

## Archetypical Explorations of Self-Discovery in Hesiod, Homer, and Sophocles

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*Then let it break upon us. I must learn  
My parentage, whatever it may be....  
But I shall not be shamed. I hold myself  
The child of Fortune, giver of all good.  
-Oedipus, Oedipus Rex*

*So, don't only show us by the argument that justice is stronger than  
injustice, but show what each in itself does to the man who has  
it-whether it is noticed by the gods and human beings or not-that  
makes the one good and the other bad.*

-Adeimantus to Socrates, *The Republic of Plato*, Book II

*Would a god want to lie, either in speech or deed by presenting an  
illusion?*

-Socrates, *The Republic of Plato*, Book II

### **Introduction**

Students at low-income schools are often denied access to elements of the western canon which are taken for granted at higher achieving schools. While I don't want to delve too deeply into the controversial issues surrounding the inclusion of the western canon in school curriculum, I do want to say that I believe it is important to be familiar with the most basic texts and ideas of the canon, and that I don't see this and basic ideas of multi-culturalism to be at odds. I would even argue that by exploring ideas presented in major texts such as *The Odyssey*, we allow for much discussion about how we define ourselves both personally and culturally. Certainly many classical and biblical texts have had profound impacts on who we are and why we think and behave like we do, and by making these explicit, we empower our students to make sound judgements on who they are and how different cultures may enhance or detract from our understanding of self-definition.

### **Academic Setting**

I currently teach at a low-income middle school which is over 90% Hispanic and Mexican National, a school which must constantly struggle with low English proficiency, low literacy, poverty, violence, drugs, and little community support. I realize that for my students, education provides their most valuable opportunity to overcome the

obstacles these issues pose. In spite of having limited resources, I strive to impress upon each learner the importance of knowledge. Holding high standards and requiring all students, regardless of ability or experience, to reach their highest potential is the foundation of my educational philosophy.

In addition, or perhaps as a result of socio-economic issues, students at this school have traditionally scored very low on standardized tests. Although this may be due in part to low educational priorities at home, it is also due to low expectations of the students' abilities from teachers and from students themselves. In my experience, low achieving students who are challenged with difficult material and high expectations almost always rise to the challenge. Knowing that a teacher believes in their potential as learners can make all the difference, even when students are unsure of their own abilities. By presenting material to students which may normally be associated with higher achieving schools, we quickly raise confidence and expectations, and thus eventually raise overall ability, a part of which is measured through standardized test scores.

This unit is designed for an eighth grade literature class and will focus not only on universal themes and interpretation that will aid the students in their future schooling, but will also try to address their current developmental level in a meaningful way. I believe that presented in the right way, the themes of Greek mythology will provide meaningful discussion, learning, and academic background for students who are often not challenged academically. Because there are extremely varied levels of reading proficiency in the class, reading will be done as a class out loud, or in smaller groups in which higher and lower level readers will be grouped together. In group readings, emphasis will be placed on comprehension of the texts while reading. Extremely low level readers may receive alternative reading material covering the same subjects. Students with limited English proficiency may also receive translations (when available) in their native language, in this case Spanish. Please see reading list for translations.

### **Context and Background**

There are questions that all human beings ask, regardless of culture, environment, or background. Who am I? Why am I here? What should I do? Am I the master of my own life, or subject to forces beyond my control? The ways in which we answer these types of questions are what make us unique, as cultures and as individuals, but the need to ask such existential questions is, I would argue, universal. When such questions are grappled with on a personal level, they result in an individual understanding of one's place in the cosmos. This

becomes a way of seeing the cosmos and leads to personal philosophies and values, and sometimes to a direct mystical experience of the cosmos as it is perceived. When these questions are answered by a society, perhaps as the long, gradual accretion of individual conceptions, they gradually become codified into mythology, religion, government, and law, the very things which define culture itself.

Societies often provide answers to deep existential questions that are a reflection of their environment. In the early Middle East, the universe was seen to be controlled by capricious, harsh gods who created humanity solely to serve them. Humans had little value in this world view, and were seen as subject to forces utterly beyond their control, a reflection perhaps of the difficult desert environment in which they lived. The Egyptians pictured the cosmos as ruled by much more benevolent gods who preferred order and law. Although humans were unquestionably subject to the gods, including the Pharaoh, life was not the unpredictable journey it was for the people to the east. The regular, predictable ebb and flow of the Nile was proof that the universe was a place with at least some sense of order and stability. For the monotheistic religions of Judaism, Christianity and later Islam, the cosmos was seen as a very orderly place, although that order may not always be perceived and known by mortals. The universe was seen to be progressing in a linear fashion preordained by God. Humans were punished for transgressions against God's order, but ultimately the promise of a chosen tribe of people reaping the rewards of being chosen by God outweighed all other considerations.

