeus

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Indo-European & Semitic Roots Appendices

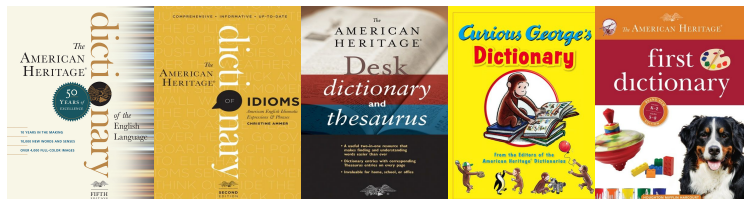
Thousands of entries in the dictionary include etymologies that trace their origins back to reconstructed proto-languages. You can obtain more information about these forms in our online appendices:

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The Indo-European appendix covers nearly half of the Indo-European roots that have left their mark on English words. A more complete treatment of Indo-European roots and the English words derived from them is available in our [Dictionary of Indo-European Roots](#).

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