

# **Mythology: Gods, Heroes, and Universal Themes**

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*From prehistoric India and aboriginal Australia to Africa and Polynesia,  
myths express the common experience of all humanity.*

-  
Stephen  
L.  
Harris  
and  
Gloria  
Platzner

## **Introduction**

The impact of mythology differs from person to person. Some feel that it is merely a collection of interesting stories that are simply entertainment. To others it is a fascinating doorway to interacting with a culture's gods, goddesses, heroes, and important life lessons. Myth permeates our lives, from references such as someone's "Achilles heel" used in general speech or literature, to current TV shows and movies that continue to explore ancient mythic themes.

Since I am one of those people fascinated by mythology and its impact on human lives, I have chosen to use mythology in my classroom. It is the perfect vehicle to interest my students in other cultures, as well as the language arts or literature skills I have planned for them. The most important thing for my students is that they will have fun learning about both.

## **Academic Setting**

Harrison Middle School is located in the South Valley of Albuquerque, New Mexico. The school is located in a semi-rural area within walking distance of the Rio Grande River and bosque. Students live in an environment in which urban and rural elements are intermingled. Some students' families have been in the area since the early Hispanic settlements were created. Others are either immigrants from Mexico or have moved into the area to take advantage of reasonably priced housing. Most families in the area are in the middle to lower socioeconomic range.

Harrison Middle School's enrollment has generally been between 650

– 750 students. The percentage of students receiving free or reduced cost lunches has been high, ranging from 67% to 89% in the last few years. The ethnic makeup of Harrison students is predominantly Hispanic; the percentage changes from year to year, but generally is around 85% or higher. Many of our students come from single parent homes; many of those "single parents" are the student's grandparent, aunt, or a guardian. Harrison has a high percentage of limited English, bilingual, and monolingual Spanish speaking students. This translates into many students having a difficult time getting information from grade level texts and in taking standardized tests.

Harrison has been labeled a "school in need of improvement." This means that literacy (both reading and math literacies) is a main focus at our school. For next year the school has created a schedule to support a daily balanced literacy period in which all teachers will be teaching literacy. The students will be assessed and assigned to a group appropriate for their reading level. A computerized assessment tool will be used to test students each nine weeks to show when improvement warrants moving students to a new level. The range of reading levels covered is from pre-kindergarten to high school.

### **Rationale**

The classroom in which I will use this unit is a sixth grade language arts/literature class of learning disabled students. Many students in my classroom have functional reading levels anywhere from one to four grade levels below their current grade level. This means more than half of my students who, more often than not, have had almost all negative experiences with regard to reading. This affects their classes across the board. I feel it is essential to not only do everything I can as an educator to raise their reading levels, but also to introduce them to the fascinating world of reading books, magazines, and newspapers for enjoyment. One way to do this is to expose them to materials they are interested in and with which I can teach the skills needed to increase their reading levels. Hopefully they will be interested enough in some of the topics to go out and find more books on their own time.

Mythology is a topic that is interesting to most adults, but children in particular seem to love it. Using mythology as a base from which to teach the skills spelled out in the district core curriculum should be very easy. There will be numerous opportunities to focus on reading, language arts, and social studies issues. Students will have the chance to do research, present oral reports, write up essays, work on small group projects, and respond to literature, and will have many other opportunities to interact with the material.

## Background Information

Mythology is defined differently depending on where you look. Generally, a myth is defined as a story that has to do with various gods or heroes. Joseph Campbell stated in *Myths to Live By*:

... in this  
wonderful human  
brain of ours there  
has dawned  
realization  
unknown to other  
primates. It is that  
of the individual,  
conscious of  
himself as such,  
and aware that he,  
and all he cares  
for, will one day  
die. This  
recognition of  
mortality and the  
requirement to  
transcend it is the  
first great impulse  
to mythology (22).