The civilization of ancient Greece was in many ways unique from these other cultures. Perhaps this resulted from the blending of what was a political system essentially based on warrior king societies mixed with existing near-eastern religious systems in the Peloponnesus. At any rate, Greek mythology pictured the gods as much more human in their exploits. To be sure, the gods were superior to mortals, but they behaved in ways that were much more human than say Yahweh, Marduk, or Horus, gods so aloof from the human world that they bore little resemblance to anything familiar. As a result, the Greek gods could be understood much more as archetypal representations of the human psyche than could the distant, unapproachable gods of Mesopotamia and Egypt. Granted, this is clearly a 20<sup>th</sup> century post-Freudian interpretation, but one that does seem to have validity. The very nature of the Greek gods and their warrior-king ethic encouraged inquiry that may not have been possible in the monolithic Egypt, monotheistic Israel, or chaotic Mesopotamia. Questions about mankind's place in the cosmos were

actively pursued, seeking to know what role humans had over their own destiny, what part the gods took in an individual's life, and even whether or not the gods existed at all! This is a question that could not have been asked in Egypt, as it would have undermined the very basis of its god-ruled civilization. In short, the gods were representative of Greek rationalism and humanism which encouraged types of inquiry that had not existed previously. These eventually gave rise not only to new ideas of scientific inquiry, democracy, and rational philosophy, but to new ideas of religion spawned from the mixture of these ideas with the extant mythology.

The obvious question at this point is, "So what?" We live in a world separated by thousands of years and thousands of miles from ancient Greece. Why should we, and especially why should our students, be concerned or interested in the subject? We are not a nation of Indo-Europeans only, we are a nation represented by an extremely diverse populace. We are Asian, African, Hispanic, American Indian, and many distinctions beside. I would argue that although this is true, the principles on which this country were founded are undeniably Western, and often Greek in origin. The founding fathers may well have been influenced by the Iroquois league when writing the constitution, but they were obviously influenced by Athenian democracy (and the Roman Republic) as well, a fact that seems obvious given the architecture of Washington D.C. Furthermore, in a country that is largely Christian based (simply an observation, not a value judgement), we must give a nod to the Greek contributions to the religion, whether in the influence of the mystery religions and their dying and rising god motif, or in the influence of the *logos*. To understand who we are, we must understand where we have come from. Even our popular conceptions of God, from Gary Larson's "Far Side" cartoons to portrayals in art, seem more akin to Zeus in Olympus than the ubiquitous Yahweh. Finally, Greek ideas were spread not only to the new world via its European colonizers, but also to Africa through the Seleucid dynasties and Asia through Alexander. Knowledge of Greek ideas does help us to understand who we are and where we come from, both in the literal, physical sense, and in terms of its archetypal representations as presented in Greek mythology.

Why teach Greek myths specifically? What do the Greek myths in particular offer us that other mythologies might not? For one, they are undeniably part of our cultural experience. This is not strictly academic. The success of television shows such as *Xena: The Warrior Princess* and *Hercules* are certainly not high academic works, and yet they are enormously popular. Nor are these shows popular simply because white male university professors have told us they are good.

In fact, this is often lamented by academics themselves, who ironically decry popularization despite the fact that the original works were created precisely for that purpose. The ubiquitous influence of Greek myth in everything from Disney movies and pop music to high art attests to the fact that on some level, it appeals to our psyche and our experience. It is my personal belief that the reason for this is because it speaks to our psyche in an archetypical way. It raises questions that all human beings ask at one time or another. Furthermore, it speaks to us culturally as Americans. We are an intensely humanist society in the fact that we do indeed see human beings and human activity as central to our cosmos. If we did not, would the power of advertising be able to take hold of us? Thus characters such as Hercules easily resurface on both television and in the movies. Odysseus reappears in modern literature, rock and roll songs and contemporary film. Recognition of this is part of what it means to be literate in our society, albeit not the only criteria.

The late middle school years are important developmentally because this is the time when human beings begin to make abstract judgments about themselves and their relationship to the world. No longer are judgments based on concrete information, but become based more and more on abstractions such as, "Who am I?," "What is good?," and "What am I supposed to do?." This coincides with Erik Erickson's psycho-social theory of development, and the adolescent's search for personal identity. It also corresponds with Lawrence Kohlberg's Moral Development concept, and specifically with his idea of post-conventional Moral Reasoning. Also Jean Piaget's Formal Operational Stage, where situations are not seen as black and white, but as one possible outcome given a large number of variables. In reality, all of this is academic. The bottom line is that in the late middle school years, children are in the process of becoming adults. This is the age in many cultures when adolescents go through rites of passage which symbolically represent their entry into adulthood. It can be an exhilarating time, but also terrifying. Their ideas of self-identity are undergoing radical shifts which are confusing and often painful. This journey of self-discovery is analogous in many ways to Joseph Campbell's idea of the hero's journey, an archetypical journey embodied in much of Greek mythology, whether the Hesiodic works, the Homeric epics, or the tragedies of Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides. Indeed, these works can serve a pedagogical purpose beyond what we normally think of as academia. They can help young people understand their individual journeys into adulthood.

