

## **Around the World with Myth**

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Mythology is often included in a literature course as one unit, Greek Mythology. From elementary school on, students read the most popular Greek stories from Greeks, from Athena to Zeus. Children love the stories because they are exciting and include monsters and very memorable characters. Many students can retell stories like “Icarus and Daedalus” and even recount the way in which that story warns all children to listen carefully to parental warnings. Students in high school must often use a mythological dictionary to make sense of allusions in literature, from Shakespeare to James Joyce. However, because of the influx of immigrants into our country and the resulting diversity in our classrooms, including only Western traditional mythology is as unacceptable as including only British and American writers in the literature curriculum. And as we diversify the literature, we must also provide a historical and mythological context for that literature to ensure understanding.

This unit is a beginning in the process of integrating mythology into the English/Language Arts diversified curriculum. While the core novels are negotiable based on a particular school or district, the essence of the unit, infusing mythology, remains an important element. Additionally, the depth of investigation into mythology, activities, and products may be changed based on grade level, ability level, and available time. More importantly, core books and associated mythology should be based on the population in a school. I consider this unit a work in progress; as I am able to add pieces of literature relevant to my students’ cultures, I will also include the mythology of that culture.

### **DESCRIPTION OF STUDENTS**

My students are in sixth grade and are designated Gifted and Talented (G/T); they attend accelerated classes in all subjects as part of the K-8 Vanguard program at T. H. Rogers School in Houston. In addition to G/T, our school houses two additional programs: multiply impaired and the regional school for deaf students. Both programs begin instruction when students are about three years old; the deaf students stay until they begin high school, but the multiply-impaired students remain until they are 22. Our population is very diverse, comprised of Asian, Latino, African-American, and Caucasian students; in fact, over 50 languages and/or dialects are spoken in the homes of our students. This unit was designed to reflect the diversity of the student body on one level as well as create a common bond among students. It was also designed to address the social and emotional needs of gifted students who are typically egocentric and need instruction and experiences that provide opportunities to develop empathy for cultures and situations with which they may feel they have no real connection. We are fortunate that our diverse populations offer our G/T students opportunities to work with students who have physical and/or intellectual challenges.

## **OBJECTIVES**

The student will:

- understand the role of mythology in a culture
- recognize the similarities and differences among major cultures' mythology
- understand the impact mythology has on modern literature
- recognize and explain allusions to mythology
- rewrite/retell myths in dramatic form for presentation to a larger audience
- use standard research techniques to investigate a variety of topics across cultures
- recognize cultural icons
- recognize the relationship between literature, history, and mythology

## **RATIONALE**

This mythology unit will challenge students to examine important cultural issues in the world: past, present, and future. Rather than reading simply about the Greek experience, students will be able to construct a context for literature around the world and be able to form generalizations about how a culture must meet human needs. While students are somewhat familiar with Greek stories, they have not really looked at myths as definitions of human needs.

This unit provides learning opportunities for students on many levels. First, students must use close reading skills throughout the unit, and because they are required to apply the information they are reading, they must have a deeper understanding of what they have read. Second, students must practice effective research skills in order to find and use resources from many sources. Another important aspect is that students must apply cooperative learning skills for an extended project on two levels: within their own group, but also among the groups in the class. Fourth, students will have the opportunity to present their information to the class with a variety of products – from a poster advertising a Greek god's occupational specialty to masks to theatrical presentations (including puppet theater) that are representative of the culture being studied. Finally, students will have a myriad of opportunities to hone their writing and editing skills for a project that will be viewed by others: an authentic project for a real audience.

In particular, this unit offers students the opportunity to develop skills that are necessary to find, to critically analyze, to evaluate, and to synthesize information they locate from various media sources, all higher level skills on Bloom's taxonomy. While students may use books for research, they must also access visual media sources for information; their search and analysis will serve to strengthen their literacy skills.

Finally, this unit also addresses Howard Gardner's concern with students' multiple intelligences. The variety of products offers students the opportunity to utilize their strengths, but it also requires them to address their areas of weakness. For example, the student who does not like to work in groups (interpersonal) may choose tasks that allow him to work primarily alone (intrapersonal), but in the end, his work must be incorporated into the whole, and he must participate in that integration. The student who loves to perform will have that opportunity, but he must also participate in the non-performing aspects of production. The "shy" performer may be asked to assume a role in a production, and the performance on film is much less intimidating than performing in a crowded theater.

## **BASIC CURRICULUM UNIT**

Our school's philosophy is that disciplines should work together to make learning more meaningful for all students. In an effort to align the English curriculum with the sixth grade World Cultures course, the sixth grade English curriculum focuses on literature across time and

cultural boundaries. While the social studies course quickly surveys cultures from Europe to the Far East, English students move more slowly to examine literature from selected countries that represent many of our students' homelands. As we tackle the literature, we make connections between the history of a culture and the literature that represents, in some way, that history. For example, as students read *The Pearl* by John Steinbeck, we look at the Spanish Conquistadors and the effect they had on native Indian cultures in Mexico. When Juana prays for her child, she combines a Catholic prayer, the Hail Mary, with ancient Indian chants. Students also study two prominent Indian cultures of that area: the Mayans and the Aztecs. As students read *When Keoka Was My Name*, they study the lengthy and still somewhat raw conflict between the Koreans and the Japanese. Before actually reading this novel, students should read the account of the Empress Jingo and the takeover of Korea, a disputed account of the invasion, but certainly one that makes modern historical accounts even more interesting (Davis 329). Further, students will be amazed at similarities between Eastern and Western mythology; one example is "The Love of Asagao," the tale of two Japanese lovers that bears some semblance to "Pyramus and Thisbe" (Davis 245-249). When students look at *Journey to Jo'Burg* by Beverly Naidoo and "Debbie, Go Home" by Alan Paton, they must consider apartheid and the effect it has had on the family in South Africa. In considering the issue of apartheid, students must also examine the colonization of Africa in the 1800s (and before) and the effect that European influence has had on the oral tradition. Students will be amazed at the similarities between "Natiki" and the European "Cinderella" story. By examining the history and mythology of each culture, students will be able to construct an understanding of common elements of cultures.

