GREEK MYTHOLOGY
THE NINE GREEK MUSES

URANIA
Muse of Astronomy

THALIA
Muse of Comedy

EUTERPE
Muse of Lyric Poetry

POLYHymnia
Muse of Sacred Poetry

CALLIOPE
Muse of Epic Poetry

MELPOMENA
Muse of Tragedy

ERATO
Muse of Love Poetry

CLIO
Muse of History
THE NINE MUSES OF THE GREEK MYTHOLOGY

"Sing to me oh Muse"... The Nine Muses of the Greek Mythology were deities that gave artists, philosophers and individuals the necessary inspiration for creation. Hesiod reveals that they were called Muses or Mouses in Greek, as the Greek word "mosis" refers to the desire and wish. The word museum also comes from the Greek Muses.

All the ancient writers appeal to the Muses at the beginning of their work. Homer asks the Muses both in the Iliad and Odyssey to help him tell the story in the most proper way, and until today the Muses are symbols of inspiration and artistic creation. In painting the Muses are usually presented as ethereal women with divine beauty, holding laurels and other items depending on their faculty.

According to the Greek Myths, God Zeus bewildered the young woman Mnemosyne and slept with her for nine consecutive nights. The result of their encounter was the Nine Muses, who were similar to everything.

Mnemosyne gave the babies to Nymph Eufime and Apollo the God. The Nine Muses were: Clio, Euterpe, Thalia, Melpomeni, Terpsichore, Erato, Polymnia, Ourania and Calliope. When they grew up they showed their tendency to the arts, taught by God Apollo himself.

They were not interested in anything of the regular human everyday life and they wanted to dedicate their lives to the Arts. Apollo brought them to the big and beautiful Mount Elikonas, where the older Temple of Zeus used to be. Ever since, the Muses supported and encouraged creation, enhancing imagination and inspiration of the artists.

Muses and Arts
According to the Greek Mythology, two Muses invented theory and practice in learning, three Muses invented the musical vibrations in Lyre, four Muses invented the four known dialects in the language – Attica, Ionian, Aeolian and Dorian – and five muses the five human senses. Seven muses invented the seven chords of the lyre, the seven celestial zones, the seven planets and the seven vocals of the Greek Alphabet.

Analytically the Nine Muses are:
1. Clio: The Muse Clio discovered history and guitar. History was named Clio in the ancient years, because it refers to "kleos" the Greek word for the heroic acts. Clio was always represented with a clarion in the right arm and a book in the left hand.

2. Euterpe: Muse Euterpe discovered several musical instruments, courses and dialectic. She was always depicted holding a flute, while many instruments were always around her.

3. Thalia: Muse Thalia was the protector of comedy; she discovered comedy, geometry, architectural science and agriculture. She was also protector of Symposiums. She was always depicted holding a theatrical – comedy mask.
4. Melpomene: Opposite from Thalia, Muse Melpomene was the protector of Tragedy; she invented tragedy, rhetoric speech and Melos. She was depicted holding a tragedy mask and usually bearing a bat.

5. Terpsichore: Terpsichore was the protector of dance; she invented dances, the harp and education. She was called Terpsichore because she was enjoying and having fun with dancing ("Terpo" in Greek refers to be amused). She was depicted wearing laurels on her head, holding a harp and dancing.

6. Erato: Muse Erato was the protector of Love and Love Poetry – as well as wedding. Her name comes from the Greek word “Eros” that refers to the feeling of falling in love. She was depicted holding a lyre and love arrows and bows.

7. Polymnia: Muse Polymnia was the protector of the divine hymns and mimic art; she invented geometry and grammar. She was depicted looking up to the Sky, holding a lyre.

8. Ourania: Muse Ourania was the protector of the celestial objects and stars; she invented astronomy. She was always depicted bearing stars, a celestial sphere and a bow compass.

9. Calliope: Muse Calliope was the superior Muse. She was accompanying kings and princes in order to impose justice and serenity. She was the protector of heroic poems and rhetoric art. According to the myth, Homer asks from Calliope to inspire him while writing Iliad and Odyssey, and, thus, Calliope is depicted holding laurels in one hand and the two Homeric poems in the other hand.