### *Rationale*

The ultimate rationale for this unit therefore rests on two points. The

first is that all human beings raise the types of questions we see in Greek literature and mythology, and these questions are particularly salient in adolescence when children are making the transition to adulthood. To know ourselves, we undergo a journey of self-discovery akin to the hero's journey. During this journey we ask questions which quite often become defining moments in our lives. If adolescents can be shown how to ask these questions, how others have asked them, and what the consequences of asking them were, they may find their own search for self-discovery more fruitful. This seems particularly important in an age where more and more adolescents find meaning by completely rejecting societal values, or accept them in facile ways through violence or drugs. At times, such rejection may be normal and even fruitful, but at times it may lead to a type of nihilism, as the growing gang problem illustrates. Gangs provide a sense of belonging that is conspicuously absent elsewhere in young peoples' lives, and are thus seductively attractive for them, giving them a tribal sense of belonging analogous to the warrior groups in *The Iliad*. Ultimately, however, such a sense of belonging is a dead end street that prohibits rather than encourages introspection. If a child does not expect to live past the age of eighteen, a journey of self-discovery may not seem to be of much value. Likewise, if a child stops any sort of true, meaningful self-discovery through the use of drugs, violence, or the rejection of growth, then they remain essentially a child. From Erickson's, Kohlberg's, or Piaget's point of view, these children never become adults because they have not fully developed emotionally or psychologically. They are physically grown but psychologically remain children. The implications of this are far reaching. Not only does the person negate their personal growth, a fact which could literally be called tragic, but their ability to participate meaningfully in the political system of this country is severely hindered. One can only vote responsibly if one is able to make clear and often difficult ethical judgements. The inability to participate in a democratic system undermines the very democratic system itself. There were of course enormous problems with Athenian democracy itself, problems addressed in the Roman Republic which in turn heavily influenced American democracy; but the fact remains that self-knowledge based on sound inquiry ensures the ability to participate, and in participation we exercise at least a measure of control over our own destinies.

The second rationale for this unit is to understand the roots of certain American and Western ideologies and beliefs. Greek culture still influences our thinking and belief systems in very important ways. It has directly spawned many American ideas of democracy, ideas about god, justice, science, and even art and architecture. It has given rise to

innumerable academic disciplines, but also many television shows and movies. More children know who Hercules is now than know who Quetzalcoatl, Zarathustra, Ganesh, or Wotan are. This does not make the myth inherently more important or more profound, but it does seem to attest to a cultural inclination, whether the result of bias, marketing, intellectual imperialism or momentum. It seems important to address this on some level, so that we can understand where our myths and ideas come from, and how they help to make us who we are. The point is not one of exclusion, but of understanding. Even Greek society and mythology was a rich blend of cultural input from the Middle East, Africa, and Europe, a fact which can be seen in the development of Greek myth and even in the writings of the historians Herodotus and Thucydides. To understand this in general is the only way in which multi-culturalism, as the concept is used today, can come to have real meaning, and not be simply a luke-warm attempt to acknowledge different cultures without a true understanding of what they are about.

### *Unit Content*

The content I have chosen for this unit demonstrates, I believe, personal journeys to self-discovery and maturity - elements which should resonate on some level with adolescents. Hesiod provides not only good background in terms of the mythological players we will encounter later in the unit, but it also shows the struggle for maturity and self-identity which will ultimately place the Olympian gods at the top of the Greek pantheon. Zeus' struggle with his father Cronos mirrors Cronos' own struggle with his father Ouranos, and indeed, in the other direction, represents the struggle every adolescent goes through in trying to forge their own identity separate from his or her parents. Thus in reading about the cosmic struggle between Zeus and his father, we are not looking back literally into the early physical universe, but are really confronting our psyche and the birth of our conscious individuality. There are, of course, interpretations widely divergent from this admittedly Jungian one. For instance, Hesiod's own view of the event focuses on the victory of order and civilization over primitive brutality (Harris and Platzner 60). This point should serve to illustrate the capacity of Greek myth to allow for several equally valid means of interpretation, depending on one's goals and motives. For purposes of this unit, the Jungian view seems most productive.

The choice to use Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* is based on the belief that journeys of self-discovery are not always, and may in fact seldom be, positive uplifting experiences. They often entail grappling with dark, uncomfortable truths, but ones which can keep us from reaching our

full potential unless recognized, fought, and defeated. As the blind prophet Tiresias tells us, "To be wise is to suffer." As the football coach might tell us, "No pain, no gain." Part of the heroic journey is always a descent into hell, whether that be literally as in Odysseus' or Orpheus' case, or figurative as in Achilles' or Oedipus' case. Odysseus literally travels to Hades with the help of a god, but he emerges a wiser man than when he entered. Oedipus' journey is inward. It is literally a "tragic" journey in that he must own up to his personal flaws and his errors of judgement. He must recognize the hubris which caused him to deny them for so long, and which caused him to remain figuratively blind to his own true self. When he emerges, he too is a wiser man than when he entered, although with much more tragic consequences than Odysseus. He now can see his true self, although he becomes physically blind. His admission of error, however, makes him heroic. He takes full responsibility for his situation rather than blaming other human beings or the gods. To be heroic is to embrace our faults as well as our strengths. In this way, Oedipus does in fact become heroic despite his terrible crimes and extreme hubris. Redemption is always possible, but must be achieved internally, and often with incredible suffering. The realization that growth is often painful but can only truly be achieved with the conscious acceptance of responsibility is a powerful lesson for any human being, and particularly for adolescents who may be undergoing this experience for the first time.