In order to enhance cultural awareness and provide the depth and complexity that is required of G/T curriculum, I am adding a mythology/folklore module to each of the sixth grade literature units. Before we begin each unit, each class will be divided into groups, and each group will begin an investigation into a particular aspect of the mythology of the culture we are studying. For example, as we begin *The Pearl*, students will be divided into story study groups that will study stories that reflect the Aztec culture and the effect the story might have had on the behavior of the people. Throughout the unit, students will pursue their research, culminating in a product that will be presented to other students.

### **UNIVERSAL CONCEPTS OF MYTHOLOGY**

While mythologies of diverse cultures may have developed across time and place, they all have common elements that define the basic needs of mankind. For example, all cultures have a story that explains the creation of the world; these creation stories serve to explain how the earth was formed and how people came to be. Another important universal question is what happens to us after death; this includes not only what the "final resting place" will be like, but also the ways and means of getting there. Mythology also tries to explain the elements of nature, from stories about birds to erupting volcanoes; the effect geography has on the development of the culture is evident from many of these nature myths. Additionally, mythology often serves to define human behavior, both good and bad, in stories of justice and behavior. Finally, mythology defines the beliefs about heroes and the heroic adventures of a culture. In the preface to his book, *Parallel Myths*, J. F. Bierlein notes that he includes myths from around the world – not simply the commonly studied Norse and Greek myths – in order to reveal amazingly common features of the myths. "Such parallels demonstrate that human beings everywhere have much in common; the 'primitive' and the 'modern' are not all that different...the gaps between cultures narrow to reveal what is constant and universal in human experience" (xiv).

### **ICONS, ALLUSIONS, AND JUSTICE/MORALITY IN MYTHOLOGY**

While there is an inherent value in studying mythology by itself, it is imperative that students are aware of the characters and stories in modern literature that originally appeared in mythology. It

would be difficult, if not impossible, to understand *Julius Caesar* without understanding the myriad of allusions to Greek mythology. How can students fully appreciate the forbidden love between Romeo and Juliet, the ultimate romantic icons, without a glimpse into the story of “Pyramus and Thisbe”? And how could Shaw’s *Pygmalion* or the musical *My Fair Lady* be fully enjoyed without the connection to “Pygmalion and Galatea”? An interesting challenge to students might be to choose a myth and modernize it as so many authors have already done.

On another level, mythology terms permeate our language. Reading a news story about someone who has accomplished a Herculean task doesn’t convey full meaning if the story of Hercules and his tasks is not known. Bierlein notes that many of our terms are directly from mythology: chaos, museum, mercurial, Achilles’ heel, and so forth (6-7). A story titled “Antaeus” doesn’t have full meaning for students unless they understand the Greek character Antaeus and how his strength ebbed the moment he lost his connection with the earth.

Sharon Creeden makes a connection between justice and mythology/folktales in *Fair is Fair: World Folktales of Justice*. The stories she includes address legal principles, court procedures, and the actual processes we use in coming to terms with difficult questions that arise in all societies. She notes that myths and folktales are used to define aspects of justice in different cultures. Creeden asserts that “...the stories in this collection are *themselves* the type of archetypal tales that we carry in our heads when attempting to resolve disputes” (15). In addition to reflecting the cultural values defined in each story, many of the tales were also used to educate citizens in the “right and wrong” of their actions. While the tales are generally amusing, they are also very relevant. As Creeden points out, the stories offer the lesson that “even though we all want justice, it is not always easy to figure out what that is” (12).

## **SENSITIVITY ISSUES**

### **Mythology versus Religion**

Mythology, as a reflection of a culture, addresses specific cultural issues, and in my diverse classroom, students must practice sensitivity when looking at another culture’s history. Researching sensitive issues will expose students to a variety of sources and multiple points of view; on one hand students may be initially confused and overwhelmed by the amount of information they encounter. They may also find conflicting information or opinions, perhaps for the first time. This situation will challenge students to examine the issues carefully in order to construct their truths about the issue:

...these students learn to participate in the process of democracy by accessing information that they are then capable of critically analyzing and evaluating. Further, they have the skills to verify and validate the information because they can access alternative points of view and perspectives from a range of sources. Today no single, text, teacher, or website can be relied upon as the dominant source of information of authority on any given subject. (Considine and Haley 23)

A basic tenet of my curriculum will be a clear demarcation between myth and religion. Certain religious sects may perceive mythology as a threat to their religious beliefs, and I have to be conscious of this perception. Some parents may question whether or not their children should participate in discussions about mythology. However, I am confident that our administration will support this curriculum since mythology is already a constructed unit in the HISD curriculum and model lessons whose use is mandated throughout the district. I will ensure that modern religious practices will not be defined, in any way, as mythology. Edith Hamilton effectively makes this point when she states, “Greek mythology is largely made up of stories about gods and goddesses, but it must not be read as a kind of Greek bible, an account of Greek religion...a real myth has

nothing to do with religion...Myths are early science, the result of men's first trying to explain what they saw around them" (19).

### **Age-Appropriate Research**

Children's books include mythology in stories that are entertaining and age-appropriate. However, encouraging students to look further for information will expose students to somewhat more sensitive material during their research. Given the age of the students, material must, in some way, be censored as appropriate for the age group. Additionally, I would like the products to be displayed or performed for other students in the school, again requiring sensitivity to age and developmental level of the students.

Many questions of accessibility are answered by using materials in the school library, of course, but in many cases, the resources would be inadequate for some of the topics. Therefore, resources such as the Internet, the public library, and community organizations (such as the East Asian Society) must be utilized. Prior to beginning research, then, students must discuss and be aware of "questionable" material they may encounter.

Parents should be aware of the mythology modules and the relationship to the literature; fortunately, we issue an overview of the curriculum to all parents in the fall which may indicate any problems before they become real issues.

### **FINAL PRODUCTS**

After students have invested time, energy, and effort into this project, they must construct and present their products to an audience of their peers and/or parents. Products will be an area of choice, within certain parameters, for the students. Each module will offer several choices based on the culture being studied. For example, students will have the option of performance – live or taped. They may also build models, create masks, create a power point, tell a story to younger children, and so forth. Teachers should be receptive to suggestions from the students for research. For example, when you read Japanese myths, you quickly become aware of the importance of the fan in the Japanese culture; the fan could be a topic that would stimulate student interest, and if interested, students will delve more enthusiastically into their research. Finally, students will have the chance to address the audience regarding their work and receive the accolades they deserve for their efforts.

