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**WALCH**  
PUBLISHER

# MYTHOLOGY

*A Teaching Unit*

REVISED  
AND  
EXPANDED



- Where Do All Our Heroes Come From?
- Myth and Morals
- The Gods of Greece Meet the Gods of Rome
- African Mythology
- Native American Mythology

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## PART I

## WORKSHEET 1

**FINDING THE MESSAGE IN THE MYTH**

Although some myths were probably told simply to entertain listeners, most had a more serious purpose.

- A. Some were attempts to explain natural phenomena such as floods.
  - B. Some were religious speculation on human beings' relationship to the gods or on such mysteries as creation, death, and the afterlife.
  - C. Some examined human behavior, both people's failings and their virtues.
- Read each of the following well-known myths and decide whether it belongs in Group A, B, or C above. Then state what it explains or teaches.

**1. Daedalus and Icarus**

To escape from a prison where he and his son were being held, Daedalus made wings of wax and feathers. In flight, the son, Icarus, ignored his father's warning about flying too close to the sun. The heat of the sun melted the wax, Icarus's wings fell apart, and he plunged to his death.

This myth belongs in Group \_\_\_\_\_ or Group \_\_\_\_\_. It teaches that \_\_\_\_\_

**2. Persephone and Pluto (Hades)**

Persephone, the beautiful daughter of Demeter, goddess of agriculture, was kidnapped by Pluto (Hades) and taken to his kingdom, the Underworld. Demeter, angered by Pluto's boldness and grieving for her daughter, forbade the earth to give forth fruit until Zeus, the most powerful god, worked out a compromise. For five months of the year, Persephone would be with her mother and all growing things would flourish, but during the other seven months she would be with Pluto and the world would turn barren and cold.

This myth belongs in Group \_\_\_\_\_. It explains \_\_\_\_\_

**3. Orpheus and Eurydice**

Soon after the talented musician Orpheus married the beautiful nymph, Eurydice, she was bitten by a snake and died. Orpheus, determined to bring his bride back from the Underworld, went there himself and so charmed Hades with his music that the god agreed to let Eurydice return to life, on one condition. Orpheus must not look back on Eurydice as he was leading her out of Hades's kingdom. Unfortunately, Orpheus stole one glimpse of his bride and she was lost to him forever.

This myth could be placed in Group \_\_\_\_\_ or Group \_\_\_\_\_. It explains or teaches that \_\_\_\_\_

- Vocabulary from the myths:

1. Demeter's Roman name was Ceres. What name for a popular breakfast food is derived from it? \_\_\_\_\_
2. Orpheum is often used as a name for a theater. Can you explain why this is appropriate? \_\_\_\_\_

## PART I

## LESSON 2

**MYTHS IN OUR MODERN WORLD**

Myths? They are just fantastic stories about the long ago. They don't belong in the twentieth century.

Right?

Wrong! Even though you may not be aware of them, myths still play a part in your daily life.

Perhaps you'd like proof.

Let's imagine that when you got up this morning, you washed your face with Dove soap before going down to breakfast.

While you were eating your cereal, you happened to notice a picture of the corn goddess on the box. Just then, your mother called to you to hurry. You were already late for school, and she'd have to give you a ride in the Mercury.

In your first class, you took out your Venus pencil to do your algebra. English came next. You were expected to write a paragraph, using

chronological order. In science, your teacher explained the characteristics of arachnids. In social studies, your class divided into hawks and doves and had a lively debate about our country's military policies.

After school, you put on your Nike running shoes, hoping they'd "put wings on your feet." Later, your track coach told you that your time was off. You thought that was probably because your Achilles tendon was still sore.

Back home, you checked the bulletin board and found that your household chore for the day was cleaning the bathroom with Ajax cleanser.

Finally, with chores and homework finished, you could turn on your Panasonic TV.

How alert were you to the part mythic characters played in your day? Try the game on the next page to find out.



# TEACHER'S READY REFERENCE

## LESSON 1

### VOCABULARY FOR REVIEW

speculate

forbade

awe

reverent

### SUPPLEMENTARY ACTIVITIES

- A. Imagine you are a person from ancient times entering a railroad or highway tunnel for the first time. Write a myth to explain the existence of the tunnel.
- B. Imagine that you, one of the ancients, are present at the launching of a space shuttle. Write a mythic explanation of the event.