Finally, the choice of *The Odyssey* was made for a number of reasons. The first is that it is an incredible adventure story. Throughout the epic poem we are regaled with natural and supernatural forces. We see the hero, Odysseus, traveling to many strange and foreign lands, encountering giants, witches, and monsters of astounding variety. These are elements which still hold strong appeal to us, a fact proved in contemporary video games, movies, and even literature such as the Harry Potter series. Whereas many modern examples may represent nothing more than diversion however, *The Odyssey* presents these fantastic elements in the setting of a voyage of self-discovery. Odysseus' return to his home on Ithaca from the battlefields of Troy is not simply a physical journey. It is a journey of self-discovery which follows the archetypical hero's journey quite well. When Odysseus leaves Troy he is, despite the extreme bravery and cunning he showed there, for all intents and purposes a child. He defeats the cyclops Polyphemus early in his journey, but after doing so gloats like a small child in a moment of hubris, flaunting his victory over this son of a god, the very god Odysseus must rely upon most in his sea journey, Poseidon. In so doing, Odysseus brings his twenty-year journey, and possibly the death of his men, on himself. Furthermore, Odysseus

cannot return home to his wife (and anima), Penelope, until he has gone through a sort of sexual maturity. He must learn from the feminine principles he encounters along the way. From Circe he must learn the type of knowledge which he gains from her help entering the underworld. He must resist both the seductive but deceiving pleasures of the Sirens, the threatening sexuality of Scylla and Charybdis which literally threatens to devour him, and finally the promise of immortality offered by Kalypso. When he does in fact reach Ithaca, it is as a mature man. His love and desire for his wife and home are based soundly on mortal considerations, on a mature and conscious decision to accept the domesticity which awaits him. The fantastic has led to the mundane, which we see is the most rewarding part of the heroic journey.

In addition to Odysseus' progression from childhood to maturity, we see his son Telemachus undergo a journey which will not only help him to establish an individual identity separate from his father, but will also help him begin to understand his own purpose in the world. In the first four books of *The Odyssey*, "The Telemachia," Telemachus must make an ethical decision to resist his mother's suitors, and to disobey his mother's commands in order to follow a higher calling, in this case Athena's. In so doing, Telemachus begins his manhood. He is no longer a child at the mercy of his mother, but a man who can be called by the gods themselves. His search for his father's whereabouts and his encounters with actual warriors present at Troy simultaneously provide him direct identity with his father, identity which he had lacked previously and which gives him a sense of place and background, but also establishes him as an individual in his own right. Thus the heroic journey of self-discovery takes place on a number of levels within the text, providing ample opportunity for exploration of this theme.

Because the idea of the hero's journey can be confusing at times, it may best be introduced using Christopher Vogler's very clear exposition of the idea in *The Writer's Journey*. This may also be supplemented with Bill Moyers' interview with Joseph Campbell in *The Power of Myth* series. This should provide students with a good background in the basic ideas of the hero's journey without bogging them down in Jungian psychology. Joseph Campbell's *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* is an exhaustive exploration of the archetype, but will more than likely be beyond the scope of the unit or the interest of students.

### **Implementation**

Students will be encouraged to reflect on their own lives and ask

questions regarding their own identity and vision of their place in the cosmos. Students may be asked to make a list of the forces outside of themselves that have control over their lives. Obvious answers may include their families, the government, the laws, or physical limitations. Students may even be encouraged to engage in some type of group activity in which a desired goal cannot be achieved independently, but must be realized through group cooperation. In this way, they will be encouraged to think of their identity not only in terms of themselves, but also in terms of their role in a social setting, for every hero is both an individual and a reflection of his or her society.

Students will then be asked to engage with different texts and ideas about free will versus predestination. Readings may include basic writings by John Calvin, Somerset Maugham's "Appointment in Samarra," Zeno's paradox of movement, and popular notions of "everything happens for a reason."

From these initial discussions, we will move to more formal analysis of Greek myth. We may look at Hesiod's *Theogony* and raise questions about the succession of Zeus. Was Ouranos to blame for his overthrow by Zeus? Was the overthrow inevitable? How much of the story hinged on Zeus' decisions? We will also examine the myth of Prometheus and his relation to mankind, and ultimately the creation of Pandora. Was man responsible for this "gift" from the Olympians? Are they destined to live out the misery promised by the gods in the gift of Pandora? Finally, we will discuss the three fates, and their relation to the gods and to mankind. We will examine ideas of death, and relate them back to the Somerset Maugham story.

With the background from the initial readings and the introduction to Greek myth in general supplied by Hesiod, we can now examine Greek tragedy. The most fruitful inquiry will begin with *Oedipus the King*. Through this play, we can examine the relationship between free will and destiny, either as determined by the gods or through the conflict between personal, familial duty and the law. In conjunction with these ideas, we may look at characters from mythology who attempt to circumvent fate such as Sisyphus and Orpheus.

The unit will culminate with a reading of Homer's *The Odyssey*. Through this reading, I hope to make some use of Joseph Campbell's *The Hero With a Thousand Faces*, although this will not be the major emphasis of the reading. We may also watch part of Bill Moyers' interview with Campbell in *The Power of Myth* as a means of covering this material. In *The Odyssey*, we will concentrate on the motivations and actions of Odysseus and the gods, and how these

directly affect and influence Odysseus' return to Ithaca. We will examine the forms of human action, its true efficacy, and its deficiencies. We will examine these specifically as they relate to our personal lives - to our personal journeys of self-discovery. Every attempt will be made to read *The Odyssey* not merely as a "classic" piece of literature, but as a vital living text which can have personal meaning to our modern existence. Through both reading and assessment students will be encouraged to make personal connections with the text, and in this case, an examination of Campbell's archetype will be helpful.

