

Gods, Heroes and Natural Phenomena Cosmologies

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INTRODUCTION

The goal of this curriculum unit is to recreate some characteristics of gods, heroes, and natural phenomena from other cultures described through mythology to interpret and understand the world.

People have always been worried about the natural phenomena that have influenced their lives and the origin of these natural changes. That is why they have always tried to explain the creation of the world probably as a way to control it, protect them from it, or simply to understand it. It is always relevant to humankind to try to find an answer that can satisfy their curiosity. “The ancient Greeks and Romans used mythology to explain the mysteries of nature that were not able to be explained using the technology of today” (Bolton x).

As myths are present in almost every culture, people use them to show their concern about the world, life and the afterlife, and the presence of gods and heroes in their lives. Ancient peoples created beautiful stories that tell the feats of those heroes, involving the seas, the sky, the sun, the moon and stars, the mountains, fire, and wind, among other things, that recreate their fears and hopes. Almost everything around us has been influenced by mythology. There is no doubt that many names of animals and plants, and expressions in various languages, come from mythology (Bolton ix).

This unit will help students learn more about world myths to understand how people in the ancient world created these fabulous stories or myths about heroes, monsters, beings with superpowers, and more, to find ways to explain their world. In the first part, I would like to compare and contrast myths of different cultures to see how similar they were, because, in my opinion, myths are a great source to help students conceive of the history of those people. These stories will describe exploits of heroes and gods that tell the students why, according to people in the ancient world, we have thunder, rain, earthquakes, and every other natural phenomenon. We will use charts to compare the presence of certain elements (gods, heroes, monsters, natural phenomena) in several cultures to analyze how similar or different they are. Then, students will recognize the importance of gods in different mythologies in the world, for instance, gods who represent the sun like Re for the Egyptians; Shamash for the Mesopotamians; Tonatuh or Huitzilopochtli for the Aztecs; Lugh for the Celts; Apollo for the Romans and Greeks, among others. This part of the unit will be taught through different short readings about myths in both English and Spanish where students will improve their reading and comprehension skills while learning about mythology. The use of KWL charts will be very helpful to measure the students’ previous knowledge and the knowledge they will have at the end of the unit. Students will find this kind of chart a great tool to keep track of their learning process about mythology throughout the unit now that they will review it to compare the cultures studied.

The second part of the unit will contain the recreation of myths where students will have the opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge about mythology and common expressions in Spanish. Students will select heroes, heroines, gods or goddesses of their preference to be

represented. Then, students will work in groups to create costumes and will recycle different topics seen before to describe their characters. They will recycle vocabulary in Spanish to talk about physical description, personality traits, clothing, likes and dislikes, favorite activities, family members and also greetings and farewells. The presentations of this part of the project will be given to other Spanish classes.

This unit will be written for 9th grade students in the Spanish I class at Barbara Jordan High School for Careers. As my students are mostly non-native Spanish speakers, this unit will help them increase their ability to analyze visual and written information to gain knowledge and understanding of different cultures including those cultures of the target language. In addition, this unit will help students improve their communication skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing) in the Spanish language.

OBJECTIVES

The learners will:

- Identify mythology as a form of oral and written narrative.
- Learn new vocabulary (parts of the body, family members, relationships, clothes, colors) using information from myths.
- Use vocabulary learned to provide information using the target language (Spanish).
- Create physical and personality descriptions using mythological characters (heroes and gods).
- Create costumes to describe clothes of heroes and gods.
- Create conversations using the target language (Spanish).
- Recreate a myth (characters, costumes and dialogs) using the target language.

Languages Other Than English Level I

(TEKS/TAKS Correlation)

LOTE L1.1.01 - Respond physically to oral commands and directions, and practice giving commands to others.

LOTE L1.1.02 - Repeat words and phrases using appropriate intonation and pronunciation.

LOTE L1.1.03 - Practice basic communicative tasks on a daily basis building on current vocabulary and structures.

LOTE L1.1.04 - Identify objects by name and describe them in the target language.

LOTE L1.1.05 - Ask and answer questions to obtain information.

LOTE L1.1.08 - Read to discover meaning through context and visual clues.

LOTE L1.1.11 - Write familiar vocabulary from dictation.

LOTE L1.1.12 - Write in the target language to convey a message or to exchange information using vocabulary about everyday activities.

LOTE L1.3.01 - Make connections with CORE subjects through appropriate grade level content.