The Nine Muses have been inspiring artists since the antiquity and there countless paintings, drawings, designs, poems and statues dedicated to them. All artists of the Renaissance acknowledged their importance in artistic creation, dedicating their works to the Muses. Today, the most famous depiction of the Muses in sculpture is in Greece, in Corfu; the Empress Sissi of Austria had their statues made for her, in order to ornament the garden of her retreat house in Corfu, the famous Achilleion.

http://www.greekmyths-greekmythology.com/nine-muses-in-greek-mythology/
Muses, Graces, and Fates Information Chart

Muses (Mousa): Daughters of Zeus and Mnemosyne (Memory); goddesses of arts.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Meaning of Name</th>
<th>Domain</th>
<th>Symbols</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Calliope</td>
<td>The Fair Voiced</td>
<td>Epic Poetry</td>
<td>Writing Tablet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clio</td>
<td>The Proclaimer</td>
<td>History</td>
<td>Scroll</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Erato</td>
<td>The Lovely</td>
<td>Lyric Poetry, Mimicry</td>
<td>Lyre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Euterpe</td>
<td>The Giver of Pleasure</td>
<td>Music</td>
<td>Flute</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melpomene</td>
<td>The Songstress</td>
<td>Tragedy</td>
<td>Tragic Mask</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Polyhymnia</td>
<td>She of Many Hymns</td>
<td>Sacred Poetry, Mime</td>
<td>Pensive Look</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terpsichore</td>
<td>The Whirler</td>
<td>Dancing, Choral Singing</td>
<td>Dance with Lyre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thalia</td>
<td>The Flourishing</td>
<td>Comedy</td>
<td>Comic Mask</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urania</td>
<td>The Heavenly</td>
<td>Astronomy</td>
<td>Celestial Globe</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Graces (Charities): Daughters of Zeus and Eurynome (a Titan's child); goddess of who bestowed beauty and charm.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Meaning of Name</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aglaia</td>
<td>Splendor or Radiance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Euphrosyne</td>
<td>Joy, Mirth, Festivity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thalía</td>
<td>Good Cheer, Rejoicing, Flowering</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fates (Moirai): Daughters of Zeus and Themis (Night); goddess who wove the threads of life for each mortal being.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Meaning of Name</th>
<th>Specially</th>
<th>Seen As</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Clotho</td>
<td>Spinner and Twister</td>
<td>Spun the thread</td>
<td>Young women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lachesis</td>
<td>The Lot Caster</td>
<td>Determined the course of a person's life</td>
<td>Middle aged</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Atropos</td>
<td>The Unyielding One</td>
<td>Cut the thread to end a person's life</td>
<td>Old had</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Reformatted and modified by Stephanie Nugent for use in English 9

Lesson Connection: Inspired by Muses, Graces and Fates
Copyright The Kennedy Center. All rights reserved.
ARTSEDGE materials may be reproduced for educational purposes.
The Muses, the Graces, and the Fates

The Muses

In ancient Greece, the Muses (mousai), nine daughters of Zeus and Mnemosyne (memory) were said to give inspiration to poets and artists. They are: Calliope (epic poetry); Clio (history); Erato (love poetry and mimicry); Euterpe (music); Melpomene (tragedy); Polyhymnia (hymns, sacred poetry, mime); Terpsichore (dancing); Thalia (comedy); and Urania (astronomy). They are closely associated with Apollo and Dionysus. Apollo and Dionysus were brothers and sons of Zeus. Dionysus invented the lyre and gave it to Apollo who loved playing it. Apollo was the god of music and is often shown with the Muses. Dionysus enjoyed good times, music, and theatre.

Mortals inspired by Muses include Homer (poet), Socrates (philosopher), and Aristophanes (playwright). Vase painters and sculptors decorated pieces with the Muses as a central theme. It is believed that there were originally three muses, but the number increased to nine. The Romans gave the Muses names and attributes. The word "music" has its origin in the word "muse."