### *Lesson Plans*

Plan #1: Are You the Master of Your Own Fate?  
(One day)

Readings:

"Appointment In Samarra" *Coming Of Age In Philosophy*, 406

"Zeno's paradox" *The Presocratics*, 109

"John Calvin and Predestination." *Man's Religions*, 474

During this part of the unit, students will begin to think explicitly about ways they identify themselves, and about what level of self-determination they feel they, or anybody, has in their lives. In addition to the above readings, students will try to examine how this idea relates to contemporary issues. Possible subjects may range from something as simple as who determines how late they stay out, when they go to school and with whom they associate, to more complex concepts about ultimate control of their lives. This may be especially fruitful with at-risk students who may have family in jail, or who may be too familiar with death and dying, as many inner city kids are today. If a student does not expect to live past the age of twenty, the ideas of self-determination, self-control, and free will versus resignation to a world full of circumstances beyond their control are extremely important, perhaps even vital in giving them a sense of purpose.

### *Activities*

Because each reading is short, students will read and discuss them in small groups. Next students will make a brief hierarchical list of what types of power structures they are subject to, whether familial, social, educational, religious or any other they may find. Class will then reconvene and discuss as a large group. If time allows, class may also view *The Matrix* and discuss how these issues are explored in the film.

## Plan #2: Introduction to the Greek Gods (Three Days)

We will begin our unit on Greek mythology by exploring the characteristics of myth in general, and move toward an examination of Greek myth specifically, focusing initially on the personages most often encountered and the possible archetypes they represent. Students will list the ideas and themes they associate with the word "myth," and will compare and contrast these with other types of stories. They will also discuss the differences between myth and history, and examine the relationship between the two. Students will then begin reading short Greek myths and examine how their preconceptions match or mismatch what they find therein.

At this point, we will move toward examining mythology in a more methodical manner. We will discuss interpreting myth literally-examining whether or not it may have a direct relation to historical events, fictionally-asking whether it may be no more than entertainment, or allegorically-discussing in what ways it may have a representative meaning for us beyond the literal elements of the story. If appropriate, we may look at specific stories from the Bible, such as Noah's Ark or the creation of woman as illustrative examples.

We will specifically look at externalist and internalist theories (though this terminology may or may not be used specifically), and discuss the pros and cons of each view, possibly trying to combine the two into a more holistic view of mythology. From the externalist point of view, we will examine rationalism as a source of natural, social, and religious customs. From the internalist point of view, we will discuss allegorical interpretations and how they relate to human psychology, sociology, and religion. Discussions may include examinations of Freud, Jung, and Joseph Campbell. Other examples may include watching films such as *Star Wars*, *Indiana Jones*, or *Gladiator*.

### *Activities*

Day One: Web search activity.

Students will research assigned mythological characters on the world wide web. A minimum of three cited sources will be required.

Day Two: Presentations

Students will present their findings to the class, listing the name of researched character, their characteristics, and possible

interpretations.

### Day Three: Class Discussions

As a class we will discuss mythological interpretation. Subjects may include purposes of myth (internalist and externalist theories) and a discussion of archetypes. Time permitting we will watch one of the aforementioned films.

Plan #3 Hesiod: The Idea of Succession and Independence (Two Days)

#### Readings:

The overthrow of Cronos, *Theogony* ll. 459-506

Prometheus and The Creation of Woman, *Theogony* 507-616

#### Key Questions:

How did Cronos overthrow Uranus?

Who are the children of Cronos and Rhea?

How does Zeus overthrow Cronos? Who helps him?

#### *Activities*

Reading will be done aloud as a class. After reading Hesiod, we will discuss explicitly issues of self-identity as they relate to family dynamics. How do we define ourselves as individuals? How do our families help or hinder us in this exploration? What sort of family dynamics are expressed in the succession myth? Why do these types of struggles take place at all? Assessment will include writing a personal creation myth using archetypal elements discussed previously. Be aware that some very difficult issues will more than likely arise during discussion of family dynamics and power struggles.

Plan #4 Sophocles: "To Be Wise is To Suffer (*Pathê Mathos*)" (Five Days)

#### Reading:

*Oedipus Rex* (Trans. T.H. Banks)

#### Key Questions:

Is it always  
better to  
know the  
truth?  
What is the  
difference

between  
appearance  
and reality?  
Are things  
always what  
they seem to  
be? Who *is*  
Oedipus? Is  
he savior of  
Thebes and  
slayer of the  
Sphinx, or is  
he an  
abandoned  
child who  
murdered  
his father  
and married  
his mother?  
What is the  
relation  
between the  
two? Are we  
always  
responsible  
for our own  
actions?  
What are the  
roles of fate  
and free will  
in the play?  
What about  
self-will? Is  
Oedipus  
powerless  
after  
receiving  
the oracle,  
or did it  
merely  
foretell what  
decision he  
would freely  
make? Is  
Oedipus

innocent of  
what he has  
done since  
he did it in  
ignorance?  
Can crime  
and  
innocence  
coexist in  
the same  
person?  
How?