### **CONTENT**

In the following sections, I am including some of the mythology that I would expect students to learn during the unit. However, students must understand that there is no one source for these myths, that there are many versions of the myths based on the source for the retold myth or the editor's purpose. Variances occur particularly in cultures where stories were never written down or where the stories traveled from one location to another over time. The storyteller often modified the story based on a number of factors, one being the actual time he had to tell the story!

### **Greek Mythology**

Because many of my students have been exposed to Greek mythology in terms of children's stories, I plan to begin the year with a survey of Greek mythology: begin with what the students know. This module will serve to define mythology, raise major questions that students will address throughout the year, and provide a benchmark for other modules. For this module, each student will assume the persona of a Greek mythological character, from gods and goddesses to mere mortals and everything in between. After investigating their personal histories, students will complete a class grid of information in order to make the data available to their fellow students. In addition to the commonly known characters, I will include some short myths from Edith Hamilton's anthology that form the basis of modern literature, such as "Pyramus and Thisbe."

Students whose characters have a natural association may work together to present their stories to the class during the final presentation, a Greek feast complete with costumes, props, and food. During the feast, students must be in character and assume appropriate roles...both friend and foe to other characters.

### **Aztec Mythology**

In *The Pearl* by John Steinbeck, Kino and Juana are of Indian descent. Steinbeck doesn't assign them a particular group, but they live in an area where they could be assumed to be Aztec. However, both the Mayan and Aztec cultures could be included in this unit.

The Aztecs believed that prior to our modern world, there were four worlds called suns. The first world was a land of vegetarian giants who lived under the powerful god Tezcatlipoca, the Sun. Another god, Quetzalcoatl, is said to have been jealous of Tezcatlipoca's power and attacked him, dislodging him from the sky. Tezcatlipoca retaliated by turning himself into a jaguar and demolishing everything in the world with the exception, of course, of Quetzalcoatl, who then created a second world. Tezcatlipoca, still seeking revenge, created a wind that destroyed the sun and most of the people; those who survived became monkeys who continue to swing from the trees today. A third god entered the picture; Tlalock, god of rain assumed his place as the Sun only to be destroyed by Quetzalcoatl's floods; survivors were turned into birds. Tlaloc's wife, Chalchiuhtlicue, assumed her husband's place as the Sun only to be destroyed by yet another flood; survivors became fish.

Faced with a world of darkness, the gods sought a god who was willing to sacrifice himself to become the new Sun. Two gods volunteered. The first was an ugly outcast; the other, handsome and wealthy. The gods preferred the second and prepared a pyramid to contain fire on its top for the sacrificial act. However, the handsome god, unable to face the fire, retired from the promise, and the gods reverted to the less desirable god, Nanautzin. Displaying no cowardice, Nanautzin leaped into the flames, creating the Sun. Jealous of the power he observed in his rival, the handsome god was then able to enter the fire as well; other gods followed to become instruments to move the Sun through its course.

All was not well, however, as only the Sun existed – not the earth – and Tlaltecuhltli, a monster goddess, existed to consume anything in her path. Determined to eradicate her presence, Quetzalcoatl and Tezcatlipoca formed an alliance. Turning into snakes, they wrapped themselves around the monster, breaking her into two parts, the earth and the heavens. Tezcatlipoca then became elements of the earth: trees, caves, rivers, mountains, and so forth.

Still missing was man, but Quetzalcoatl was determined to visit Mictlan, the underworld, to retrieve his father's bones in order to use them to create human beings. Thwarted by the god of the underworld, Quetzalcoatl fell, dropped the bones, and birds shredded them into dust. Refusing to abandon his mission, however, Quetzalcoatl escaped Mictlan with the bone segments and sought assistance from Cihuacoatl, goddess of childbirth, who ground the bones into a powder, and then combined the powder with Quetzalcoatl's blood to create human beings.

The catastrophes experienced by the first four Suns, however, had a lasting effect on the Aztecs. Quetzalcoatl, considering the failures of the Sun to survive, warned the newly created beings that if they failed to behave, if they angered the gods, the Fifth Sun (and the entire world) would suffer utter destruction.

Interestingly, Quetzalcoatl is thought by some to be a real person, "probably Topiltzin (Our Prince), the great leader of the Toltecs, a tenth-century-A.D. Nahuatl-speaking culture" (Rosenberg 609). He is said to have been responsible for constructing laws and principles which were to guide the lives of his people. He, in turn, becomes the subject of further myths,

continuing the rivalry that began between Quetzalcoatl and Tezcatlipoca in the creation myth itself.

### **Northwest Indian Mythology**

In *Call of the Wild* by Jack London, the Yeehat Indians are portrayed as a poor and undernourished violent tribe that, in the end, massacres John Thornton and his partners while Buck is away from camp enjoying his new-found stature as leader of the wolf pack. As he returns to camp, the Yeehats pillage the camp until Buck drives them off with his ferocity. Because the Yeehat tribe is London's creation, I chose to focus on the mythology of the Northwest Indians because of their location in the direct path of many Yukon gold seekers and because they more truly represent the richness of the Native American cultures in the area.

Northwest Indians refers to three tribes: the Haida, the Tsimshias, and the Tlingit, all of whom settled along the northwest coast of both Canada and the United States. As a result of living in areas of moderate climate and being subject to frequent visits of both American and European vessels, these tribes enjoyed material success and were able to develop their artistic talents; the iron tools they used to carve totem poles, for instance, were among the instruments shared by their frequent commercial visitors who were anxious to acquire pelts in trade.

Foremost among mythological characters are animals, particularly Raven, but instead of being characterized in one particular way, Raven is portrayed as "a creator, a fertility hero, or a trickster-hero" depending on the myth (Rosenberg 634). For example, in Rosenberg's myth, "Raven and the Sources of Life," Raven is portrayed as an empathetic figure who attempts to rescue light from a selfish chief who is saving it for his exclusive use. The trickster-Raven is reborn as the much beloved grandson of the chief, and, as time passes, releases the stars, moon, and other elements until finally, the chief allows him to play with the sun, the chief's prized possession. Raven plays with the sun daily under the watchful eye of the chief until one day when the chief lets down his guard. The child reverts to Raven and escapes with the sun, eventually tossing it into the sky to create the light of day.