LOTE L1.5.03 - Use safe Internet sites where the language is used.

RATIONALE

This unit will be written for students in my Spanish I class. Throughout the unit students will learn different vocabulary related to topics like Family and Relationships; Clothing; Everyday Activities; Physical Description and Personality Traits among others.

The unit will help students increase their reading and speaking skills in the Spanish language. I will also teach this unit with the purpose of promoting critical thinking and to help them improve different abilities like debating and talking in public, which can be used in other areas.

The students will find this unit very helpful to complement their Geography, History, English and Literature classes, thanks to the use of myths that clearly mention names of places and characters used in those subjects.

This unit will also contain the reading of a cosmogony myth: The Fifth Aztec Sun in Spanish and English. By reading this myth, the students will get a better idea of how people imagined the origin of the universe and the humanity within the Aztec culture and at the same time develop their critical thinking and reading skills. Also a debate will be included in this part of the unit to discuss the elements of the myth The Fifth Aztec Sun: gods and goddesses, humans and values.

UNIT BACKGROUND

How It All Happened

Mythology is seen as the way people tell from generation to generation how humans conceive of their origins and the reasons for natural phenomena. Mythology tells about humans and their relations with “higher powers.” Mythology relates humans and nature in magical explanations of powerful gods and heroes and the way they create the world and overcome obstacles to reach a goal (Hamilton 3). This narrative tradition has been used to determine “the hows and whys of the universe” to look for the most logical answer to understand the universe (Asimov 2). Myths then, talk about religion where supernatural beings are worshiped, the reason for which myths are believed to be true or considered sacred to those within the culture (Bolton 3).

Mythology and Cosmology

Mythology has been defined as the “narrative tradition” used by different cultures with the purpose of explaining and describing phenomena relevant to their people. As people in the ancient world wanted to know what happened at the very beginning of time, how this world was created or how humanity was created, they began telling stories. People used stories to relate the exploits of heroes and gods, and inventing reasons that could explain the good and bad that happened to them. Mythology in different cultures was the most “plausible” explanation for every natural event and the foundation of people’s beliefs. “Myths reflect human nature, with its needs and desires, hopes and fears. Myths reveal the human condition. Creation myths satisfy the need to have roots” (Rosenberg xii). Cosmic mythology in every culture explained the origin of the world or the nature of the universe through a chaotic experience or by the intervention of gods: “At the very beginning, what existed first was the Void; the Greeks say Chaos... That Void seizes us like the yawning of an immense gullet where everything is swallowed up by murky darkness” (Vernant 3.)

Myths also involve the hero as a crucial element in the development of the stories. Heroes are the result of a relation between a mortal and a god, “others are fully human but are blessed with godlike strength or beauty” (*Encarta* 2006). Heroes represent the values and conduct of their cultures, not only because they perform exploits for their community but also because they are human themselves, only with special characteristics, that make of them “models of human behavior for their society” (Rosenberg xvi).

The teaching of the unit will include the three basic elements of mythology mentioned above: cosmogony, gods and heroes. The unit will start with a cartoon of the myth called The Children of the Sun to represent a cosmogony myth. The students will observe it carefully and will write the story in their own words in English. They will share the stories with their classmates, and then we will read the real myth with the whole class. We will discuss how similar the students’ stories are to the actual myth. The students will get the key words to be able to understand the reading in Spanish. This exercise will be complemented with the reading of the myth the Aztec Sun in English and Spanish.

At this point, the class can brainstorm ideas about the meaning of mythology, the purpose of mythology, and examples of myths. Then, students will access the Internet to answer specific questions about mythology and the importance of this narrative tradition as the source of explanations of the universe to the different cultures around the world. Once they have a better knowledge about the topic, the class can read the myth of Perseus and Medusa to understand the idea of gods and heroes.

The Concept of Heroes

Of unusual strength and bravery, heroes in mythology were children born from one parent who was a god and one human (Asimov 148). Heroes usually tried to achieve exploits worthy of praise by destroying monsters or saving people's lives. Magic is commonly present in those heroes' deeds. The myth of Perseus will be a great example to present this topic. Perseus, the son of Zeus and Danae and grandson of Akrisios king of Argos, was forced to kill one of the three gorgons, Medusa, to please the king Polydektes. Perseus with the help of Hermes managed to get the necessary tools to destroy Medusa and later to kill the rest of his enemies (Burn 63).