Is it better to be a pig satisfied than Socrates dissatisfied? Is the examined life best? Is ignorance bliss? If your girlfriend went out with your best friend on Friday night, do you *really* want to know about it? Why do bad things happen to good (or at least, well meaning) people? Why do we answer these questions the way we do, and are we always being honest with ourselves? These will be the types of questions we will focus on in the reading of this play. These are not questions unique to the ancient world. We still explore these themes in novels such as Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* and Jose Saramago's *Blindness*.

Sophocles' play was written at a time of great change and upheaval in Athens, leading people to reexamine "their traditional perspectives on human experience and the relationship of humans to the gods" (Harris and Platzner 610). Analogies between this situation in ancient Athens and the contemporary United States seem clear, and will also provide a springboard for class discussion. We will examine not only self-knowledge, but collective cultural knowledge as well, and how this plays out in both the play itself and our personal lives. Is our insecure, litigious society a result of forces beyond our control, or have we created it? If so, what might we do to change it? To what degree can we even truly and satisfactorily answer these questions? Oedipus ultimately takes personal responsibility for his situation, but it remains unclear exactly how his predetermined fate and his personal free will have interacted to produce the circumstances he now must endure. To what degree can we distinguish between the two?

Sophocles' Oedipus undergoes a journey quite different from Zeus. How is his journey different, and how is it similar? What purpose do the different journeys serve? What are the different forces at play in Oedipus' relationship with his parents? How is his situation as a child similar to Zeus'? Both characters undergo a journey which leads them to self-knowledge, but the types of self-knowledge are quite different.

Specifically, we will explore how they are different, why they are different, and what the implications of those differences are, especially in terms of Tiresias' statement.

Activities:

### Day One-Four

I will give a brief introduction to Greek tragedy, and introduce key terms (chorus, tragedy, hubris, ate, pathos, hamartia).

Class will read the entire play aloud. Parts will be assigned, but be sure the part of Oedipus is given to a proficient reader, preferably one with a theatrical sense. As time allows, we will stop to discuss key elements of the play. Encourage hamming it up during reading.

### Day Five

Class will divide into two sections to debate whether or not Oedipus is responsible for his fate, or whether he was subject to forces beyond his control. Alternatively, each student may be asked to write a brief essay describing the point of view with which they agree. Essay must consist of a minimum of three well written paragraphs.

### Plan #5 The Odyssey: The Quest to Become a Complete Person (7 Weeks)

In addition to being one of the most central texts in the western literary tradition, *The Odyssey* is an example of the hero's journey *par excellence*. It is, of course, fantastic, portraying gods and monsters and physical perils of all sorts, but it is also a beautiful examination of human weakness, strength, desire, reason, hatred and love. Odysseus' journey is an elaborate series of episodes which lead to his self-knowledge, one which is only complete when he returns home to his family. In addition, it is an examination of the female psyche. Odysseus' self-knowledge entails the recognition and acknowledgment of feminine principles, both in the outside world and within himself. His most important encounters are with the female, including Kalypso, Circe, Nausikaä, and ultimately his wife Penelope. Odysseus' journey entails an acceptance that masculine strengths are not always enough. To be a complete person he must be a whole person. In Jungian terms, he must come to terms with both animus and anima.

By presenting Odysseus' journey not simply as a sea story, but explicitly as a journey of self-discovery, and by incorporating Telemachus' mini-Odyssey within *The Odyssey* as an example of an adolescent discovering who he is, I believe that kids can be drawn into

the story in a meaningful way. The success of this part of the unit will depend on balancing the psychological interpretation with the fantastic elements which will most appeal to kids raised on music videos and computer games. By doing so, students will hopefully discover a lot about literature, but more importantly, a lot about themselves, who they are, and what their place is in the world.

#### Introduction:

a)  
Background  
of The  
Trojan War  
Students  
will be  
introduced  
to the events  
leading up  
to  
Odysseus'  
journey, in  
particular,  
The Trojan  
War.

Students  
will read the  
myths of the  
Golden  
Apples, the  
abduction of  
Helen, and  
major events  
and  
characters in  
the Trojan  
War itself.

b) The Hero's  
Journey  
Students will  
discuss the hero's  
journey as outlined  
by Joseph  
Campbell and  
Christopher  
Vogler. Students

will receive a one page handout from Vogler outlining the major elements of the hero's journey. Students will be asked to cite modern examples of the hero's journey, either from real life or from fictional stories they know. Students may also be asked to write their own hero's journey, using themselves or a fictional character to outline the major aspects.

C) discussion of allegory/symbolism  
The class will discuss what they know about these concepts, possibly making a KWL chart to outline what they know and what they need to learn. Students will cite examples from stories they know.

All of the following readings will be done as a class. When time permits, the entire books will be read. Where time runs short, the noted selections will be used.

Week #1 Telemachi (Books 1-4) (Or Book 1 only)

Discussion will center on

Telemachus' journey of self-discovery, leading him from childhood to manhood. Parallels will be drawn to Odysseus' larger journey within the work. Parallels will also be drawn between his growth to maturity and those experienced by Zeus and Oedipus.