### ANSWER KEY

1. B; C; teaches that the child should obey the parent and that the young should heed good advice; also teaches that human beings must not try to act like gods, i.e., "fly too high"
2. A; explains the change of seasons
3. B; C; teaches obedience to authority and that it is impossible to cheat death

### VOCABULARY

1. cereal
2. comes from Orpheus, the divine musician

## LESSON 2

### VOCABULARY FOR REVIEW

chronological

vulnerable

arachnid

fantastic (gives meaning other than current slang)

### SUPPLEMENTARY ACTIVITIES

- A. Make a collection of ads with mythological connections, to be used on the bulletin board. Example: Ajax cleanser.
- B. Find mythic references on the sports page of the newspaper and bring them in for the bulletin board. Example: He showed herculean strength.

### ANSWER KEY

Order may vary, but pairing is as follows: Venus, doves, A; hawks, B; cereal, C; corn goddess, D; Achilles, E; Ajax, F; chronological, G; arachnids, H; wings on your feet, Mercury, I; Nike, J; Panasonic, K.



## LESSON 3

You may want to hold a class discussion on the subject of altruism and moral courage.

### VOCABULARY FOR REVIEW

crafty                      persistence

### SUPPLEMENTARY ACTIVITIES

In a short report, compare a real modern hero with an ancient mythical hero.

Example: Compare a heavyweight boxing champion with Hercules.

### ANSWER KEY

1. He was a self-made man who also worked to help others.
2. She showed willingness to sacrifice her own comfort to save others, determination, and the will to win against great odds.
3. Kennedy was seen as attempting to create an ideal world, as did Arthur.
4. She was a self-made woman.
5. Both require physical courage, leadership, the will to win over obstacles. The game is a combat for territory.

## LESSON 4

You will want to give students a brief account of the Trojan War, including the story of the Trojan Horse, before they do the worksheet.

### VOCABULARY FOR REVIEW

row                      defy

### SUPPLEMENTARY ACTIVITIES

Search your school's art print collection, art reference books, and mythological encyclopedias for reproductions of famous paintings inspired by myths, and bring them to class. Examples: Sargent's *Hercules Kills the Hydra*; Botticelli's *Birth of Venus*, or *Mars and Venus*; Rubens's *Vulcan at His Smithy*.

### ANSWER KEY

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| 1. Apollo                                  | 9. Daedalus and Icarus                                  |
| 2. Apollo, sky or heavens                  | 10. Icarus flew too close to the sun and lost his life. |
| 3. sky                                     | 11. a poet of ancient Greece                            |
| 4. early morning                           | 12. the Trojan War                                      |
| 5. Answers will vary<br>(buttercup, tulip) | 13. Answers will vary.                                  |

## PART I

## LESSON 8



## THE GODS GIVE WAY TO THE NEW

In Lesson 7, you learned the Greek version of the creation of the world. Now you may be wondering when human beings entered the picture. Actually, that did not take place until after another power struggle among the gods.

It happened like this. Cronus was now in power, but just like his father before him, he saw everyone else as a threat to his throne. As a result, he decided to leave the three hundred-handed monsters and the one-eyed giants buried. He released only his fellow Titans.

He was suspicious of his own children, too, but instead of burying them alive as Uranus had done, he ate them! Cronus's wife, Rhea, tolerated his behavior for a while. Then, like Gaea, she plotted against her husband. Just after Rhea had given birth to a son, Zeus, she arranged for him to be taken to a distant place where he would be safe from his father. Then she wrapped a large stone in a cloth, and the unsuspecting Cronus ate it, thinking that he was destroying his latest son.

When Zeus had grown to manhood, he returned home unrecognized. Then he found a way to feed Cronus an herb which caused him to vomit violently, thus releasing the eleven children he had swallowed long before.

Zeus now had eleven allies, and he also enlisted the help of two sympathetic Titans, Prometheus and Epimetheus. Next, he released the one-eyed giants, or Cyclopes, who had been