The Muses continued to inspire painters, like the Dutch master, Vermeer, the German painter Hans Rottenhammer, and Simon Vouet, a French artist in the 16th and 17th Centuries.

American poet James G. Percival wrote "An Ode to Music" in the early 1800s. The Muses inspired waltzes and marches in the 1800s: Julius Bernstein's "Nine Muse Waltz"(1879). The 20th Century composer, Igor Stravinsky, who was fascinated by the ancient Greeks, wrote Apollon Musagete. Choreographer George Balanchine visualized the music and created movement for the god Apollo and the Muses Terpsichore, Polyhymnia, and Calliope to create the ballet, Apollo. In 1928, this ballet made George Balanchine famous and it remains in dance repertoires throughout the world.

Function in literature

The muses are typically invoked at or near the beginning of an epic poem or classical Greek hymn. They have served as aids to an author of prose, too, sometimes represented as the true speaker, for whom an author is only a mouthpiece. Originally, the invocation of the Muse was an indication that the speaker was working inside the poetic tradition, according to the established formulas.

Six Classic Examples

**Homer**, in Book I of *The Odyssey*:

"Sing to me of the man, Muse, the man of twists and turns
driven time and again off course, once he had plundered
the hallowed heights of Troy." (Robert Fagles translation, 1996)

**Virgil**, in Book I of the *Aeneid*:

O Muse! the causes and the crimes relate:
What goddess was provok'd, and whence her hate;
For what offense the Queen of Heav'n began
To persecute so brave, so just a man; [...] (John Dryden translation, 1697)

**Catullus**, in Carmen I:

"And so, have them for yourself, whatever kind of book it is,
and whatever sort, oh patron Muse
let it last for more than one generation, eternally."
(Student translation, 2007)

**Dante Alighieri**, in Canto II of The *Inferno*:

O Muses, O high genius, aid me now!
O memory that engraved the things I saw,
Here shall your worth be manifest to all! (Anthony Esolen translation, 2002)

**John Milton**, opening of Book 1 of *Paradise Lost*:

Of Man's first disobedience, and the fruit
Of that forbidden tree whose mortal taste
Brought death into the World, and all our woe,
With loss of Eden. till one greater Man
Restore us, and regain the blissful Seat.
Sing, Heavenly Muse, [...] (Anthony Esolen translation, 2002)

**William Shakespeare**, Act I, Prologue of *Henry V*:

Chorus: O for a Muse of fire, that would ascend
The brightest heaven of invention,
A kingdom for a stage, princes to act
And monarchs to behold the swelling scene!

**Geoffrey Chaucer**, in Book II of *Troilus and Criseyde*:

O lady myn, that called art Cleo.
Thow be my speed fro this forth, and my Muse.
To ryme wel this book til I haue do;
Me nedeth here noon othere art to vse.
for-whi to euery louere I me excuse
That of no sentement I this endite,
But out of Latyn in my tonge it write.

"SING TO ME, OH MUSE..."

The Muses of Greek mythology had one of the most important functions of all: to inspire poets and promote the arts and sciences. The fortunate person inspired by them was held in the highest esteem and considered sacred far beyond any priest. The Muses were often described as the queens of song, and no Olympian banquet was complete without them.

According to the earliest writers the Muses were the inspiring goddesses of songs, and they eventually were portrayed as divinities presiding over the different kinds of poetry and over the arts and sciences. As patrons of the fine arts, the Muses promoted the more civilized aspects of human existence.

The ancient writer Hesiod said of them, "They are all of one mind, their hearts are set upon song and their spirit is free from care. He is happy whom the Muses love. For though a man has sorrow and grief in his soul, yet when the servant of the Muses sings, at once he forgets his dark thoughts and remembers not his troubles. Such is the holy gift of the Muses to men."

That was the reason that the Muses were frequently invoked over thousands of years of artistic expression and remain yet today reference points for artists, poets, writers and musicians.

They were said to be the daughters of Zeus, king of the Olympian gods, and Mnemosyne, the goddess of Memory, even though others claim that their parents were actually Uranus (Sky) and Gaea (Mother Earth). They were born in Pieria, at the foot of Mount Olympus.