What Campbell says makes sense. The realization that one day you will die creates an urgency to make an immediate record of profound thoughts to guide future generations. Every human being in the midst of stimulating conversation, when sitting quietly, or even while brushing your teeth, has had an epiphany about something. If it's about something universal that affects many others, there is the impulse to share this pearl of wisdom you've just discovered. As products of the creative imagination reacting to the material and psychological forces that shape human life, myths may have arisen almost as soon as language acquired sufficient flexibility to articulate them (Harris and Platzner 8). Early man organized the most important of these epiphanies into groups of stories to pass on to others through the vehicle of oral tradition. Later, when cultures developed written languages and passed beyond the stage of using writing to merely keep track of how many sheep someone had, these stories were written down. Many of the myths discussed important things like how the world was created, who created it and why, who these beings are, what they want from us, why good and bad things happen, etc... They were creating order out of chaos. Although nothing seems impossible

in the mythic realm, even the most ostensibly illogical events are subtly grounded in the values, attitudes, and expectations that govern the society producing the myths (Harris and Platzner 7). One of the roles that a culture's myths play is to inform members of that culture what information is good for them to know, such as how not to anger your gods, or that you need to keep your place as a mortal and not overstep your boundaries. Punishment myths are rife with this type of information.

Campbell states that comparative cultural studies have now demonstrated beyond question that similar mythic tales are to be found in every quarter of this earth (*Myths to Live By* 1993:9). The themes that show up in so many cultures again and again are called universal myths. It is understandable that many cultures, though very different in environment and ways of doing things, would have some of the same concerns. Some of the "universals" are creation myths, flood myths, dying and rising god myths, punishment myths, and hero/heroine myths. This is an important point for students to understand. Human beings are not isolated in their own bubble of experiences, unique to themselves. We have concerns that are important to all and we can use that as somewhere to start when discussing other cultures. Yes, clothes, housing, languages, and pastimes may be different, but we have important things in common. Such as: survival issues, wondering who we are, where we come from, how we fit in our world, and what we are supposed to do with our lives. A good place to start studying the myths of another culture is Greek mythology.

### Greek Mythology

The pantheon of Greek gods and goddesses is a good starting place because of its anthropomorphic tone. These gods are approachable and interesting due not only to their incredible powers over human beings, but to the range of emotions and reactions they have to each other and the humans they are worshipped by.

For the ancient  
Greeks, myth took  
the role of  
prehistory,  
providing  
traditions about  
their supposed  
ancestors in the  
extremely remote  
past. In the Greek

view, the mythic past included everything from the world's beginning to the aftermath of the Trojan War (Harris and Platzner 11).

Greek myth, as is the case with many other mythologies, was probably influenced by other cultures the Greeks came in contact with. Predominantly, Mycenaean, Mesopotamian, Cretan, and Egyptian myths seem to have similarities with the Greeks. Harris and Platzner state ... "Greek myth is distinguished by its emphases on humanism, individualism, and competitiveness"(23).

### *The Greek Pantheon*

#### Zeus

Son of the Titans Cronus and Rhea, king of the Olympian gods, personification of atmospheric phenomena – particularly storms and lightning – and the cosmic guarantor of justice, oathkeeping, civic order, and kingship (Harris and Platzner 982). As head of the Greek Pantheon, he was the ultimate court of appeal for both humans and gods. All other Olympians were either his siblings or children, including his sister-wife Hera. He is associated with thunderbolts and eagles.

#### Hera

Queen of the Olympian gods and sister-wife of Zeus. She was the goddess of marriage, wifedom, and motherhood. Associated with thrones, scepters, cuckoos, and peacocks.

#### Hestia

Virgin goddess of the hearth. Never left Mt. Olympus because she was responsible for making sure that the hearth fire never went out.

#### Demeter

Goddess of agricultural fertility. Mother of Persephone. She threatened to starve humanity until she saw her daughter again after Persephone was abducted by Hades. Zeus declared that Persephone would spend two-thirds of the year with her mother and one-third (the winter) with Hades, thus giving us an etiological myth of the seasons.

## Hades

God of the Underworld – the realm of the dead. A grim god who also was lord of the riches within the earth. Husband to Persephone. Associated with a helmet of invisibility.