In another tale trickster-Raven lulls Ganook, hoarder of the only fresh water spring in the world, to sleep in order to drink (steal) the fresh water. When the angry Ganook awakes to find the water gone, Raven attempts escape, only to be wedged in the smoke hole. Ganook, desperate to recover his water, starts a smoky fire to kill Raven, but Raven pulls free and flies away, spurring springs, ponds, rivers, and lakes of water from his filled bill. An aside to the story involves the transformation of Raven from a white snowy bird into the black creature we know as Raven.

While Raven is often portrayed as a relatively harmless trickster interested in creating necessary elements of the world (stars, moon, sun, water), he is not quite so innocent in other versions. In another myth, Raven tricks an entire village into abandoning the town so that he may take possession of all their belongings. In several other stories he destroys selected animals for his own entertainment. In fact, because the stories are related by so many storytellers, many versions of the myths are available. Some myths, in fact, are not appropriate for all children and should be carefully monitored by teachers. Before students search for myths, teachers should examine the myths that are available and censor them according to the age of their students.

One area of particular interest to students is the level of arts/crafts practiced by the Northwest Indians and the relationship of their crafts to the stories that have passed through generations, the character of Raven being one of the most popular story lines. According to Edward Malin, these tribes were wealthy due to the volume of trading, and they developed larger and better constructed settlements than one might have guessed. He also notes the emphasis on class structure and position within the tribe and the focus on material goods and wealth. He points out

that in this region, varied art forms flourished, including carved totem poles, woven ceremonial clothing, masked theater, dance and music, and the painting of crest symbols on village house fronts of high-ranking families (20-21).

The painting arts, particularly the house fronts and totem poles, are directly related to tribal mythology. According to Malin, clan myths are the subjects for the house paintings which were executed by anonymous painters outside the clan. In fact, Malin notes that it is traditional that the owners of the house not explain the myths as they were recorded in the painting; rather, they would call on a professional narrator to tell the story to others and, as they told the story, extol the wealth and virtues of the family. The procedure seems to be that the myth is related to a painter who then creates the painting appropriately. Myth and painting were, of course, compatible (40-41). Mythology for this culture, then, will focus on Raven stories and the artistic depiction of those stories.

### **Maori Mythology**

Archeologists, linguists, and scientists now armed with DNA technology continue to refine theories as to the origin of the Maori people of New Zealand. The consensus is that they arrived 700-1000 years ago as part of a much larger migration of people across the Pacific that took place about 7000 years ago (Strudwick 4-5). Regardless of origin, one of the most important aspects of Maori life is the structure assigned to political and family life. Both aspects are important to students when they read *Whale Rider* by Witi Ihimaera.

The novel takes place in Whangara, a small New Zealand settlement; the locals are depicted as direct descendants of Paikea, *The Whale Rider*. The plot centers on the chief's search for a new leader who is capable of leading the villagers into the modern age of New Zealand. In the course of the story, the main character, Paikea, the chief's granddaughter, learns about her culture partly through legend and myth. Students should study the myths, too, in order to understand deeper meanings in the novel and to appreciate the uniqueness and tribulations of the Maori culture over the past few centuries; the turmoil over land and respect continues in the courtrooms of New Zealand today.

The Maori creation story is unique in that it does not begin with an object or action, but as an idea; in other words, life came from emptiness. Initially, Father Rangi creates Night and Day; he joins with Mother Papa to create the land, but their love and devotion to one another leave their children distressed because of the eternal darkness in which they must live. The children, ready to take action, decide to physically separate their parents, allowing light to enter their lives. From this group of children, Tane emerges as the leader and voice of reason, advising his brothers that they must each attempt the separation. One brother, Tawhiri, disagrees and causes a rift among the brothers. However, other siblings begin their attempts to separate their parents. After they all fail, Tane comes to the rescue and successfully parts his parents, freeing the children from darkness.

The story continues in order to explain nocturnal elements; rebel Tawhiri allies with Father Rangi (sky) to explain wind, rain, and hurricanes. One brother, Tanjora, escapes earthly chaos to take up residence in the sea and carries with him anger against Tane for beginning the cycle and separating Tanjora from his reptilian children.



## LESSON PLANS

### Lesson One: Gods, Goddesses, and Mortals in Greek Mythology

#### *Objectives*

- Students will define mythology, legends, and folktales.
- Students will define major categories of mythology (cosmogonic, culture heroes, birth and rebirth, foundation).
- Students will use a variety of sources to locate information about prominent characters in Greek mythology.
- Students will apply close reading skills to Greek myths.
- Students will present Greek stories to their classmates using a variety of formats.
- Students will employ specific advertising techniques for their “occupation boards.”

#### *Introduction*

In order to become acquainted with the characters in Greek mythology, students will begin the unit by assuming the persona of a Greek god/goddess or a mortal from one of the myths. They will research their character using Edith Hamilton’s book as a primary resource, but they will also investigate their character on the Internet for more detailed information. Each student will complete a “Character Profile” which they will use to create a billboard they will present to the class in order to share their information. Additionally, each character will advertise his/her talents and skills in the form of billboards that will hang throughout the school. Since we know gods are immortal and, therefore, still alive on Mount Olympus, the time has come for them to earn their keep in the modern world. What can Hestia do to earn a living? Why would we send Hercules on a mission? And what job might Ares perform in our modern world? In addition to creatively characterizing the gods, students would also have to employ good advertising techniques to construct their boards. As students present the information, classmates will complete a “Greek Mythology Chart” which will be used as the basis for comparing other major mythologies.

#### *Concept Development*

- Greek mythology is composed of stories that center on gods/goddesses, mortals, and characters who are part god/part mortal.
- Greek mythology was used to explain science, entertain the citizens, and was a literary form of the ancient world.
- Greek characters have relationships with one another, and these relationships are evident in many of the stories about the characters.
- Greek characters are used to teach people how to behave and the consequences of not following the rules.
- Greek characters are often used as allusions in modern literature.
- Greek stories have been adapted to modern literature by some of Western Civilization’s most prominent authors.
- Greek mythology is not religion.

#### *Activity 1: Greek Mythology: The Creation Story and Family Tree*

- Students will be divided into reading circles to read and prepare discussion questions for the first myth lesson.
- Students will begin the unit by looking at the family tree provided by Edith Hamilton.