Another notable example of a hero is Heracles (Hercules for Romans). In order to purify himself after murdering his own family, he is told to perform some deeds for King Eurystheus. By performing those deeds he would also gain immortality and be among the gods (Bolton 220). After completing his tasks he purified his sins and headed for more adventures where he found a tragic death, leaving his mortal body and ascending in the immortal one to Mount Olympus (Bolton 223).

Through the use of these two myths of heroes, students can comprehend important aspects that characterize a hero as the immortality that these heroes try to reach by performing dangerous deeds, illustrating the bravery that the ancients had set for what made a hero, as well as the ambitions, skills, and loyalty (Bolton 219).

The Role of Heliotropic Gods

Gods and goddesses in different cultures play the most important roles in mythology. They personify the power to control everything in the universe. People worship gods to ask for protection, forgiveness, life, death, harvest, and every single human need (Rosenberg xviii). The Children of the Sun Myth will be used to explain the role of gods helping humans. This myth talks about the moment when Father Sun looked down from heavens to realize how humans were living like wild animals and decided to send to the earth one of his sons, Manco Capac, and one of his daughters, Mama Ocllo Huaco, to teach people how to improve their lives. Then, Father Sun provided humankind with all they needed: heat, knowledge, food, etc., through his children, who told the people how their father wanted them to live their lives (Rosenberg 574).

To learn more about gods and heroes, we will study the family tree of the Greek gods Uranus and Gaea and the different relationships of their descendants, practicing the vocabulary in Spanish.

This unit will include the nine essential teaching strategies from Robert Marzano through individual and group activities:

1. **Identifying similarities and differences:** To break a concept into its similar and dissimilar characteristics.
2. **Summarizing and note taking:** To ask students to analyze a subject to expose what is essential and then put it in their own words.
3. **Reinforcing effort and providing recognition:** To show the connection between effort and achievement.
4. **Homework and practice:** To extend students' learning outside the classroom.

5. **Nonlinguistic representations:** To incorporate words and images using symbols to represent relationships.
6. **Cooperative learning:** To organize students into cooperative groups to yield a positive effect on overall learning.
7. **Setting objectives and providing feedback:** To provide students with a direction for their learning.
8. **Generating and testing hypotheses:** To use deductive approach to make a prediction.
9. **Cues, questions, and advance organizers:** To use what the students already know about a topic to enhance further learning.

LESSON PLANS

Lesson One: Reading a Cartoon

Objectives

LOTE L1.1.03 Practice basic communicative tasks on a daily basis building on current vocabulary and structures.

LOTE L1.1.04 Identify objects by name and describe them in the target language.

LOTE L1.1.05 Ask and answer questions to obtain information.

LOTE L1.1.08 Read to discover meaning through context and visual clues.

Materials Needed

Each student will be provided with a copy of a cartoon of The Children of the Sun Myth.

Activities

1. Each student will look at the cartoon carefully and will write the story in English according to the pictures.
2. Students will work in pairs and will share their stories with a partner. Two or three stories will be selected and will be read aloud.
3. The real myth of the Children of the Sun will be read in Spanish and English. One student will read a line in Spanish and then another will read the same line in English.
4. Students will answer true or false to the following statements according to the story:
 - Chalchuitlicu es una diosa buena y amable.
 - Chalchuitlicu negó el fuego a los humanos.
 - Tezcatlipoca era un buen amigo de Chalchutlipoca.
 - Las lágrimas de Chalcutlipoca crearon un diluvio.
 - Los dioses crean al sol y la luna por el bien de la humanidad.

Assessment

- Students will answer questions based on the story.
- Students will be graded on completion of work.

Lesson Two: “The Children of the Sun”

Objectives

LOTE L1.1.03 Practice basic communicative tasks on a daily basis building on current vocabulary and structures.

LOTE L1.1.05 Ask and answer questions to obtain information.

LOTE L1.1.08 Read to discover meaning through context and visual clues.

LOTE L1.1.11 Write familiar vocabulary from dictation.

LOTE L1.1.12 Write in the target language to convey a message or to exchange information using vocabulary about everyday activities.