## Poseidon

God of the sea and earthquakes. Husband to Amphitrite. Associated with the trident, horses, and bulls.

## Aphrodite

Goddess of love and sexuality. Born fully formed from the semen spilled from Uranus's severed genitals into the foam of the sea. Wife of Hepaestus, but frequently the lover of Ares. Associated with Cyprus, Corinth, apples, doves, mirrors, beautiful clothes, and cosmetics.

## Athena

Virgin goddess of wisdom, protectress of kings and heroes. Born from Zeus's head, (his favorite child). A military strategist. Associated with Athens, heroes, olive trees, owls, the aegis, and the Parthenon.

## Apollo

God of light, music, prophecy, and medicine. Twin of Artemis. Father to Asklepios, the demigod of healing. Associated with Delos, Delphi, the lyre, the sun, and severe punishments to females or males who rejected his advances.

## Artemis

Virgin goddess of the hunt and childbirth. Twin of Apollo. Meted out extreme punishments to men who threatened her chastity. Associated with the bow and arrow.

## Ares

God of war. Strong, brutal warrior. Lover of Aphrodite. Associated with armor and weapons.

## Hermes

God of travelers and the roads. Messenger of the gods. Always on the move. The patron of merchants and thieves. Also said to escort souls to the Underworld. Associated with winged shoes, the caduceus staff, a traveler's hat, inventing the lyre, and herms (statues at crossroads)

and boundary areas).

### Hephaestus

God of fire and forge. Born lame and ugly. Husband of Aphrodite. Created the weapons of the gods. Created Pandora, the first woman. Associated with Lemnos, the cyclops, and tools of the forge.

### Dionysus

God of wine and altered states. Born from Zeus's thigh. Peter Bently stated that he was the focus of a great mystic cult, whose initiates pursued an ecstatic release brought on by wine, revelry, and dance (62). Associated with a wine cup, wine, ivy, and the Bacchae.

### Universal Themes

As mentioned previously there are certain themes in mythology across the world that are seen again and again. These concepts seem important enough that cultures around the world thought it necessary to include them in their particular mythology. *Parallel Myths* by J.F. Bierlein records a number of myths in it under the themes of creation, floods, love, morality tales, heroes, journeys to the Underworld, and the end – the Apocalypse. The themes that will be discussed briefly here are creation myths, flood myths, and hero myths.

### *Creation Myths*

How did this world come about? Where did god/s come from? How were human beings created? These are some of the questions asked by both ancient and modern man. Stories were created to answer these questions by cultures around the world. Human beings have a driving need to create order from chaos. In many myths water is commonly involved in the beginnings of our world. In ancient Egypt, the first act of creation was said to have been the rising of a mound of land out of the primordial watery abyss called Nun. In Chinese myth the cosmic giant and divine ancestor Pan Gu grew for 18,000 years inside the cosmic egg (which was thought to embrace all potentiality in many creation myths) until it split into two parts, a light half - the heavens and a dark half - the earth. Some mythologies discuss a perpetual cycle of death and rebirth. A world is created, the gods observe the actions of mankind, mankind is deemed defective in some way, the world is destroyed, and a new world is brought into being. This type of creation myth appears in many different Native American myths. The Indian creation myth is a little different, the creator god Brahma is revealed from within a lotus flower that has sprouted from the god Vishnu's navel. Then from Brahma's meditation the universe comes into being. Its lasts for an immense period of time before it dissolves

back into chaos, from which a new cosmos emerges in exactly the same way (Bently 52).

### *Flood Myths*

The idea that mankind was found defective by the gods in some way and that the slate must be wiped clean to start again has appeared in many myths. Frequently the means of wiping the slate clean was to use a great flood. According to many of the mythologies still flourishing in the Orient, a world flood occurs inevitably at the termination of every aeon (Campbell, 1993: 74). The concept of a completely new world emerging from the deluge is common in Central America. For example, in the Aztec myth of the Five Suns, the present world (the fifth) is said to have arisen after the previous world was swept away by a flood (Bently 78).

