# Orpheus and Eurydice Summary

* We start off with a pretty typical boy-meets-girl story. And after they meet, Orpheus (who's a famous musician) and Eurydice fall in love and get married. The end.
* Oh wait.
* Hymen, the god of marriage, is present at the wedding ceremony. He refuses to offer any words of encouragement or even crack a smile. We'd say this is a pretty bad sign for the future of the marriage.
* After the wedding, Eurydice decides to get some fresh air. She takes a walk through a nearby meadow, dancing and laughing with her bridesmaids (the Naiads). Natch.
* In some versions of the myth, the lustful shepherd Aristaeus (son of [Apollo](http://www.shmoop.com/apollo/) and Cyrene) surprises Eurydice. He's pretty hot for her, and he chases her along a nearby riverbank.
* Desperate to avoid his sexual advances, Eurydice stops looking where she's going and stumbles across a poisonous viper. Uh oh.
* Sure enough, the snake bites Eurydice's ankle and she dies. The end.
* Nope, still not.
* Orpheus is (obviously) overcome with grief at his wife's death. And just like any good musician, he expressed himself by singing the blues. Literally.
* Fed up with his depression, Orpheus decides to take action. His plan? Travel to the Underworld and ask [Hades](http://www.shmoop.com/hades-pluto/) to let Eurydice go. Seems straightforward enough.
* As he enters the Underworld, Orpheus uses his music to charm the spirits and monsters who live there. Ever get serenaded by a cute guy with a stringed instrument? Hard to resist, right?
* Even animals love him. Cerberus, the three-headed dog who guards the entrance, stands motionless and lets Orpheus pass. Everyone else is moved, too: the grotesque Furies weep, Sisyphus stops moving his rock, the vulture stops pecking at Tityus' liver, and the souls of the dead gather to hear him play. So yeah, guess he chose the right song.
* In any case, Orpheus finds [Hades](http://www.shmoop.com/hades-pluto/) and Persephone, the King and Queen of the Underworld. Now the convincing begins.
* He makes a grand speech and plays his lyre to try to persuade these two to let Eurydice go. His strategy? He reminds Hades that *he* fell in love once, too (with Persephone). Also, since everyone dies eventually, they'll eventually get her (and his!) soul back anyway. So why not let Eurydice live for a few more years?
* Orpheus' eloquent speech melts the hearts of Hades and Persephone. Surprise, surprise. And – success! – they agree to free Eurydice.
* But there is a small catch. Hades says Eurydice must walk behind Orpheus as they travel back to the upper world – Orpheus is forbidden from looking back at Eurydice until they have exited the Underworld.
* Doesn't seem too tough, right? Who doesn't love a little delayed gratification anyway?
* So Orpheus agrees, and the couple begins their ascent.
* Orpheus can hear Eurydice's footsteps behind him and before long, he can see the exit. He steps out of the cave and into the light. He made it!
* But (yes, there's a but – we know you saw it coming) due either to excitement for having escaped or concern for his wife, Orpheus totally forgets about Hades' warning and turns to look at Eurydice.
* NO!
* Eurydice is *just* on the verge of exiting the cave, but she hasn't quite made it out.
* We repeat: NO!
* At that moment, three loud noises echo throughout the Underworld, signaling that something is very, very wrong.
* Orpheus and Eurydice lock eyes for a split second. Eurydice just barely manages to say "Farewell!" before she is sucked back down to the Underworld.
* Orpheus reaches for her – but he's grabbing at air. (How sad is this?)
* Our guy is stunned. What should he do? He tries to enter the Underworld a second time, but this time the Ferryman on the River Styx won't let him pass.
* Now it's time for more wallowing. For somewhere between seven days and seven months (depending on what version you read), Orpheus sits weeping on the banks of the River Styx.
* Ugh.
* Eventually, he wanders back to Thrace, still bemoaning the loss of Eurydice and singing the blues (literally).
* Things aren't going well for this guy, and sure enough, for the rest of this life, Orpheus spurns the romantic advances of all other women. Now *that's* loyalty.
* Among Orpheus' rejected lovers are the Maenads, a group of women who worship the drunken god [Bacchus](http://www.shmoop.com/dionysus-bacchus/). They're a pretty unruly bunch, and when Orpheus turns them down, they are not happy campers.
* The Maenads try to throw sticks and stones at him, but the objects refuse to hit Orpheus because they're enchanted by his music. This guy is even moving sticks and stones not to break his bones – impressive.
* On to plan B: the Maenads rip Orpheus limb from limb, and scatter his body parts across the land. They also tear off his head and throw it in a river.
* Well, then.
* Even as Orpheus' head floats down the river, he calls out for Eurydice. How's that for romantic/creepy?
* Orpheus' head eventually washes up on the island of Lesbos, where it's discovered by the Muses. They also find his limbs and give them a proper burial.
* According to some accounts of the myth, the spirits of Orpheus and Eurydice end up finding each other in the Elysian Fields, which is the nicest part of the Underworld. Aw.
* But some party pooper accounts don't agree that they are ever reunited. We like to think the first way is what really happened.

# Theme of The Power of Music in Orpheus and Eurydice

Ultimately, music serves two major functions in this myth. First, it allows Orpheus to express himself (and express himself he does!), and second, it alters people's moods, actions, and ideas. Who ever said that rock and roll couldn't change the world?

## Questions About The Power of Music

1. Has listening to music ever changed your views on life?
2. Do you think it's fair that Orpheus gets special treatment because of his musical abilities?
3. Why is music such a powerful art form? Is sad music more powerful than happy music?
4. Lyre music was very popular with the Greeks. Can you think of any modern music that has been able to affect how large groups of people think and feel?

# Theme of Love and Trust in Orpheus and Eurydice

Love is a powerful motivator. It can make people do irrationally amazing things ("look, honey, I baked a giant cake in the shape of your face!") and irrationally stupid things (see first example). In the Orpheus and Eurydice myth, we find instances of both amazing and stupid things done in the name of love.

Orpheus is so heartbroken when he loses Eurydice that he travels to the Underworld for her, which is irrational and awesome. But then, as they make their way to the upper world, he turns around to look at her. This is irrational and way less awesome, since he knows that doing so will send his wife plummeting back to Hades.

This second example is definitely an exercise in trusting the ones we love. Orpheus can hear his wife's footsteps, but he's never quite sure that she's there. Had he been able to hold out, and simply trust that Eurydice was behind him, they might have made it back to Earth and lived happily ever after.

## Questions About Love and Trust

1. Why do you think Hades made a rule that Orpheus was not allowed to look at Eurydice until they reached the upper world?
2. Different versions of the myth give different reasons for Orpheus turning around. Some say that he got excited and forgot his instructions. Others say he was plagued with doubt, and needed to make sure that Eurydice was still there. Why do you think Orpheus looked back?
3. If you were Eurydice, would you forgive Orpheus for turning around?
4. Some endings of the story imply that Orpheus and Eurydice never see each other again, while others say that they are reunited in the Underworld after Orpheus dies (specifically, in the beautiful Elysian Fields). Which ending is more powerful? Why?