Materials Needed

A copy of the story *The Children of the Sun Myth*

A KWL chart

Sources (books, encyclopedias, Internet) at the library

Activities

1. Students will be provided with KWL chart to determine their previous knowledge about one of the most important cultures in the world: the Incas. Students will complete the first part of the chart (Knowledge) where they will state how much they know about Peru, the Incas, Lake Titicaca, and the Andes Mountains. Then, they will complete the second part (Want to know) where they will write the questions they would like to be answered through the activities.
2. Students will be taken to the library to search information in order to answer their questions. They will work in small groups (2 or 3 students).
3. The whole class will share the information obtained through the search.
4. Now that the students have located Peru, the Andes Mountains, and Lake Titicaca on the map and they know about the Incas, we will read the myth *The Children of the Sun*.
5. After the reading, the class will debate about the following ideas to introduce them to the topic of the myth:
 - How did the Sun god care about the people?
 - Why did he care about them?
 - Did the people really need to be helped?
6. The class will parallel the two myths worked in class: *The Fifth Aztec Sun* and *The Children of the Sun* to find differences and similarities among them. They will learn about the famous Temple of the Sun in Cuzco, Peru.

Assessment

Students will be evaluated on completion of work.

Student can earn extra credit for class participation.

Lesson Three: Learning about Myth

We will discuss the concept of mythology and we will brainstorm ideas in order to measure the student's pre-knowledge of it. Then, students will have the opportunity to read about mythology to have a better understanding of this topic. A study sheet will be provided to the students.

Objectives

LOTE L1.1.02 Repeat words and phrases using appropriate intonation and pronunciation.

LOTE L1.1.03 Practice basic communicative tasks on a daily basis building on current vocabulary and structures.

LOTE L1.1.04 Identify objects by name and describe them in the target language.

LOTE L1.1.05 Ask and answer questions to obtain information.

LOTE L1.1.08 Read to discover meaning through context and visual clues.

LOTE L1.1.12 Write in the target language to convey a message or to exchange information using vocabulary about everyday activities.

LOTE L1.3.01 Make connections with CORE subjects through appropriate grade level content.

LOTE L1.5.03 Use safe Internet sites where the language is used.

Materials Needed

Dry erase board and markers.

Study sheet

Internet access

Activities

1. Brainstorm ideas about myths.
2. Share the opinions with the whole class.
3. Read information about the meaning of myths and the importance of them in different cultures around the world.
4. Students will work on the following web page: www.abc.net.au/arts/wingedsandals/
5. In this web page the students will learn in a fun way about Greek mythology. They will read about myths, heroes and gods.
6. Once the students have read about mythology they will be asked to share their opinions about what they learned.
7. This web page will be a good source to practice the topic of family. Then, the students will complete a family tree chart of some gods, goddesses, and heroes.

Assessment

1. Students will be evaluated on completion of work.
2. Students will be evaluated through out a quiz about family. Students have to complete a family tree using the information obtained during the search.

Lesson Four: Creating costumes and Recreating Myths

Objectives

LOTE L1.1.03 Practice basic communicative tasks on a daily basis building on current vocabulary and structures.

LOTE L1.1.04 Identify objects by name and describe them in the target language.

LOTE L1.1.05 Ask and answer questions to obtain information.

LOTE L1.1.08 Read to discover meaning through context and visual clues.

Materials Needed

- Construction paper
- Paint
- Brushes
- Plaster

Activities

1. Students will select a god, goddess or hero they want to represent.
2. They will create a costume and a mask of this character.
3. Using the target language (Spanish), students will make a description of the character of their choice and will present to the audience.
4. A group of judges (teachers from the Spanish department) will determine the best descriptions, taking into account intonation, pronunciation, and costume creation.

Assessment

- Students will be evaluated on completion of work.
- Students will be evaluated according to their intonation and pronunciation of the Spanish language when describing their characters.

Rubrics

Work completion

Student name: _____

Work	Complete 5 pts	Incomplete 2 pts	Class Participation 5 pts

Character Description

Student Name: _____

- The student describes the character (hero or god) accurately using complete sentences. 15 pts.
- The student describes the character using complete sentences although some mistakes are present. 10 pts.
- The description of the character is not very clear..... 2 pts.
- The intonation and pronunciation are appropriate for the description. The meaning is clear..... 15 pts.
- The intonation and pronunciation are fair. Some mistakes are present without affecting the meaning..... 10 pts.
- The intonation and pronunciation are not clear. Mistakes affect the meaning..... 2 pts.
- The creation of costume and mask demonstrates preparation and creativity..... 15 pts.
- The creation of costume and mask demonstrates some preparation and creativity..... 10 pts.
- The creation of costume and mask demonstrates poor preparation..... 2 pts.

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