Flood myths occur in many cultures around the world. Some of these are Manu and the Fish (India), The Flood Myth of Hawaii, Tata and Nena (Aztec), Deucalion (Greece), Noah's Ark (Judeo-Christian), The Gourd Children (China), The Flood Myth of Babylonia, The Flood Myths of Native Americans (Mandan, Kristeneaux, Choctaw, Creek-Natchez, Mojave-Apache, Cree, and Algonquin), The Flood Myth of the Incas, and The Flood Myth of the Egyptians.

Most people are familiar with the Old Testament story of Noah's Ark. Mankind was deemed hopeless due to their level of sin. To show that God is not completely vengeful he tells Noah and his family of the coming flood and what to do to survive it. They are to build an ark and should get pairs of every animal onto the ark within a given time period. Anyone not on the ark will perish. In this way the animals and Noah's family, could repopulate the earth after the flood had cleansed the earth.

The Mesopotamian version is that a flood was sent by the gods to punish humanity. In this story too, all of humanity is wiped out except for one man and his family. He is sometimes named Atrahasis, Utnapishtim, or Ziusudra. Similar themes occur in the Southern Chinese myth of the Gourd Children, except that the universal flood which destroys humanity is seen as the arbitrary act of the Thunder God.

### *Hero Myths*

Hero myths often follow a traditional pattern involving everything from an unusual birth and displaying incredible powers in some area, to embarking on a quest or quests of discovery. Harris and Platzner outline the heroic pattern in detail on page 229 of their book *Classical*

*Mythology.* The appeal of the hero myth to the average person is the vicarious enjoyment of reading about exploits involving travel to strange, distant places and interactions with fascinating gods, monsters, and foreign people. These are all things that most of us don't get a chance to do in our everyday lives. We learn from the hero's successes and defeats what to do and what not to do in various situations. Harris and Platzner state "...the implicit function of the hero is to redeem humanity, a process begun by Prometheus's defiance of Zeus ... by his half-divine nature, his glorious deeds, and his relentless pursuit of immortality, the hero uplifts humanity from its dismal condition and reminds us of our own godlike potential."(230). Three heroes from Greek mythology personify this definition of the function of a hero: Perseus, Heracles, and Odysseus.

### Perseus

Perseus's parents were Zeus and Danae. Danae was a princess of Argos who had been locked in a tower by her father. He had been told that the son she would bear would kill him. Zeus, as usual, enraptured by her beauty, decides he must sleep with her. He comes to her in the form of a shower of gold. When the king finds out that she has had a baby, he has Danae and Perseus, put to sea in a chest. They land on the island of Seriphus where they are rescued by Dictys, the brother of the king. The king, Polydectes, desires Perseus's mother. To try and save her from his unwanted advances Perseus offers to bring the king the gift of his choice. The king asks for the head of the gorgon Medusa. Thus begins Perseus's adventures. First, with the assistance of Athena and Hermes in equipment and advice, he is successful in defeating Medusa and getting her head. Later, he rescues Andromeda, his future wife, from a nasty sea monster. He then returns to Argos.

### Heracles

Heracles' parents were Zeus and Alcmene. Alcmene was the queen of Tiryns. Zeus took the form of her husband, King Amphitryon, and had sex with her. She gave birth to twins, Heracles (son of Zeus) and Iphicles (son of Amphitryon). Heracles has been accredited with accomplishing many incredible things – from helping various kings to the twelve labors and founding the Olympic Games. His twelve labors were as follows:

1. Killing the Nemean lion.
2. Killing the Hydra.
3. Capturing the Cerynitian hind.
4. Capturing the Erymanthian boar.
5. Cleaning the Augean stables.

6. Removing the Stymphalian birds.
7. Capturing the Cretan bull.
8. Capturing the Tracian horses.
9. Bringing back the girdle (belt) of Hippolyte.
10. Bringing back the cattle of Geryon.
11. Bringing back the Golden Apples of Hesperides.
12. Capturing Cerberus.