Week #2 Odysseus at Scheria (Books 5-7) (Or Books 5 and 6 only)

The idea of the feminine psyche will be introduced, and its role will be examined and discussed. Students will compare and contrast Kalypso on the island of Ogygia, and Nausikaä on the island of Scheria, and discuss Odysseus' relation with each. Students will examine what each character may represent, especially in light of Odysseus' journey of self-discovery.

Week #3 Odysseus' adventures at sea (Books 8-12) (Or Books 9-12 only)

This is the most entertaining section of the epic in that it recounts Odysseus' most fantastic encounters on his ten-year journey. Here we meet the Lotus-Eaters, Polyphemus the Cyclops, the god Aeolus, the Laestrygonians, the sorceress Circe, the sirens, Scylla and Charybdis, Helios' cattle, and hear of Odysseus' harrowing descent to Hades. These books are perfect for students to explore through visual representations, song, film, and acting. Analysis will focus on Odysseus' credibility in reciting these tales, on the possible allegorical representations contained within them, and further exploration of the feminine psyche, especially through the characters Circe, Scylla and Charybdis, the

sirens, and  
Odysseus' mother  
in Hades.

Week #4 Odysseus and Telemachus  
return to Ithaca (Books 13-16)

(Or Book 16 only)  
Odysseus is  
reunited with his  
son Telemachus.  
Discussion will  
focus on how the  
heroic journeys of  
each character  
have brought them  
together. How do  
our personal  
journeys of  
self-discovery  
relate to social  
situations that are  
outside of our  
personal control.  
Does Odysseus'  
arrival back home  
in Ithaca imply  
that his journey is  
at an end? What  
must he still  
accomplish before  
his journey is  
finally complete?

Week #5 Odysseus among the suitors (Books 17-19)

(Or Books 18 and  
19 only)  
Class discussion  
will focus on  
Odysseus' use of  
deception as a  
means to  
accomplish his  
goals. We will  
compare his

intentional  
deception with  
Oedipus'  
unintentional one,  
and discuss the  
differences, both  
in terms of action  
within the story  
and possible  
allegorical  
meaning.

Week #6 Odysseus defeats suitors, reunites with Penelope (Books 20-22)

(Or Books 21 and 22 only)

Class discussion will focus on Odysseus' means of defeating the suitors. What are the masculine qualities at his command? What about feminine qualities? Has he learned anything from his encounters with the feminine psyche on his sojourn?

Week #7 Athena makes peace between Odysseus and the suitors' kinsmen (Books 23-24: Both of these Books should be read in their entirety)

Class discussion will focus on Odysseus' reuniting with Penelope and Athena's brokered peace with the suitors. Penelope's role in the theme of the feminine psyche will be examined, as well as the marriage bed made from the olive tree.

Conclusion

Class  
will  
discuss  
how  
Odysseus  
fits  
the  
hero  
archetype?  
Trace  
the  
major  
elements  
of his

role  
in the  
Hero's  
journey.  
What  
elements  
of  
*The  
Odyssey*  
fit the  
hero  
model,  
and  
what  
elements  
diverge  
from  
it?

### *Assessment*

Final project must include both a written work and an alternative final assignment addressing Multiple Intelligence theory.

Written work will be a five paragraph essay.

In an attempt to incorporate Multiple Intelligence theories, students will be exposed to a broad range of resources, including original texts, reinterpretations, video (which may include film versions of myths or theater productions), slides of artistic representations including vase painting, architectural relief, sculpture, classical painting or modern artistic representation, and perhaps Greek song.

Assessment strategies will be varied, although all students will be required to write a literary essay as part of their final grade on the unit. Other assessment may include visual representations of specific myths including paintings, drawings, sculptures or dioramas. Students may also choose to enact a scene from a play, or to create a short film on video.

Throughout this unit I will try to incorporate art, drama, history, literature, religion, politics, philosophy, and possibly even mathematics through the inclusion of Euclid. For example, students could read classic Greek drama and poetry, examine how the ideas expressed within them took shape in the political life of Greece, and in turn examine how the major themes found therein have influenced

the modern world in which we live. Furthermore, students could research the development of artistic forms in this climate including architecture, sculpture, painting, theater, and even popular arts such as poetry and textiles.

### *Performance Standards Met*

Any unit of this size will address numerous content standards. However, it is useful to specify standards met in order to justify any unit to students, parents, and administrators. Below are listed standards met for the two most often used content standards in Albuquerque Public Schools.

All ten Language Arts Content Standards outlined by the New Mexico State Department of Education are met.

In addition, the following elements from the *Albuquerque Public Schools District Core Curriculum and Scope and Sequence* are met:

A: 1 and 2, B: 1-3, C: 1, D: 1 and 2

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### **Bibliography**

Angus, S. *The Mystery Religions*. New York: Dover, 1928.

An excellent introduction and analysis to mystery cults throughout the ancient world, with an emphasis on their relation on their relation to earlier Greek and Roman religion and their supplanting by Christianity.

Banks, T.H. (Translator). *Sophocles' Three Theban Plays*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1965.

An excellent translation of the Oedipus cycle, containing a good, brief introduction to Greek tragedy and useful endnotes.

Burkert, Walter. *Ancient Mystery Cults*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987.

Contains useful information on Dionysus and the Eleusinian mysteries.