After the Titans had been defeated and Zeus had consolidated his rule and established himself as the supreme Olympian, he lay with the Titaness Mnemosyne for nine nights because he needed to create someone to sing of his glory. The result was the Muses.

Seated on lofty Mount Olympus near the throne of Zeus, they sang of his greatness, about the marvelous deeds of the splendid Greek heroes and of the origin of the stars, the earth, and all its wonderful creatures. They also delighted in parties and feasts and took great pleasure in song and dance.

But they weren't just beautiful party animals...It was the Muses who discovered letters and thus created poetry and writing. They were brilliant.

The Muses took joy in communication and gave birth to dialogue, in essence helping to create that which they sang about. By praising the gods, they completed their glory. By boasting of the glorious deeds of valiant warriors they forever etched those names in history - If the Muse didn't sing about you, you were forgotten...it was almost as if you had never existed.

The god dearest to them was Apollo and they were his faithful followers. For that reason he is often called the Musegetes, which means "Leader of the Muses". A few others claim that Hypnos, the god of Sleep, was their favorite. Beside them on Mount Olympus were seated the three Charites (Graces), who were the attendants of Aphrodite and personified charm and beauty, and
next to the Graces sat Himerus (Desire).

After Pegasus the flying horse was born the young colt was taken in by the goddess Athena and carried to Mount Helicon where she entrusted the Muses with his care. In his excitement at meeting the sisters, young Pegasus struck the the side of the mountain with his hooves and caused the springs of Aganippe and Hippocrene to gush forth their bounty of inspiration.

These springs were sacred to the Muses as were all springs and wells.

Urania, the Muse of Astronomy and Universal Love (also an aspect of Aphrodite) showed the most interest in the rearing of Pegasus. Prophesying of his future heroic deeds and eventual celestial honor she grieved the most when Bellerophon, at Athena's beckoning, came to take Pegasus away from Mount Helicon. Urania rejoiced when Pegasus rejoined the Muses on Mount Olympus following the death of Bellerophon.

The Muses are sometimes called the Pierides, but others think that these were nine sisters, daughters of a man called Pierus, who dared challenge the Muses in a contest of song and, having been defeated, were turned into magpies, greenfinches, goldfinches, ducks and other birds.

The Pierides were not the only ones punished by the Muses for competing against them. A minstrel named Thamyris engaged in a musical contest with the Muses in a city called Dorium, but of course he lost and they took his eyes and minstrelsy. But others say that, for his foolish boast against the Muses, he was first punished in Hades. Demodocus was another man whom they deprived of his eyes, but at least he received the gift of song from them.

Even though the Sirens were supposed to be daughters of the Muse of dance Terpsichore and the river god Achelous, still they were prompted by Hera to compete in song with the Muses and naturally couldn't match them. As punishment the Muses plucked their feathers and made crowns out of them for themselves.

Another one of their victims was King Pyreneus of Daulis. He attempted to forcibly seduce the Muses but perished when he leapt from the pinnacle of a tower trying to follow them - The Muses could fly...the king couldn't...

The Muses taught Aristaeus the arts of prophecy and healing, and instructed the nymph Echo to play beautiful music. Their disciples also included the Sphinx, who learned her riddle from them, and Musaeus, whom some call a son of the great poet Orpheus, was trained by the Muses.

The Muses sing usually for the gods, but they are said to have sung in other special occasions such as the funeral of Achilles, the fallen hero of the Trojan War, and the weddings of Peleus, and of Cadmus & Harmonia. But it was rare indeed for the Muses to sing other than for the gods.

The sacrifices offered to the Muses, in return for divine inspiration, consisted of libations of water or milk, and of honey.

The number of Muses varies over time. At first only one Muse was spoken of but later poets
mention three: Melete (Practice, Study), Mneme (Memory), and Aoede (Song). They were nymphs in Pieria, which is found in western Thrace, and their cult was brought to Mount Helicon in Boeotia by the Aload.

