

Greek Mythology

Background Information

What is a Myth?

- A myth is a traditional story, especially one concerning the early history of a people or explaining some natural or social phenomenon.
- A myth generally involves supernatural beings or events.
- It explains the views of a group of people and helps them to understand the world around them.
- Most cultures have some type of myth - typically they begin with a creation myth.
- Greek and Roman mythology is most commonly thought of when one talks about mythology.

Origin

- The etymology (origin) of the term is Greek
- Root words:
 - Muthos = story
 - Logos = speech or argument



Cultural Myths

- Cultural myths are traditional.
- It is common to find similarities in stories and universal symbols and themes across different cultures' myths.
- Greek, Roman, Native American, Celtic, South American, African, and Norse mythology are examples of myths from different cultures.

Greek Mythology

- Greek gods are not indefinitely omnipotent.
 - Gods have typical human traits such as jealousy and the desire to feast and drink.
- To the Greeks, the life of the gods so closely resembled human life that the gods felt real and tangible.
 - Myths acknowledge the mystery and beauty of humanity.
- In general, Greek myths involve less strange and frightening magic than the myths of other ancient civilizations.
 - Individuals become heroes by virtue of bravery and strength rather than supernatural powers.

Gods and Goddesses

Greek :

- Zeus
- Apollo
- Hades
- Poseidon
- Hera
- Athena
- Persephone
- Demeter

Roman :

- Jupiter
- Apollo
- Pluto
- Neptune
- Juno
- Minerva
- Proserpine
- Ceres

Power :

- King of Gods
- Sun
- Underworld
- Seas
- Marriage
- Wisdom
- Underworld
- Earth

Creatures

- Centaur
- Gorgon
- Pegasus
- Nymph
- Sphinx
- Muses
- Fates



Characteristics

A myth is a story that is (or was considered) a true explanation of the natural world.

- **Characters** are often non-human.
- **Setting** is typically ancient, taking place before records were actually kept. They are also often set in a world similar to our own.
- **Plot** possess events that bend or break natural laws.\
- **Themes** generally encourage values such as individualism, family, and community.

Why Study Mythology

- To learn about ancient cultures
- As inspiration for the arts
- To teach values and morals
- To understand **allusions** in modern language
- To identify common characteristics among cultures
- For entertainment

The Stone and the Banana: An Indonesian Myth

The Stone and the Banana

The natives of Paso say that in the beginning the sky was very near the earth, and that the creator, who lived in it, used to let down his gifts to men at the end of a rope.



The Stone and the Banana

One day he thus lowered a stone; but our first father and mother would have none of it and they called out to their Maker, “What have we to do with this stone? Give us something else.” The Creator compiled and hauled away the rope; the stone mounted up and up until it vanished from sight.



The Stone and the Banana

Presently the rope was seen coming down from heaven again, and this time there was a banana at the end of it instead of a stone. Our first parents ran to the banana and took it. Then there came a voice from the heaven saying: “Because ye have chosen the banana, your life shall be like its life. When the banana-tree has offspring, the parent stem dies; so shall ye die and your children shall step into your place.

The Stone and the Banana

Had ye chosen the stone, your life would have been like the life of the stone, changeless and immortal.” The man and his wife mourned over their fatal choice, but it was too late; that is how, through the eating of a banana, death came into the world.

The Stone and the Banana

What characteristics were showcased in “The Stone and the Banana”?

- What phenomenon was the story explaining?
- What supernatural elements were present?
- What can you tell about the Indonesian culture based on this myth?

Creation Myths

Jigsaw Activity

Step 1

Take a sheet of binder paper (landscape turn) and make four even columns of 15.

Label the four columns as:

- Chinese
- Ugandan
- Blackfoot
- Genesis

Step 2

Answer the following questions on the grid for your story.

1. Is there one creator or many?
2. Is the creator's power supreme or shared?
3. Is the creator male or female?
4. Is the creator kind or mean?
5. Is the creator concerned or indifferent?
6. Is the creator named or not named?
7. Does the creator live in the sky/heavens or on earth?
8. Is the creation of the world accomplished by command, action, or both?
9. Is the creation of the world orderly or chaotic?
10. Is the creation of the world through warfare or is it calm?
11. Is the creation of the world through sexual or non-sexual acts?
12. Is creation fast or slow or is time not mentioned?
13. Is the first man created or does he just exist in the new world?
14. Who creates the first man?
15. How is the first man created?

Step 3

Compare your answers to your partners' and jigsaw the answers to completely fill in your grid.



Step 4

Highlight the lines where all four stories had the same answer.



Step 5

Discuss: What is significant about the fact that four different groups of people on four different spots on the planet at different times in history came to some of the same conclusions about the unknown?

What does this show us about humanity?