

Individual Learning Packet

Teaching Unit

Mythology

by Edith Hamilton

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Mythology

Introduction

Many times, the words “folk tale,” “fairy tale,” “legend,” and “myth” are used interchangeably. Before beginning the study of *Mythology*, students should understand how these terms differ. Folk tales or fairy tales are usually purely imaginative, fictional stories intended to amuse, entertain, or teach. Legends are usually true stories of events in history but exaggerated for dramatic or humorous effect. Myths are imaginative stories resulting from man’s attempt to understand the phenomena of nature or to explain cultural customs and rituals. Mythology is a way to explain things in the world that had no explanation before.

Much of the literature students read in school will contain allusions to Greek, Roman, or Norse mythology. For example, a character in a novel may be described as *narcissistic*, as an *Adonis*, or as undertaking *Herculean* tasks. All of these are references to Greek myths. Recognizing the myth leads to greater understanding of the character which is being developed in the book.

In addition, our culture traces its political, philosophical, and social roots back to Greek culture. Mythological stories serve as the subject for works of art, commercial advertisement, comic books, and science fiction, among other things.

A student who has some familiarity with Edith Hamilton’s *Mythology* is intellectually and academically ahead of a student who has no knowledge of mythology. The book is long, but it is not difficult reading. The subject matter itself provides reading that can be interesting and informative. It has been established as a popular classic, a valuable tool, and a necessary reference work that is essential for the well-read student.

The book provides the famous myths of ancient Greek and Roman times, as well as a brief section on Norse mythology. It includes great heroes, both before and after the Trojan War; the great families of Greek mythology—the House of Atreus, the Royal House of Thebes, and the Royal House of Athens; and a variety of myths dealing with the beginning of the Earth, the explanations for natural phenomenon, and the strengths and weaknesses of both gods and mortals.

The source for any page references in the study guide is the Time Warner edition of Edith Hamilton’s *Mythology*.

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Objectives

By the end of this Unit, students will be able to

1. recount various theories for the origins of myths.
2. differentiate between classical and the earlier, primitive myths.
3. recognize the chief Olympian gods and goddesses and their functions.
4. recount the Greek version of creation.
5. follow the creation of man, his fall, and the introduction of death into the world, as seen in Greek culture.
6. identify and discuss the lesser Greek and Roman gods and goddesses.
7. comment on two great gods of Earth: Dionysus and Demeter.
8. discuss explanatory myths, such as the tales of Demeter and Persephone.
9. continue this discussion with myths dealing with animals and flowers.
10. recount and comment on the ancient world's most famous pair of lovers, Cupid and Psyche.
11. compare and contrast the Cupid/Psyche myth with other pairs of mythological lovers regarding:
 - the element of trust
 - the acceptance of pain/suffering on behalf of the loved one
 - valuing a person for the intrinsic, not the exterior, beauty.
12. follow various stories of Zeus' love affairs, both with human women and with goddesses.
13. recognize the reasons and need for mythological monsters.
14. examine Jason's quest for the Golden Fleece as part of the heroic tradition.
15. recognize elements of magic in a story and evaluate Perseus' heroic qualities, relating the myth of Perseus to the fairy tale of Cinderella.
16. point out the value of an intellectual, compassionate hero as seen through the story of Theseus.

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Questions for Essay and Discussion

1. Choose three heroes of Greek mythology. Discuss the qualities each of these heroes has and how these qualities are shown through the hero's actions.
2. Contrast the Greek and the Norse explanation for the beginning of the world.
3. Look at the myths of Hyacinth, Narcissus, Adonis, and Clytie. Discuss how these flower myths follow the death/resurrection idea.
4. Discuss how the stories of Demeter and Dionysus follow the cycle of birth, growth, reproduction, and death.
5. Monster myths developed to explain natural phenomenon (e.g., Charybdis or The Clashing Rocks), to explain how wicked people might be punished, and to add excitement to heroic tales. Find a monster myth and explain how the myth corresponds to each of these categories.
6. Choose three myths dealing with love and discuss how these myths illustrate three ideas about love: the essential element of trust; the acceptance of pain or suffering on behalf of love; valuing a person for him/herself and not for external appearances.
7. A common theme in Greek mythology involves punishment that befalls those who try to see themselves as equal to the gods. Consider the myths of Icarus, Arachne, Phaëthon, and Niobe and discuss the sin/punishment element in each of these myths and the lesson that all four put forth.
8. In her introduction Edith Hamilton contrasts the ways the Greeks and earlier peoples viewed the world. What are the differences that she sees between them?
9. Some critics describe Hamilton's Mythology as an "idealized view." Why do you suppose they use that term?

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Introduction

Vocabulary

aloof – standoffish
amorous – lustful
ardent – passionate
ascribed – credited
bestial – beast-like
clarity – clearness
colossus – giant
compendium – collection
contending – competing
decreed – judged; ruled
discomfit – thwart
disconcertingly – confusingly
divinities – gods
frivolous – silly
indisputable – without question
invariably – always; without fail
meed – reward
omnipotent – all-powerful
preposterous – absurd
prevailed – was uppermost
primeval – primitive
rhetorical – overblown
semblance – appearance
suppliant – one who prays; one who begs
surpassing – exceeding
voluminous – productive

1. What is the difference between primitive and classical mythology?

5. What does Prometheus do that angers Zeus?

6. How is Prometheus tortured?

7. Why is Pandora created?

8. Why does Zeus send a flood to earth?

9. Who are the only two survivors?

10. Who are the Stone People?

Chapter 8: Four Great Adventures

Vocabulary

covet – desire
dissuade – persuade away from
hind – deer
pedestrian – dull
precipitous – hurried
supernal – heavenly

1. How does the myth of Phaëthon explain the poplar trees that grow along the bank of the river Eridanus?

2. Pegasus and Bellerophon

A. Why does Bellerophon believe that he can be equal to the gods?

B. What does Bellerophon forget?

Chapter 15: The Adventures of Odysseus

Vocabulary

avert – turn away; avoid
destitute – extremely poor
ewer – pitcher
filial – family-related
limpid – clear; calm
moldering – decaying
profusion – plenty
provisions – food
revoked – taken back
roistering – carousing
sumptuously – lavishly
vexed – troubled

1. What are four great adventures of Odysseus during his twenty years of wandering before he returned home?

2. How are Odysseus and his wife Penelope finally reunited?