(Mount Helicon was one of the Muses' sacred mountains, the others being Pierus in Pieria, where they were born, Mount Parnassus with its Castalian spring and, naturally, Mount Olympus. The worship of the Muses was introduced from Thrace and Pieria into Boeotia, particularly the aforementioned Mount Helicon and its sacred fountains of Aganippe and Hippocrene.)

Eventually it became accepted that there were nine muses: Calliope, Clio, Erato, Euterpe, Melpomene, Polyhymnia, Terpsichore, Thalia, and Urania. Each had her own domain: Calliope is the eldest and most distinguished of the nine Muses and initially identified with philosophy. She is the Muse of eloquence and epic or heroic poetry. Calliope, which means "beautiful voice", is the mother of the great poets and musicians Orpheus and Linus with Apollo.

When Persephone, goddess of the Underworld, argued with the goddess of love Aphrodite over the affections of handsome Adonis, Zeus sent wise Calliope to be the judge and arbitress. She decided that Adonis should spent part of the year with Persephone and the rest with Aphrodite. Her emblems are a stylus and wax tablets, and sometimes with a roll of paper or a book.

Clio is the Muse of historical and heroic poetry. With Pierus, the king of Macedonia, she is the mother of Hyacinth, who was accidentally killed by his beloved Apollo while practicing throwing the discus one day.

She was credited for introducing the Phoenician alphabet into Greece. Her attribute is usually a parchment scroll or a set of tablets. She is often also represented in a sitting or standing attitude, with an open roll of paper, or chest of books.

Her name means "Proclaimer" and she is so named because her songs and those of the poets bestow everlasting glory upon those praised by her.

Erato is the Muse of lyric poetry, particularly love and erotic poetry, and mimicry. Her name means "Lovely" and she is usually depicted with a lyre. She is so named because she turns those who follow her into men who are desired and worthy to be loved. She is particularly fond of the poets of love.

Euterpe's name means "Delight" and indeed she brings delight and joy to all those who hear her sing. She was the Muse of lyric poetry and music, particularly the flute, which she invented. The double-flute is her attribute.

Melpomene is the Muse of tragedy. She is usually represented with a tragic mask, the club of Hercules or a sword, and wearing the cothurnus, which are the boots traditionally worn by tragic actors.

Sometimes she holds a knife or club in one hand, a mask in the other, and her head is surrounded with vine leaves. Her name loosely translates to "choir" and she is named because of her chanting which charms and inspires her listeners.
Polyhymnia is the Greek Muse of the sublime and sacred hymn, eloquence and dance. She is usually represented in a pensive or meditating position and appears without any attribute. She is a serious looking woman, dressed in a long cloak and resting with an elbow on a pillar. Sometimes she holds a finger to her mouth.

Her name means "many songs" and is sometimes spelled Polymnia. She is so named because by her great praises she brings honor and distinction to writers and poets whose works have won for them immortal fame.

Terpsichore is the Muse of dancing and the dramatic chorus, and later of lyric poetry. Hence the word terpsichorean, pertaining to dance. She is usually represented seated and holding a lyre or a plectrum. According to some traditions, she is the mother of the Sirens with the river-god Achelous. She is also occasionally mentioned as the mother of Linus by Apollo.

Terpsichore delights her disciples with the good things to be attained from education, choral dance and song. Those who have honored her in dances are dearest to her.

Thalia presided over comedy and pastoral, merry and idyllic poetry. She also favored rural pursuits and is represented holding a comic mask and a shepherd’s staff, or a wreath of ivy, which are the attributes she is most often associated with. She is worshipped because the fame of those whose praises she sings flourishes and lasts for long periods of time.

Please note that Thalia is also the name of one of the three Graces (Charites).

Urania is the Greek Muse of astronomy, astrology and Universal love. Along with her sister Muse Terpsichore she is occasionally mentioned as the mother of Linus by Apollo. She is represented with a globe in her left hand and a peg in her right hand. Urania is dressed in a cloak embroidered with stars and she keeps her eyes towards the sky.