Harris and Platzner provide the above list, with more details on each of the twelve labors, on pages 238 and 239. Heracles illustrates the double-edged sword of having a hero living in your town. A savior in times of threat or war, the hero becomes a menace in time of peace. Trained to use his strength to kill and to glory in his violent victories, how does a hero control the violence or repress the glorying ego when he leaves the battlefield and returns to civilized life? (Harris and Platzner 238).

### Odysseus

Odysseus's parents are both mortals, Laertes and Anticleia. Some say that he had a half human, half god ancestor (Autolykos – son of Hermes) and others do not. Husband to Penelope and father of Telemachus, he was also the king of Ithaca. A favorite of Athene, celebrated for his prudence, ingenuity, and resourcefulness. He was an excellent strategist and a master of intrigue for the Greeks in the Trojan War. He is reputed to have come up with the idea for the Trojan Horse. After the Trojan War Odysseus and his men sail home for Ithaca. His journey is an incredible one, fraught with wonders and danger. Here is the sequence of events from Harris and Platzner (346):

1. Some of his men are killed after a raid on Ismarus.
2. A storm drives the fleet away from Ithaca.
3. Stops for a short time in the Land of the Lotus-Eaters.
4. On the Island of the Cyclops Polyphemus eats six of his men and brings Poseidon's curse on Odysseus.
5. His men open Aeolus's bag of winds and they are blown away from Ithaca again.
6. All ships except his are destroyed by the Laestrygonians.
7. He is Circe's lover for a year.
8. Forewarned by Circe he passes safely between Scylla and Charybdis.
9. His ship sunk and his men killed by Zeus for eating the sun god's sacred cattle.

10. Cast ashore on Calypso's island where he is detained for seven years.
11. Allowed to build a raft to sail home, Posiedon destroys it and leaves him to drown.
12. After coming ashore on Scheria is finally transported back home to Ithaca.

These three heroes will be an exciting entrée into the study of the heroes. Students will explore the hero myths of other cultures and draw parallels between the Greek heroes and those they discover.

## **Implementation**

### Unit Goals

The overall goal of this unit is to teach language arts and literature skills through the vehicle of mythology. This will parallel the other goals of introducing the students to mythology in general and specifically to Greek mythology. The students will also be discovering the mythology of other cultures through classroom and independent activities.

### *Objectives:*

- Students will become familiar with general mythological concepts and vocabulary.
- Students will become familiar with the key figures in the Greek pantheon.
- Students will become familiar with the main components of three universal myths chosen by the teacher and one of their own choice.
- Students will become familiar with the stories of the heroes Perseus, Heracles, and Odysseus.
- Students will work on literary elements within the context of various myths.
- Students will use research skills to independently locate additional sources of myths to include in the classroom collection for various activities.
- Students will use cooperative learning skills to complete various small group projects.
- Students will develop writing skills to complete independent or group activities, consisting of both research oriented and creative writing opportunities.
- Students will work on cognitive skill activities such as comparing, contrasting, sequencing, and classification with the

use of graphic organizers.

- Students will effectively present an oral presentation on assigned material.
- Students will create art forms to extend what they've learned.

This unit is planned for a sixth grade language arts and literature class of learning disabled students and should take about four weeks to complete. The first week would be used to work on the general mythology section. Week two would be used to work on the Greek Pantheon of gods and goddesses. Week three would involve the section on universal themes of myths. The last week would be about the heroes Perseus, Heracles, and Odysseus.

### Language Arts Content Standards and Benchmarks

This unit covers all six strands of the sixth grade language arts standards either directly, or peripherally.

#### *Strand 1: Reading Process*

Content Standard: The student employs appropriate reading strategies to read and interpret increasingly complex texts for a variety of purposes.

Benchmark: The student demonstrates competence with reading processes to comprehend, analyze, interpret, and evaluate a wide variety of texts across content areas.

#### *Strand 2: Reading Analysis*

Content Standard: The student responds to, examines, and critiques historically and culturally significant issues and events portrayed in literature that both illustrate and affect people, society, and individuals.