- Students will read “The Coming of All Things” and refer to characters on the family tree as they read.
- Students will compare the simplicity of V. Hamilton’s version with the complexity of E. Hamilton’s version. Students must realize that different sources will have differing versions of the myths and stories.
- Students will read the Prometheus story; they will discuss the need for people to explain elements of nature (fire) and how men need to have these elements explained.
- Students will read “Pandora” and discuss both the dismay Greeks felt because of the evils of the world, but also the hope that they had for future good.

Materials

*In the Beginning* by Virginia Hamilton

“The Coming of All Things: The Greek Creators,” pages 127-131.

“The God Brings Fire to Man: Prometheus the Creator, pages 132-137.

“Pandora: Zeus the Creator,” pages 138-147.

Edith Hamilton’s *Mythology* “The Principle Gods Family Tree,” page 316.

**Activity 2: The Basics of Greek Mythology: Characters and Relationships**

- Students will randomly draw the name of a character. They will begin the investigation into that character using Edith Hamilton’s comprehensive descriptions. As they locate information, they will record that information on their character chart. In order to share the information with other students, each student will make a presentation to the class and add their character to the Greek family tree.

The following Greek characters will be included as the core group:

Zeus	Hera	Athena	Hades
Poseidon	Ares	Prometheus	Atlas
Hestia	Hephaestus	Dionysus	Hermes
Demeter	Persephone	Apollo	Artemis
Aphrodite	Eros	The Muses	The Furies
Pandora			

- Each student will determine the most prominent feature of their character and demonstrate that feature by creating a billboard for that character that will include important elements of that character. The assignment sheet is included as a handout for this unit.
- Each student will present his/her billboard to the class and add important information; audience will complete their god/goddess chart during the presentation; they will have time to ask questions if information is not clear.

**Activity 3: The Greeks as Storytellers**

Introduction

In pairs or groups, students will read popular Greek myths and convert the narratives into scripts which they will then use to tell the story. The list below will be used, but it can easily be altered to fit any class. Some of the stories are short, while others are more lengthy. Students will be assigned stories based on the length and the number of characters in each myth. A myth such as “Cupid and Psyche” will require fewer students (and less time) than a story about the Golden Fleece. When they have finished the myth, they will create a story board of essential actions in the story. Some myths will have a small number of storyboards, while others will be more extensive.

## Materials

- *Edith Hamilton's Mythology*
- "Flower Myths," 85-91
- "The Cyclops Polyphemus," 81-85
- "Cupid and Psyche," 92-100
- "Pyramus and Thisbe," 101-108
- "Pygmalion and Galatea," 108-111
- "Baucis and Philemon," 111-113
- "The Quest of the Golden Fleece," 117-130
- "Phaethon," 131-134
- "Pegasus and Bellerophon," 134-137
- "Daedalus," 139-140
- "Hercules," 159-172
- "Atalanta," 173-177

## Assessment

- Correct and complete information on the Greek God "Rap Sheet."
- Billboard that depicts major information about the god/goddess.
- Presentation of Greek myth to the class.
- Quiz: Students will use their class notes to complete a "scavenger hunt" quiz covering the gods/goddesses.

## ***Assignment: Getting to Know the Characters of Greek Mythology [Handout]***

### Activity 1

As we begin our unit on Greek mythology, it is important that you become acquainted with major characters and their stories. In order to do this, each of you will assume the persona of a Greek character and investigate the characteristics of and stories about that character. Specific elements that you need to include are:

*Domain:* Does your character rule over a particular aspect of life? Does your character rule over a particular area or city? For example, Athena is associated with Athens and the Parthenon.

*Characterization:* How is your god/goddess described in terms of character? Is he/she associated with a particular cause? For example, Hera is portrayed in a positive sense as the protector of marriage, and many stories about her involve her diligence in exposing and punishing Zeus and his lady friends for their relationships outside of marriage. However, she is also portrayed as a vengeful goddess unable to discern the innocence of some of those women.

*Description/Appearance:* How do your sources describe the character? How is the character portrayed by different artists?

*Symbol of the character:* What prop seems to define an aspect of your character. For example, Ares, god of war, is often accompanied by a vulture.

*Contributions:* What has your character contributed to the world? For example, Poseidon is honored for creating the first horse.

*Family Ties:* What is the relationship between your character and other members of the Greek family? How was he/she accepted into the family? For example, Hades, a brother of Zeus, is a prominent god of the underworld who is not welcomed on earth.

Activity 2: Since gods and goddesses were considered immortal, they are still alive on Mt. Olympus! However, in the modern world, they must leave the mountain in order to earn a proper living. In order to share important aspects of your character with other students, you must use information you have learned to determine an appropriate job or business for your character and create a billboard that will advertise the services of your god. We will post the billboards in the hall for all to see.

Elements that you must include are:

- Name of your god or goddess
- Clear indication of the business or product you are advertising
- Slogan
- Symbols of your god/goddess

## **Lesson Two: Mythology of the Aztecs**

### ***Objectives***

- Students will research important aspects of the Aztec life including gods and important factors in their civilization.
- Students will analyze important factors of Aztec life and explain them to other students by creating and presenting a codex.
- Students will compare elements of Aztec mythology with Greek mythology and form hypotheses about the similarities and differences they discover.

### ***Introduction***

One important concept on which John Steinbeck focuses in *The Pearl* is the influence that the Spanish have had on the culture and people of Mexico. Juana, one of the main characters, often prays for help using both ancient magic chanting and the “Hail Mary.” The village is clearly divided, symbolically and literally, into two camps: the Europeans and the Indians (native). The European doctor is clearly disgusted when requested to doctor the ills of the natives; in his red satin robe, he lounges in his bed sipping chocolate from a tiny porcelain teacup and decrying the fact that he is expected to serve the natives, complaining that he is a doctor, not a veterinarian. In order to enrich student understand of the Indian culture, they will investigate the Aztec culture, focusing on the mythology and daily life of Kino’s and Juana’s ancestors. In light of the fact that many of the codices were destroyed by the Spanish invaders, students will take on the task of reading the stories and producing new codices which will tell the story of Aztec life.