Her name means "Heavenly" and Urania is so named because she raises her disciples to heavenly heights. Among her other talents she could foretell the future by the position of the stars. Those who are most concerned with philosophy and the heavens are dearest to her.

http://mythman.com/
THE NINE MUSES

At Delphi and other spots of worship in the ancient world, the Muses were said to be three in number. Over the centuries, that figure grew and finally it was agreed that they were nine. Born after their mother Mnemosyne (Memory) spent nine nights with Zeus, they were beauties with blond or violet tresses (depending upon whether Hesiod or Pindar is the source). They could see into the future, and they loved the pleasures of feasting and song. Since Apollo was the god of music, poetry, and the arts, it was natural that the muses became his companions and in some cases his lovers. The muses were:

- Calliope: epic poetry
- Clio: history
- Erato: the lyre
- Euterpe: the flute
- Melpomene: tragedy
- Polyhymnia: hymns and pantomime
- Terpsichore: dance
- Thalia: comedy
- Urania: astronomy
Muses

The Muses were the daughters of Zeus and Mnemosyne, or memory. They handled artistic endeavors. Poets and other artists depended on them for help with their creations. They were popular subjects for sculptors. These inspiring ladies include (various sources differ regarding the precise number of Muses and their specific areas of responsibility, but we'll give one standard version):

- Polyhymnia: The sponsor of hymns to the gods
- Urania: The Muse of astronomy
- Calliope: The Muse of epic poetry
- Thalia: The Muse of comedy
- Terpsichore: The Muse of choral singing (lyric poetry) and dancing
- Clio: The Muse of history
- Euterpe: The Muse of flute playing
- Melpomene: The Muse of tragedy
- Erato: The Muse of poetry not accompanied by dancing, specially love poetry — hence her name

All epic poets claim that their inspiration comes from the Muses. Homer's first words in the Iliad are "Sing, Goddess, of the wrath of Achilles," and there can be no doubt that this "goddess" is a Muse. He opens the Odyssey with "Muse, tell me about a man of many ways..." The Roman poet Virgil is a little more self-centered. His Aeneid begins "I sing of arms and of a man..." and he gets around to invoking the Muses only later.
Nymphs and Muses

The Muses (1, with Apollo, their leader) and nymphs were graceful female goddesses whose allure enticed both Greek gods and kings, who often became their lovers, along with countless artists.

Daughters of Zeus and the Titan Mnemosyne, the Muses were said to live on mountains, especially on Mount Helicon in Boeotia, where the center of their cult was situated. There were nine Muses: Clio (history), Euterpe (flute playing), Thalia (comedy), Melpomene (tragedy), Terpsichore (dance), Erato (singing), Polyhymnia (mime), Urania (astronomy), and Calliope (epics). They were especially beloved by the artists who looked to them for inspiration.

The nymphs, natural spirits appearing as beautiful women, reflected the belief that the divine was present throughout nature. There were flower nymphs, water nymphs, and nymphs who existed as cooling breezes.

Daughters of Memory When the Titan goddess of memory, Mnemosyne, slept with Zeus for nine nights, she bore nine daughters called the Muses (3). Each of them had a special function in the cultural life of Mount Olympus. Originally there were only three Muses: Melete (“meditation” or “practice”), Mneme (“memory”), and Aoede (“song”).

Tree Spirits The Dryads (“tree-daughters”) (2), nymphs of the wood, were the spirits who presided over cultivated groves and wild forests alike. Each species of tree had its own group of tree spirits, and in addition each tree had a spirit of its own. Among the more important tree spirits were the Melai (“ash”), who were born from the blood of Uranus when he was castrated, and the nymphs of the laurel tree.

Nymphs of the Water There were numerous types of water nymphs. Alongside the 3,000 nymphs of the ocean, the Oceanides (4), were the nymphs of the Mediterranean, the Nereids. Another group of nymphs, the Naiads, ruled over fresh water and were found in springs, rivers, and lakes.