Benchmark: The student examines literature from a variety of authors, cultures, and genres and makes connections among a variety of literary works.

#### *Strand 3: Expressive Language: Writing*

Content Standard: The student writes effectively for different audiences and purposes (e.g., to describe, narrate, express, explain, persuade, and analyze) using appropriate strategies and conventions.

Benchmark: The student develops and demonstrates proficiency and competence in writing strategies and conventions across content areas to describe, narrate, express, explain, persuade, and analyze critically

for a variety of audiences.

*Strand 4: Expressive Language: Speaking*

Content Standard: The student speaks effectively for different audiences and purposes (e.g., to describe, narrate, express, explain, persuade, and analyze) using appropriate strategies and conventions.

Benchmark: The student develops and demonstrates proficiency and competence in speaking strategies and in appropriate speaking conventions to describe, narrate, express, explain, persuade, and analyze for a variety of purposes and audiences.

*Strand 5: Receptive Language: Listening and Viewing*

Content Standards: The student demonstrates, analyzes, evaluates, and reflects upon the skills and processes used to communicate by listening to and viewing a variety of auditory and visual works.

Benchmark: The student comprehends, analyzes, and interprets formal and informal auditory and visual works, including multimedia presentations.

*Strand 6: Research*

Content Standards: The student conducts and compiles research data, synthesizes findings, and develops an original conclusion to increase personal and community depth of knowledge.

Benchmark: The student gathers and uses research information to analyze issues across content areas.

**Week One**

The material for this week will center on introducing the students to mythology in general. Time will be spent on identifying and defining vocabulary likely to be unfamiliar to most of the students. We will also spend time reading aloud various myths and doing a surface exploration of the various themes that commonly show up in mythology.

*Day One*

Purpose: The class will create a KWL chart on mythology to be kept on the wall. Students will listen to two myths read by the teacher. Students will define vocabulary provided and create flashcards of the vocabulary words.

Questions for discussion:

- What is mythology? What do we think we know about it?

- What are some things that we would like to know?
- What is the difference between a myth, a legend, and a folktale?
- Are myths true history? Why or why not?
- Can you tell what culture the two myths read to you came from?
- What were clues that helped you to figure that out?
- Why is it important to do vocabulary lists?
- How much can you understand of a story when you don't understand most of the words?

### Activities:

- The teacher will direct the students' attention to a large KWL chart on the wall titled Mythology. The class will discuss what they know about mythology and the teacher will write these items down under the "K" column. Then the class will discuss what they would like to know about mythology. The teacher will write these items down under the "W" column. The last column will be filled in throughout the week and beyond as the questions are answered. The nature of a KWL chart is that it isn't static; the class will continue to add questions and answers throughout the unit.
- Students will listen to two myths of different cultures read aloud to them by the teacher. They will be instructed to listen for clues that will tell them which culture the myths are from. Before reading the myths the teacher will write on the board three cultures and the titles of the two myths. The students have to choose which culture goes with which myth and write which clues helped them figure that out. The class will discuss their findings
- The students will be given a list of common mythological terms with their definitions. They will be instructed to get out their 3x5 index cards to create flashcards on these words. On the front they write the word, a pronunciation guide, and they use the word in a sentence. On the back they define the word and put down a synonym and antonym for the word (if they exist).

Evaluation: Students will be evaluated by the quality of the KWL chart and later for answering their questions posed. They will also be evaluated by the clues they come up with for identifying the culture of a myth and their score on the vocabulary quiz.

*Day Five*

Purpose: The students will be giving small-group (three students) oral presentations today.

Activity: There are three parts to the presentations. Part one – the group will give the class an introduction to the culture they have been assigned. This should include showing the location of the culture on a map, when the culture was at its height, the language they spoke, and three interesting facts about the culture. Part two – each member of the group will read aloud a myth from that culture and identify what theme the myth has. Part three - the group will tell the class what was appealing about the culture, what was not so appealing, and will tell if they would have wanted to be a part of that culture and why or why not.

