It was a beautiful day like all the others in this land; the sun shone brightly in the sky, the hills were lush and green, and flowers blossomed from the earth. The lovely young maiden, Persephone, frolicked with her friends upon the hillside, as her mother Demeter sat near by, and her father Zeus peered down from the sky above. Laughter could be heard as the young girls gathered handfuls of purple crocuses, royal blue irises and sweet-smelling hyacinths. Persephone thought to bring some to her mother, but was soon distracted by a vision of the most enchanting flower she had ever seen. It was a narcissus, the exact flower her father hoped that she would find. As she reached down to pluck it from its resting place, her feet began to tremble and the earth was split in two. Life for Persephone would never be the same again.

From this gaping crevice in the ground emerged Hades, the awe-inspiring god of the underworld. Before Persephone could even think to utter a word, she was whisked off her feet onto the god’s golden chariot. The thought of being taken to the black depths below filled the young woman with terror, but any screams of protest were soon lost within the darkness, as they descended to the Underworld below.

The pain in Demeter’s heart told her something was terribly wrong. She searched high and low for her dear daughter, who had vanished from both the heavens and the earth. Consumed by depression over the loss of her child, she soon ceased to remember her worldly duties as the goddess of grain and growth. As she watched the plants wither and die all around her, she felt her own hopes begin to fade.

At the same time, deep down in the realm of the dead, Hades hoped to explain his actions to the sweet Persephone. Professing his love, he told her of the plan her father helped deploy and begged her to stay and be his wife. Yet Persephone longed for something more: the comforts of her mother’s home and a view of the lush green grass and blue sky up above.

It did not take long for Demeter’s unhappiness to be replaced with rage. Still unable to find her daughter, she flew to the home of Zeus and demanded that Persephone be found at once. She also questioned every immortal she could find and eventually uncovered Zeus’s plot. In an attempt to appease Demeter’s growing anger, he dispatched a messenger to retrieve their daughter from the depths.

Upon his entry to the Underworld, the messenger Hermes was amazed at what he found. Instead of finding a frail and fearful Persephone, he found a radiant and striking Queen of the Dead. She had adjusted well to her new position, saying she had even found her calling. The goddess was now in charge of greeting the new arrivals and helping them adapt to their new life. While she wished to see her mother up above, she was torn by her desire to remain at Hades’ side.

Hoping to comfort Persephone in her confusion, Hades came to his Queen’s side. He gently kissed her forehead and urged her, “Do not fret, eat instead from this fruit I know you will like.” As she pressed the red pomegranate seeds to her lips, she listened to his words. He told her he would miss her very much, but her duties as a daughter mattered too. So, she climbed into the chariot and bid her husband farewell, as Hermes sped them off to the middle realm of mother earth, the home of her devoted mother.

The flowers sang joyfully of her return, while her mother beamed with pride. Yet, the child that she had born and raised had changed while she was gone. She had grown into a goddess, one both beautiful and wise and the more that Demeter inquired about her experiences below, the more she came to worry that the life they knew was gone. She recalled a declaration Zeus had made from the heavens up above: in order for Persephone to return to the home and life she had known, Persephone could bring nothing back from her time in the Underworld. However, the ruby stain upon her lips spoke of the beauty’s fate. Persephone had eaten the food of the other world. It could not be erased.
Even so, Zeus loved his daughter too much to send her back to Hades without the hope of ever returning again to her mother. So, each spring Persephone comes back with the flowers that pave her way and each fall when she leaves again for the Underworld below, her mother mourns and winter comes, while she waits for her return. Yet, for Persephone there is no remorse. She looks forward to the time she spends as Hades’ Queen and wife, and to guiding those who have lost their way to the next phase of their life.

**Demeter & Persephone • Version 2**

Persephone was the daughter of Demeter, goddess of the fertility of the earth, the seasons, and of grain. One day, Persephone was playing in a meadow when Hades, god of the underworld, burst from the ground, carried her away screaming, and took her to the underworld to be his bride. She screamed and struggled, calling for her mother, but no one heard her shouts, save Hecate, daughter of Perses.

Demeter realized that her daughter was missing, but no one, including the gods, would tell her what had happened. She searched for nine days for Demeter, until Hecate came to her and told her that she had heard Persephone screaming, but did not see what had happened.

Demeter went to earth, took on a mortal form and was taken into the house of Metaneira, who had just born a son. Demeter became a nurse to the child. She did not feed or nurse the child, but every night anointed him with ambrosia, the nectar of the gods, and breathed her sweetness upon him that he would become immortal.

When Metaneira tried to interfere with Demeter’s plans, Demeter screamed at her, telling her that she would have made the child immortal, but now his death was inevitable, and that a temple must be erected in her honor. She sent man a terrible year — a plague for the earth and the harvest. The land did not grow any crops.

Zeus grew tired of hearing complaints from the starving people of the Earth so he ordered Persephone to come back from the Underworld. He hoped that if Demeter could see her she would end the terrible famine on earth. Hades was reluctant to let his new wife go, so before she left, he gave Persephone six pomegranate seeds to eat, telling her that if she did not eat them she could never again be at her mother’s side. However, since she had eaten the pomegranate seeds, Persephone was tied to the underworld and had to return there each year for the same number of months as seeds she had eaten. For the rest of the year, she was allowed to remain with her mother and the other gods.

So great was Demeter’s happiness at being reunited with her daughter again, that the flowers began to grow and the famine of the earth was at an end. Each year, however, when her time on earth is finished, Persephone returns, Queen of the Underworld. Leaves fall and flowers shrink away again, awaiting, with Demeter, her return.

**Questions**

*Please answer the following questions on a separate piece of paper. You do not have to write the questions, but you must answer in complete sentences. Title your paper, “Demeter and Persephone.”*

1) What occurrences in nature are explained by this myth?

2) In a paragraph (six-sentence minimum), compare and contrast the two versions of this myth. What elements of the story are added/ left out of each? Which version do you think is better, and why? Be sure to support your ideas with facts, quotes, etc. from the stories.