### ***Concept Development***

- Spanish conquistadors invaded Mexico and challenged the cultures that were already established there.
- Foreign influences destroyed some of the written history of the indigenous culture, particularly the codices that illustrated myths and legends of the culture.
- Mythological characters were able to transform into their animal spirits when necessary.
- Many Aztec myths illustrate that sacrifice was an important part of Aztec ritual.
- Hieroglyphics, written pictures, represent the Aztec mythology.
- A codex is a painted book that shows what the Aztecs knew and how they lived. The codex pages are folded in a zigzag fashion.
- The cultures of Meso-American were sophisticated and share characteristics with other ancient cultures despite the fact that there wasn’t physical transfer of information.

**Activity 1: Identifying Primary Gods/Correlation with Greek Characters (one day)**

- Students will use a scavenger hunt technique on the internet to locate descriptions of primary Aztec gods and enter their names in the character chart they began during their study of Greek mythology.
- Example: Students will discover that Huitzilopochtli is the Aztec war god.
- Students will compare the attributes/characteristics of Huitzilopochtli with Ares, the Greek god.
- Students will continue the process with other Aztec gods.

**Activity 2: Recreating Codices of Important Myths (three days)**

- Students will be divided into groups and assigned a story topic. One group will be assigned “Daily Life” as a topic.
- Students will read their assigned stories and create a graphic organizer that will be used to create a codex for each story. The organizer will be a simple sequential chart; each box in the chart should contain a sketch of what needs to be drawn for that part of the codex. The “Daily Life” group will create an organizer that contains some of the day to day activities and interests of the Aztecs. For example, one student will look at the importance of corn in this culture while another looks at major festivals and/or holidays.
- To preserve the meaning for other classes, students will include a text at the bottom of each codex to explain the story (minimal captions).
- After the organizer is complete, students will divide the pages and produce a codex for the story.
- When all the codices are complete, they will be displayed, and the group that created each will retell the story to the class.

**Activity 3: Formulate comparisons between cultures.**

- After students have compared Greek mythology with Aztec mythology (including the stories and major characters), they will work in their groups to formulate reasons/hypotheses for the connections, or lack of connection, between the two cultures.
- Each group will present and defend their hypotheses to the class.

**Closure**

*The Pearl* unit is scheduled so that it will end approximately November 1. Students will close the unit by celebrating Day of the Dead. I usually ask a parent, the language teacher, or another Hispanic staff member to create an altar, explain the significance of the day, and share in a picnic feast with the children – a traditional part of the celebration of ancestors. On this day, the codices will be displayed in the library, artifacts will be displayed there as well, and elementary students will be invited to participate by touring the displays with my students as docents.

**Materials**

- *The Aztecs* by Robert Hull
- “Aztec Mythology.”  
<<http://www.freeuk.net/elloughton13/aztecgod.htm>>
- “Aztec and Mayan Gods.” Accessed February 22, 2007.  
<[http://www.meta-religion.com/World\\_Religions/Ancient\\_religions/Central\\_america/](http://www.meta-religion.com/World_Religions/Ancient_religions/Central_america/)>

### ***Assessment***

- Individual Grade: Internet Research on a particular god/character and comparison with Greek mythology.
- Group Grade: Graphic Organizer
- Individual Grade: Individual Codex page(s)
- Individual Grade: Presentation of Codex page(s)

### **Lesson Three: Mythology of the Northwest Indians**

#### ***Objectives***

- Students will compare myth characters and stories to the Greek and Aztec cultures they have already studied.
- Students will compare the lifestyle of the Northwest Indians with the life of the Aztecs.
- Students will compare the arts/crafts of the Northwest Indians with the hieroglyphics they studied in the Aztec unit.
- Students will construct scenarios from the core novel using Indian pictures.

***Introduction:*** Since this unit will focus on Northwest Indian mythology and its relation to the arts and crafts of the tribe, it is important that students read examples of myths and relate them to art.

#### ***Concept Development***

- Because of their location close to the sea, Northwest Indians enjoyed material successes and interaction with outsiders that facilitated their development.
- Northwest Indians had a very structured culture composed of tribes and clans.
- Northwest Indians believed that their wealth should be shared and used the potlatch to celebrate their culture, their successes, and to share the wealth with others.
- Northwest Indians represented their positions and their stories through fairly sophisticated paintings of their house fronts and inside screens, both of which are rarely found/shared with modern culture.
- Intricate carving and painting on totem poles are a means of preserving Indian mythology.

#### ***Activity 1: Relating Mythology to Artistic Representation***

- Students will be divided into groups and read the stories provided.
- After they read the stories, students will examine the prints of the house fronts that tell the story they just read.
- Students will deconstruct/analyze the painting to define specific elements of the story.
- Students will draw and label figures that represent particular characters (for example, the thunderbird). The figures will become part of a “painting glossary” for all students to use.
- Each group will present their story to the class and explain the painting. Their figures will be posted on the board and compared with drawings from other groups.

***Materials:*** Stories and art plates from *Northwest Coast Indian Painting* by Malin

- “The Sea Monster” and Plate 10
- “The Thunderbird” and Figure 6
- “The Beaver Screen” and Figure 7
- “The Thunderbird and Whale” and Figures 8.1, 8.2; Plates 11A and 11B

**Activity 2: Students will use pictures to translate stories.**

- Students will view additional pictures of house front paintings and, using the glossary they began in Activity 1, write a story based on the pictures and what they have learned about the Northwest Indians.
- Students will view the plates in a museum type atmosphere, choose one, take notes on the art, and write the story for homework.

**Materials:** Art plates from *Northwest Coast Indian Painting*

**Activity 3: Construct a house front painting or totem pole using Indian symbols.**

After completing the core novel, *Call of the Wild*, students will choose an aspect of the story to depict in either a house front painting or a totem pole. Sample topics might include the following: (3 days)

- Trekking across the land while delivering government mail (Francois and Perrault)
- Search for gold in the wilderness
- Buck winning the bet in front of the saloon
- The tragic story of the city slickers who suffer an icy death
- Buck's journey to the wilderness
- Buck's decivilization

Students may decide to work individually or in pairs for this project. They will review the novel and submit a proposal for the aspect of the story they intend to cover and a rough draft of how they will depict that aspect. When approved, students will construct their project.

**Materials**

*Call of the Wild* by Jack London

Glossary of pictures from Activity 1

Butcher paper for house front or coffee cans for a totem pole.