Evaluation: The students will be evaluated by a rubric designed to show at what level they covered all the material required, as well as their skills in presenting the material.

## Week Two

The material for this week will revolve around familiarizing the students with pantheons of gods and goddesses. We will focus on the Greek pantheon due to its engaging cast of characters and familiar archetypes. The students will work with the Greek gods until comfortable and will then be asked to identify similarities and differences between them and the gods of other pantheons.

### *Day One*

Purpose: The students will be introduced to the Greek pantheon of gods and goddesses. First they will be given a quick lecture on the creation of the

Greek world with a brief discussion of how Gaia and Uranus gave birth to the Titans, Cyclops, Giants, and the 100-armed ones. We will cover how the Titans Rhea and Kronus got together and produced the first six of the Olympian gods. We will discuss how Kronus overthrew his father and how later his son Zeus overthrew him to become the king of the gods. How the rest of the twelve Olympians came to be will also be discussed.

### Questions for Discussion:

- How did the Greek world come to be?
- Who was there in the beginning?
- Where did the Olympian pantheon come from?
- What happened to the gods that were there before them?

- How did Zeus become king of the gods?
- Who were the rest of the Olympian gods?
- What areas of life was each of the gods in charge of?
- Were there any objects associated with specific gods?
- How can you tell one god from another?

Activity: The students will be given 2"x 2" squares depicting one of six females and six males. They will need to use the handout with the descriptions of each of the Olympian gods and goddesses and the objects associated with them. The students will be told that they may do this assignment in groups of four. They will each choose three gods/goddesses from the group of twelve to focus on. They will use the handout to decide what they need to add to the picture of the female or male to make it unmistakable that the picture is the god/goddess they chose. The students will be using colored pencils to fill in the details. When finished two groups will get together and use their two 2"x 2" sets to create a memory game that the students may then play. The winner will be the person who turns over the most matched sets.

Evaluation: The students will be evaluated on how well they did with matching attributes to the gods/goddesses. Can I immediately recognize who that is? Also on how easy or difficult it is for two different groups to combine their squares and be able to play the memory game. Can they tell which are the two Athenas? Etc...

### *Day Five*

Purpose: On day four the students created a myth involving two of the Olympians in a situation in which they either interact with each other, with people, with monsters, or some combination thereof. At the end of the day the students got into groups of four or five and shared their myths. The group chose one myth to act out on day five for the class. The students were told to bring anything that will help the skit be more interesting. This could consist of butcher paper backdrops, costumes, props, or whatever. They were given most of the previous day to create or find these items. What couldn't be found in school they were to look for at home.

Activity: The student groups get up and tell the class the title of the myth they chose, write on the board the cast of characters and who plays them. The narrator steps up and explains what the skit is about and gives the set-up. The skit then begins. After the skit is finished the class may ask the group any questions they have. These skits will be videotaped.

Evaluation: The skit will be evaluated by the effort put into the production, the myth chosen, how well the group worked together, and the audience's response to the skit.

### Week Three

Week three will consist of information on the universality of myths. There are certain themes that show up again and again in many cultures. We will talk about six themes that consistently show up (creation myths, flood myths, hero myths, punishment myths, dying/rising god myths, descent to the underworld myths). The class will focus on three of these themes: creation myths, flood myths, and hero myths. We will read myths from various cultures focusing on these themes and use literary elements to analyze them as well as work on some cognitive skills to compare and contrast various myths. The students will spend time in the library locating other myths that fit the themes chosen.

### *Day One*

Purpose: The purpose of this first day will be to discuss universal themes and to have the students listen to a myth from each of the six identified themes.

### Questions for Discussion:

- What is a theme?
- What does universal theme mean?
- Why do you think certain themes are seen in myths across the world?
- What situations do you think most cultures would want to write about?
- What is most important to human beings?
- What is quality of life and how does it affect a person's outlook on life?
- Can you rise above the situation that you are born in, or are you stuck because it is your "station in life"?
- What does this theme mean to you? (Ask this of each of the six themes.)