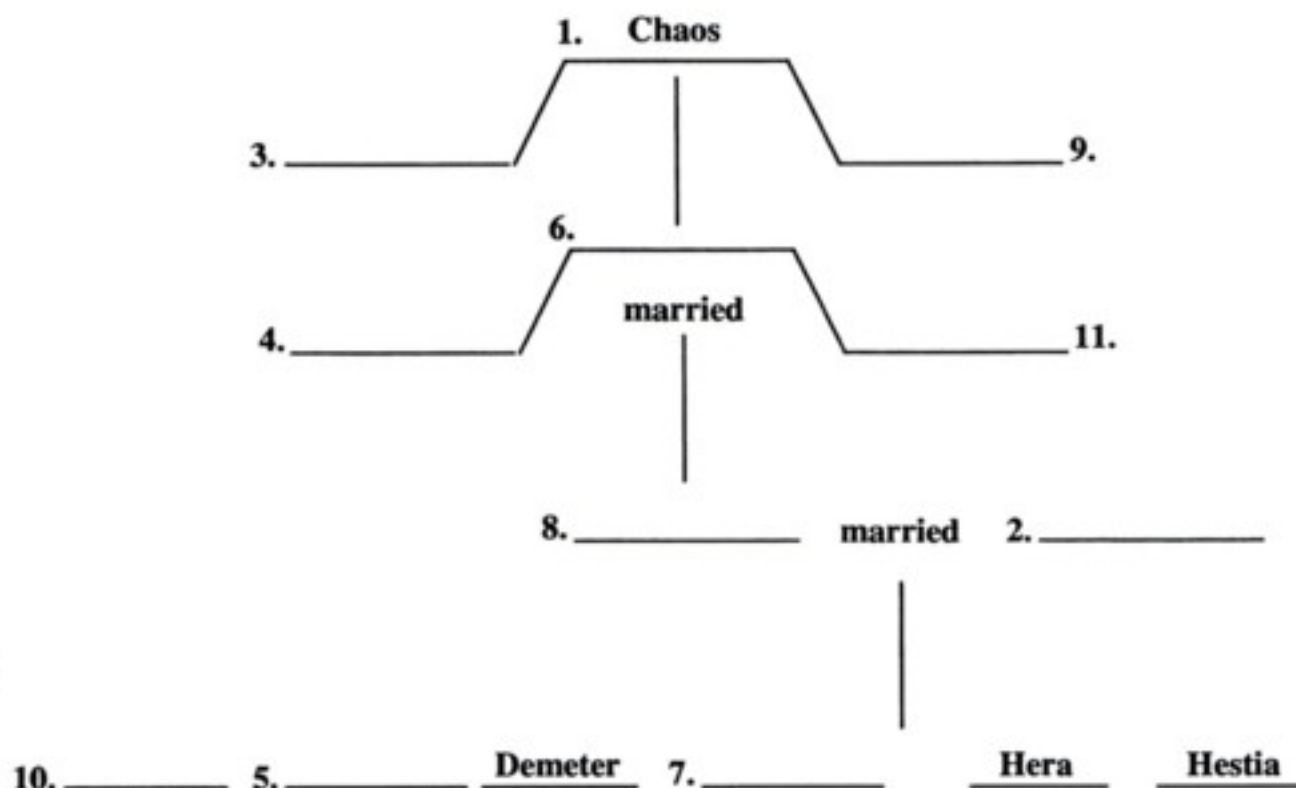
buried all this time, knowing that they too would have a grudge against Cronus. Even with all those allies, Zeus found his father to be a formidable opponent. Their power struggle lasted ten long years, but finally Cronus was deposed and Zeus became the supreme ruler.

Like many real-life conquering heroes, Zeus rewarded his followers in various ways, but he divided his father's kingdom with his two brothers. Poseidon was to be god of the sea; and Hades, god of the Underworld. Naturally, Zeus kept the best for himself and became god of the sky and the upper world.

If we read the myth of Rhea's deception of Cronus literally, it is simply a fantastic story; but if we see it as symbolic, it begins to make sense. Certainly, we can accept that Cronus was deposed through his wife's trickery and his grown son's rebellion. History has parallels to support such acts. For example, the twelfth-century English King Henry II was the victim of various plots hatched by his jealous sons with the aid of their mother, Queen Eleanor of Aquitaine.

At any rate, Zeus's coming to power set the stage for the arrival of human beings, whom he needed to worship him. But before you find out how humans came on the scene, you should become a little better acquainted with the gods themselves.



**THE GODS' FAMILY TREE.**

- You may have seen a family tree showing your relationship to your living relatives and your ancestors. Today, you are going to create a family tree for the gods. First, fill in the space beside each description with the name of the appropriate god or goddess; you may have to refer to earlier lessons. Then write the name in the corresponding blank on the tree (the first one is done for you). Note that the goddesses Hera, Hestia, and Demeter already appear on the tree. You will learn more about them later

- |           |  |
|-----------|--|
| 1. Chaos  | This was the beginning; no order existed; all was darkness.        |
| 2. _____  | She fed her husband a stone wrapped like an infant.                |
| 3. _____  | This figure personified the night.                                 |
| 4. _____  | He buried his children alive.                                      |
| 5. _____  | He became the god of the Underworld.                               |
| 6. _____  | The principle of love and order, it arose from night and darkness. |
| 7. _____  | He became the supreme god, ruler of heaven and earth.              |
| 8. _____  | He mutilated his father with a sickle.                             |
| 9. _____  | This figure was a personification of darkness.                     |
| 10. _____ | Zeus made him god of the sea.                                      |
| 11. _____ | She plotted with her youngest son to overthrow her husband.        |