Markers and/or paint.

**Assessment**

- Presentation of story to the class and drawings/explanation of figures.
- Original story based on a Northwest Indian house front painting
- Art project (house front or totem pole) based on an incident in *Call of the Wild*.
- Written response to reflective question.

**Closure**

Students will construct the setting for a typical potlach in the library for other students to view. It will include props, artwork, pictorial symbols, and so forth.

**Lesson Four: Mythology of the Maori**

**Objectives**

- Students will research and construct shadow puppets to use in telling a Maorian myth or story.
- Students will research the history of the culture in order to produce a travel brochure to encourage visits to the country.

- Students will use persuasive writing techniques to write a case either defending or opposing the Maori claim to additional land and compensation from the government based on past grievances.

### ***Introduction***

New Zealand, its geography, history, and people represent, perhaps, the least familiar culture that is included in this unit. For that reason, I plan to intersperse historical and geographical information into lessons connected directly with the novel; that information is essential to understanding the conflicts and characters in the story. Similarly, I have found very few students who are at all familiar with Maori myths. Therefore, I have included some of the most basic stories in this section of the mythology unit. Additionally, I have found only a few students, primarily my Asian students, who are familiar with shadow puppets. I decided, therefore, to marry the stories with Javanese puppets.

***Activity 1: Students will read Maori myths and convert them to short skits.***

***Activity 2: Students will produce shadow puppet shows.***

Students will work in groups to research the characters in books and on the internet to find images of the characters that they may use to design shadow puppets to illustrate the story through a narrator-driven puppet show.

***Activity 3: Students will research the Maori culture.***

Since the Maori culture is the least familiar to most students, one group in each class will research the Maori lifestyle and history and produce travel brochures for the students who will view the puppet shows. Websites will be provided to expedite the research.

***Activity 4: Students will study the claims for monetary compensation and/or land allowances based on Maori grievances.***

Since the Maori feel that they continue to have grievances against the government, students will act as lawyers, research the case, and present their legal opinions as to whether or not the Maori should receive additional compensation from the government. They will present their papers in debate format.

***Materials:*** The following myths will be used for this project.

- “Kupe’s Travels around Aotearoa”
- “How Maui Brought Fire to the World”
- “How Maui Slowed the Sun”
- “Whaitere - the Enchanted Stingray”
- “Kupe and the Giant Wheke”
- “Kawariki and the Sharkman”
- Cardboard, markers, chopsticks (for handles) to create puppets and elements of the setting and backdrop.

***Websites:*** The sites listed below have been placed in “Favorites” for easy student access.

- “Maori Culture.” Accessed February 15, 2006.  
<[http://www.piccom.org/whalerider/culture\\_politics.html](http://www.piccom.org/whalerider/culture_politics.html)>
- “Maori Culture & Mythology.” Accessed February 15, 2007.  
<[http://www.atonz.com/new\\_zealand/maoriculture.html](http://www.atonz.com/new_zealand/maoriculture.html)>
- “Maori Culture and Myths (The Bone People).” Accessed February 15, 2007.  
<<http://www.english.emory.edu/Bahri/Maori.html>>



- "Maori Myth, Legend, and Lore." Accessed February 15, 2007.  
<<http://www.nzbirds.com/birds/maorimyths.html>>
- "Maori Myths and Legends." Accessed February 15, 2007.  
<[http://www.tki.org.nz/r/maori/nga\\_pakiwaitara/hohunga/index\\_e.php](http://www.tki.org.nz/r/maori/nga_pakiwaitara/hohunga/index_e.php)>

### **Assessment**

- Quality and completeness of script generation.
- Evidence of research of characters, construction of characters and settings for the play.
- Presentation of play.
- Comprehensiveness of brochure.
- Debate

### **ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY**

#### **Works Cited**

- "Aztec and Mayan Gods." Accessed February 22, 2007.  
<[http://www.meta-religion.com/World\\_Religions/Ancient\\_religions/Central\\_america/](http://www.meta-religion.com/World_Religions/Ancient_religions/Central_america/)>.  
This article contains a list of Aztec and Mayan Gods, a convenient index to characters (with brief descriptions) in mythology.
- "Aztec Mythology." Accessed February 22, 2007. <<http://www.freeuk.net/elloughton13/aztecgod.htm>>.  
In a form easily accessible by children, the Aztec creation myth, explanations of nature, and major gods are discussed. Additionally, colorful representations of the gods and major characters are included that could be models for puppets.
- Bierlein, J. F. *Parallel Myths*. New York: Random House, 1994.  
The author wrote this book to make mythology more accessible to the average reader, not the scholar. Bierlein includes more than the typical Norse and Greek mythology; he goes to every area of the world to document the commonality of myth.
- Considine, David M. and Gail E. Haley. *Visual Messages: Integrating Imagery into Instruction*. Englewood: Teachers Ideas Press, 1999.
- Creeden, Sharon. *Fair is Fair: World Folktales of Justice*. Little Rock: August House, Incorporated, 1995.  
Creeden, formerly a prosecuting attorney, does not lecture on the law and justice, but presents stories from the oral tradition of many cultures that defines, perhaps better than our laws, how justice is determined by the common people in folktales. As she says in her foreword, she has let "the stories, in total, define justice." And the stories are from around the world.
- Davis, F. Hadland. *Myths and Legends of Japan*. New York: Dover Publications, 1992.  
An excellent source for an orderly presentation of myths that are easy enough for students to read and yet complete in their content. The appendix includes a list of gods and goddesses as well as a genealogy for them.
- Hamilton, Edith. *Mythology: Timeless Tales of Gods and Heroes*. New York: Meridian, 1969.
- Hamilton, Virginia. *In the Beginning: Creation Stories from Around the World*. New York: Harcourt, 1988.  
Hamilton includes stories of creation from diving into the sea to create a land culture to looking to the sky for the beginning of a culture. The stories are accessible to young people and offer several motifs that can be studied.
- Hull, Robert. *The Aztecs*. Austin: Steck-Vaughn Co., 1998.
- Malin, Edward. *Northwest Coast Indian Painting: House Fronts and Interior Schemes*. Portland: Timber Press, 1999.  
Anthropologist Malin's life work is the study of Northwest tribes in Southeast Alaska and British Columbia, and this study of house fronts will be an inspiration to students to pursue the mythology of animals in this region and their importance to the tribes of Malin's focus. He includes detailed drawings and sketches of house fronts and the mythology behind Indian art of this region. The pictures tell the stories.
- "Maori Culture." Accessed February 15, 2006. <[http://www.piccom.org/whalerider/culture\\_politics.html](http://www.piccom.org/whalerider/culture_politics.html)>.  
This article focuses on some of the gods who play prominent roles in the book and movie, *The Whale Rider*. It also defines social roles in the culture, the understanding of which is necessary to the novel.