Campbell, Joseph. *The Hero With a Thousand Faces*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972.

The essential examination of the hero's journey. This book is a bit dense, however.

Campbell, Joseph. *Occidental Mythology*. New York: Penguin, 1964.

An incredible wealth of information of Mediterranean and Near Eastern religion and their relationships from a Jungian point of view.

Campbell, Joseph. *The Power of Myth*. New York: Doubleday and Co., 1988.

An excellent introduction to Campbell's major ideas. This is much more useful and accessible than *The Hero With a Thousand Faces*. Campbell uses many examples from popular culture which help explain his ideas. This is especially useful because there is an accompanying video.

Cyrino, Monica. Personal comments and lecture. Professor of Classical Languages, University of New Mexico. 2001

Eastman, Roger (Editor). *Coming of Age in Philosophy*. New York: Harper and Row, 1973.

Excellent introduction to basic philosophical ideas through the presentation of original texts. This is not based on strictly Greek or western ideas, but presents a wide range of philosophical approaches from around the world.

Evelyn-White, Hugh G. *Hesiod, Homeric Hymns, Epic Cycle, Homerica*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1914.

Side by side presentations of the original Greek and the English translation. The English is a bit dry, but precise. This is a good source for material which is difficult to find elsewhere, most notably the "Homeric Hymns."

Evslin, Bernard. *Gods Demigods and Demons: An Encyclopedia of Greek Mythology*. New York: Scholastic Book Services, 1975.

An extremely useful guide to the gods as well as heroes and personages encountered in Homer. I would highly recommend that all students have this book during the unit.

Graves, Robert. *Greek Myths: Illustrated Edition*. New York: Doubleday and Co. 1981.

A very good introduction, and one that will be interesting and accessible for students new to Greek myth. The illustrations and photographs are all from original works and help bring the subject to life. Highly recommended for this reason.

Gonick, Larry. *Cartoon History of the Universe, Volumes 1-7: From the Big Bang to Alexander the Great*. New York: Doubleday and Co., 1990.

An entertaining and informative view of western history in comic book form. This is a great source for kids more visually than linguistically focused, and the information is accurate and in depth.

Harris, Stephen L. and Gloria Platzner. *Classical Mythology: Images and Insights*. Mountain View, CA: Mayfield Publishing Company, 1998.

An excellent introduction to Greek mythology and religion which offers a wide range of interpretation on the subject. Also contains many selections from the original sources.

Fitzgerald, Robert (Translator). *Homer's The Iliad*. New York: Anchor, 1975.

An excellent verse translation.

Fitzgerald, Robert (Translator), *Homer's The Odyssey*. New York: Anchor, 1975.

This is the companion to the above translation of *The Iliad*. This is the translation recommended by Professor Monica Cyrino.

Jung, Carl G. *Man and his Symbols*. New York: Doubleday and Co. 1964.

Jung's own explanation of symbolism and the unconscious, focusing on dreams, art, mythology and ordinary experience. Written

in a lucid style, an excellent introduction to many of Jung's basic ideas.

Lattimore, Richard (Translator). *Aeschylus' Oresteia*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973.

Excellent translations of these plays with an outstanding introduction. Highly recommended.

Lattimore, Richard (Translator). "Euripides' The Medea." Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973.

Lattimore, Richard (Translator). *Homer's Iliad*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961.

A verse translation of the epic. This is the translation recommended by Professor Monica Cyrino.

Neumann, Erich. *The Great Mother: An Analysis of the Archetype*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972.

A scholarly work examining the feminine archetype from a Jungian perspective. Very dense, but useful.

Neumann, Erich. *The Origins and History of Consciousness*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973.

An examination of the relationship between mythology and psychology from a Jungian perspective. Neumann discusses the evolution of individual and collective human consciousness, often in the form of the archetypal hero's journey.

Noss, John B. and David S. *Man's Religions*. New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1984.

An excellent introduction to world religions in general. Excellent, brief introductions to Greek religion, myth, and mystery religions.

Rexroth, Kenneth *Poems from the Greek Anthology*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1962.

Wonderful translations of short Greek poets ranging from Sappho to Martial, among many others. These are beautiful

translations, but may not always be appropriate for the classroom.

Rieu, E.V. (Translator). *Apollonius of Rhodes' The Voyage of the Argo*. Baltimore: Penguin, 1971.

A concise, prose retelling of the Jason myth. Good for giving background on Greek mythology and the heroic cycle.

Sutcliffe, Rosemary *Black Ships Before Troy : The Story of the Iliad*. London: Delacorte Press, 1973.

A good retelling of the Trojan war by this British author. This would serve as an excellent introduction to the subject for students who wish to explore the subject beyond the requirements of the unit.

Vogler, Christopher. *The Writer's Journey: Mythic Structure for Storytellers and Screen-writers*. Studio City, CA: Michael Wiese Productions, 1992.

An easy, accessible introduction to the concept of the hero's journey. This is more helpful even than Campbell's *The Power of Myth*. It is also good for helping students write their own hero's journey.

Wender, Dorothy (Translator). *Hesiod's Theogony/Works and Days*. Penguin: New York 1973.

A verse translation with a good introduction, but weak footnotes. Still, this may be the best version to use with students.