Activity: The students will think about their lives and the people in them. Can they think of an incident that works for one of the six themes? They will be asked to write about that incident and to link it to the theme that fits. If they can't think of any they can make up a situation based on their own lives. The students who want to will then be allowed to share their stories with the class.

Evaluation: The students will be evaluated on their participation in the class discussion and their ability to write about an incident from their lives and clearly link it to one of the six themes.

### *Day Three*

Purpose: On day two the students, in groups of three, used the various anthologies of myth books in class to locate two myths, from different cultures, for each of the three themes covered in class. Today they will use Venn diagrams (graphic organizer) to compare and contrast the two myths from each theme. The students will then present one Venn diagram per person.

Activity: The groups will gather the myths they found, the three Venn diagram handouts, and the names of the three themes that were the focus. The group will brainstorm information from each myth pair and then organize it using the Venn diagram. The group will label the Venn diagram by putting the title of the first myth and the culture it came from on the left. The title of the other myth and its culture will go on the right. The middle section will be for things that the myths have in common. The first item in this section should be the name of the common theme for the two myths. Later the groups will get up in front of the class and each person in the group will present one of the Venn diagrams.

Evaluation: The students will be evaluated on how well done their Venn diagrams are, whether the two myths compared really had the same theme, and how well they presented their diagrams.

### *Week Four*

In this week the students will be focusing on one particular universal theme – hero myths. We will review the information that we know about universal themes and hero myths in particular. Students will have the opportunity for discussion of how a hero is defined, where you might find one, etc.... They will be exposed to various hero myths read aloud by the teacher, as well as have opportunities to locate hero myths of their own. We will focus on three heroes in particular from Greek mythology – Perseus, Heracles, and Odysseus. The Greek myths for these heroes will be read and movies of these heroes will be shown (*Clash of the Titans*, *Hercules*, and *The Odyssey*). The students will discuss the differences between the Greek myths and the Hollywood renditions. There will also be an opportunity for students to create a hero myth of their own. The material that needs to be covered for this section could very well take more than one week.

## *Day One*

Purpose: This day will be used to review information already learned on universal themes and to focus on the hero myth in particular. The period will start with a discussion on pertinent questions. I will let them know that we will be focusing on learning about three Greek heroes: Perseus, Heracles, and Odysseus. The students will be given a brief writing assignment to get them thinking.

### Questions for Discussion:

- What is a universal theme?
- What is a hero myth?
- Does a hero myth have a certain pattern? What is that pattern?
- What is a hero? Do heroes have certain characteristics?
- What are some examples of heroes from literature, movies, or TV?
- Do heroes have to be larger than life, or can they be everyday people?

Activity: The students will be asked to think about their lives and write about someone in their life they think is a hero. This should be a real person, not someone from music, TV, or the movies. They should tell me why they think this person is a hero, and what they have done that the student feels is heroic. Later any students who want to can share their hero stories.

Evaluation: The students will be evaluated by their level of participation in our discussion and how well they did on the hero writing assignment.

## *Day Five*

Purpose: The students have previously read the myths about Heracles and, in particular about his twelve labors. The focus of this lesson is sequencing. The students will work on an art activity that involves putting Heracles' labors in the correct order from memory.

Activity: The groups of four students will be given twelve 4"x 4" squares of white paper. They are to draw a picture on each square that represents one of Heracles' labors. Each student will draw three labors. The group will decide how to divide them up. The students will have a teacher-created handout that succinctly states what each of the labors are. Students will use those descriptions to help guide them in what they want to draw. They may use any of the books on Heracles to help them decide what to draw, but no tracing is allowed. Once everyone has drawn the pictures, all books will be put away, as

well as the handout from the teacher. The students should then shuffle the pictures so they are all mixed up. The groups must then put the picture squares in the correct order of when Heracles accomplished the labors.

Evaluation: The students will be evaluated on how closely their pictures match the labors of Heracles described. They will also be evaluated on whether they get the sequence of the labors correct.

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