- “Maori Culture & Mythology.” Accessed February 15, 2007.  
<[http://www.atonz.com/new\\_zealand/maoriculture.html](http://www.atonz.com/new_zealand/maoriculture.html)>.  
This article provides a brief glossary of terms to define elements of the Maori culture.
- “Maori Culture and Myths (The Bone People).” Accessed February 15, 2007.  
<<http://www.english.emory.edu/Bahri/Maori.html>>.  
This article is both a review of the book, but it also contains some information about Maori myths.
- “Maori Myth, Legend, and Lore.” Accessed February 15, 2007. <<http://www.nzbirds.com/birds/maorimyths.html>>.  
This very brief article focuses on the birds of Maori mythology. It is an excerpt from *Maori Bird Lore* by Murdoch Riley. After reading the article, one is inspired to find the book.
- “Maori Myths and Legends.” Accessed February 15, 2007.  
<[http://www.tki.org.nz/r/maori/nga\\_pakiwaitara/hohunga/index\\_e.php](http://www.tki.org.nz/r/maori/nga_pakiwaitara/hohunga/index_e.php)>.  
This site contains text of several Maori myths. Of particular interest might be the story of Maui and how he brought fire to the culture. This myth could be used as a contrast to the Greek story of Prometheus.
- “Maori Myths and Traditions.” Accessed February 15, 2007.  
<<http://www.teara.govt.nz/1966/M/MaoriMythsAndTraditions/>>.  
This comprehensive article addresses several aspects of Maori myths from common literary forms to actual recounting of myths to social/political traditions of the culture.
- Rosenberg, Donna. *World Mythology: An Anthology of the Great Myths and Epics*. Lincolnwood, Illinois: NTC Publishing Group, 1999.  
This book provides a survey of mythology around the world. Divided geographically, Rosenberg provides some of the most typical myths for each culture. Each section is preceded with a brief history and analysis of the mythology of that culture.
- Schuman, Michael A. *Mayan and Aztec Mythology*. Berkeley Heights, 2001.  
This book contains simplified myths that students will easily understand, questions teachers may ask about the myths, and commentary on each story.
- Strudwick, Leslie. *Maori*. New York: Weigl Publishers, Inc., 2005.  
This is a short book, easy to read, that would be excellent for students to use at the beginning of their research. Basic topics are covered: lifestyle, crafts, occupations, political situation, and history.

#### Other Sources

- Brindze, Ruth. *The Story of the Totem Pole*. New York: Vanguard Press, 1951.
- “Creation/Migration/Origin Stories.” Accessed February 22, 2007. <<http://www.indigenouspeople.net/aztecs.htm>>.  
This website contains a variety of creation stories and is particularly helpful with Native American mythology. The stories are told in a language simple enough to be accessible to middle and high school students.
- “Making Movie Storyboards.” Accessed March 8, 2006.  
<<http://www.thirteen.org/edonline/lessons/storyboarding/b.html>>.  
This website offers instructions for teachers and graphic organizers for students in order to produce storyboards. Additionally, the site directs patrons to other sites where storyboard samples, templates, and other filmmaking resources may be found.
- Miller, Mary and Karl Taube. *An Illustrated Dictionary of the Gods and Symbols of Ancient Mexico and the Maya*. London: Thames & Hudson Ltd, 1993.  
This book goes further than the title indicates; not only are typical symbols included, but the authors define issues such as disease and games of Mesoamerica along with typical nature symbols. Illustrations are very helpful, especially for students to use as models for their own art.
- Native American Literature*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2000.  
This volume divides Indian tribes into geographical areas and provides many stories based on the oral tradition. Stories focus on the difficulties Indians have faced, the adaptive abilities of the Indians, the relationship between Indians and the spiritual world, and family life. Poems, in addition to narrative, are included.
- “Polynesia: Maori Mythology.” Accessed February 15, 2007.  
<[http://www.janeresture.com/polynesia\\_myths/newzealand.htm](http://www.janeresture.com/polynesia_myths/newzealand.htm)>.  
This article includes a version of the Maori creation myth along with photographs of the ways Maori gods are represented, including wood carvings, panel from a meeting house, and carved godsticks.

“Readers on Stage.” Accessed February 27, 2007. <<http://www.aaronshep.com/rt/Tips!.html>>

Actually an online booklet, Aaron Shepard has written a series of readers’ theater scripts for myths and folktales around the world. The stories are short enough to be used as presentations in class, but Shepard also includes details on how to teach children to script their choice of stories as well. All of his materials may be freely copied and shared for any noncommercial purpose. Useful if teachers do not want to take the time to have students write the skits themselves.

“Sensu: Experiments in making a folding fan.” Accessed on February 27, 2007.

<<http://www.wodefodhall.com/sensu.htm>>.

The background of the fan, along with directions for constructing a fan, are included in this article, along with a biography for those who want to investigate the fan in more detail. While the directions are written for an adult, the diagrams and instructions could be easily modified to include in a lesson on Japanese mythology.

Stuart, Gene S. *The Mighty Aztecs*. Washington, D.C.: National Geographic Society, 1981.

This book is suitable for teacher research, but too detailed for middle school students. However, it will allow the teacher to guide students toward topics of interest. The pictures and illustrations, however, will be useful for student research.

Susilo, Joko. “Wayang Karetao.” Accessed February 15, 2007.

<<http://www.gamelan.org/jokosusilo/karetao/index.html>>.

Although brief, this article reveals characteristics of shadow puppets used to perform Maori stories. The author also discusses the difference between Karetao and Javanese performances.

Wyatt, Gary. *Mythic Beings: Spirit Art of the Northwest Coast*. Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre Ltd., 1999.

The incredibly beautiful art in the volume is inspired by the mythology of the Northwest Coast and includes the retelling of the most important myths of the region.