Figures and Stories Relevant to Nymphs and Muses

Apollo, Leader of the Muses, see pp. 103–112
Galatea, Captivation of, see p. 116
The Titans, The, see pp. 121–123
The Muses, Birth of the, see pp. 120–123
The Oceanides, see pp. 117–118
The Naiads, see pp. 120–122
Zeus, Father of the Muses, see pp. 120–123

The Daphne, who were sacred to Apollo. Because lowland trees were usually cut down for farming and grazing, the spirits of mountain pine trees, the Satyrs, received special reverence along with their fellow mountain spirits, the Satyrs.
The Muses

*The nine Muses – immortal nymphs, nature spirits whose father was Zeus – were the source of inspiration to poets, dramatists and musicians. They were precisely personified, each with her own duties and her own symbolism.*

Although most personifications of virtues or of natural phenomena were not given detailed characterizations, the Muses were an exception. This was because it was the religious duty of all poets to acknowledge them as the source of their creative artistry. Over the centuries the invocations to each became more distinctive, and the Muses developed their identities.

The Muses were the children of Zeus and Mnemosyne, the Titan goddess of memory. Each of the Muses had individual responsibilities, and together they represented the complete range of the classical arts.

Clio represented history, the recounting of which was considered an art in the classical world. Euterpe was the muse of lyric poetry and its accompanying music. Thalia inspired festivals as well as the forms of pastoral and comic poetry that evolved from the sometimes riotous processions that were a central part of many of them. Melpomene, the muse of tragedy, was always depicted as being more solemn than the others. Terpsichore influenced dancing.

Erato was the inspiration of tender or amorous poetry; in Roman times she was also associated with April, which was seen as the month of lovers. Polyhymnia's provinces were song, the lyre and musical entertainments. The ninth muse, Urania, represented astronomy, indicating the poetic and mythological importance of the stars and planets.

The Muses were flower-bedecked virgins who lived in woods and beside fountains. They were often shown dancing in a circle, holding hands, to suggest the intimate connection between all the arts. Laurel bushes were sacred to the Muses, and winners of the great festival competitions in poetry and in drama were crowned with wreaths made from these plants. The laurel was also the plant sacred to Apollo (see page 131), the Olympian patron of song and the lyre who was associated with the Muses. For this reason, he was sometimes known as Apollo Musegetes, or leader of the Muses.

This detail from a carving decorating a Roman sarcophagus dating from the 1st century AD shows two of the Muses accompanying a musician. Artists throughout the classical world called upon the Muses for creative inspiration. They were invoked at the beginning of poems and plays, and poets vied with one another to be the most fulsome in their praise of them.
In Greek and Roman mythology, nine goddesses of the arts.

The Muses were the daughters of the Titaness Mnemosyne (Memory) and Zeus. They were the source of inspiration to artists, writers, and musicians. Believed to be virgins living in the woods, sometimes near fountains, they were often depicted holding hands and dancing in a circle to symbolize the connection between the arts. The Muses embodied the highest intellectual and artistic endeavors of mankind, and their characteristics inspired people who, in turn, were obliged to acknowledge the Muses as the source of their creativity.

Calliope was the Muse of epic poetry, considered to be the most important of the arts. Euterpe inspired lyric poetry and its accompanying music. Terpsichore helped dancers. Clio was Muse to historians whose talent for explaining the past was regarded as an art form in ancient Greece. Thalia was the Muse to comedians and those involved in festivals, which were spirited occasions if she was present. The sixth Muse, Melpomene, was more serious than the others and inspired tragedy in drama. Erato was Muse to amorous poetry; the Romans connected her with April, which was considered the month of lovers. Polyhymnia was associated with song and playing the lyre. The ninth Muse, Urania, was inspirer of astronomy, important to the Greeks for its interpretive faculty in mythology and poetry.

Overseeing all the Muses was the Olympian god Apollo, who is represented in art in many periods, including Raphael's famous painting of Parnassus, the mountain near Delphi which was traditionally held sacred to Apollo and the Muses.

The most famous progeny of the Muses was Orpheus, son of the Thracian king Oeagrus and Calliope. After Apollo presented Orpheus with a lyre, the Muses taught him how to play it, compose lyrics, and sing. The result was said to be the best poetry and music the world has ever known.

Godesses of the arts
Apollo, Minerva, and the nine muses are shown, carrying symbols of their individual arts.