

INTRODUCTION

The study of mythology is important for a variety of reasons. Mythology holds the key to the understanding of the religions and philosophies of the ancient world. It provides the earliest definitive literary record of the ideals, motives and manners of the ancients. Just as importantly, the knowledge of myths enhances the appreciation of the literature and art of the classical and modern periods.

The objective of this book is to introduce students to various mythologies and to give them a better understanding of the ancient cultures from which the mythologies sprang. It is also intended that the increased knowledge will better enable students to understand and appreciate the many allusions to mythology with which they come in contact in their academic and leisure lives.

I hope you enjoy your trip back in time to these ancient worlds!

BLOOM'S REVISED TAXONOMY

REMEMBERING:	Retrieving, recognising and recalling relevant knowledge from long-term memory.
UNDERSTANDING:	Constructing meaning from oral, written and graphic messages through interpreting, exemplifying, classifying, summarising, inferring, comparing and explaining.
APPLYING:	Carrying out or using a procedure through executing or implementing.
ANALYSING:	Breaking material or concepts into constituent parts, determining how the parts relate or interrelate to one another or to an overall structure through differentiating, organising and attributing.
EVALUATING:	Making judgments based on criteria and standards through checking and critiquing.
CREATING:	Putting elements together to form a coherent or functional whole; reorganising elements into a new pattern or structure through generating, planning or producing.

WHAT IS MYTHOLOGY?

Mythology – noun (plural mythologies) **1.** A body of myths, as that of a particular people, or that relating to a particular person: *Greek Mythology*. **2.** myths collectively. **3.** The science of myths. [Middle English, from Late Latin *mythologia*, from Greek:legend]*

Myths are primitive accounts of the origin, character and functions of the ancient gods, of the origin of humankind and of the condition of the visible world. The time in which these events occurred is completely different from our time frame.

In primitive cultures it was only natural for the people to have a sense of awe in the presence of the wonders of nature. They attributed to those natural wonders—the sun, the sky, the sea, the mountains and so on—a free will and personality such as they themselves had. Because they considered themselves inferior to those wonders, however, they believed them to have an even greater freedom, personality and power than they.

Earliest myths were based upon those phenomena that struck the emotions: the feeling of alarm at the crash of thunder, the feeling of gladness in the warm light of day, the feeling of terror in the darkness of night. and the feeling of dread when confronted with death. The first phenomena to strike the mind were probably the changes in night and day, the seasons and the weather. The earliest deities, therefore, were those who presided over the celestial sphere. As time went on, however, every phase of nature and human life was believed to have a controlling deity.

- 1.** Myths present extraordinary events without trying to justify them; therefore, people sometimes confuse them with fables. Analyse the difference between a myth and a fable.

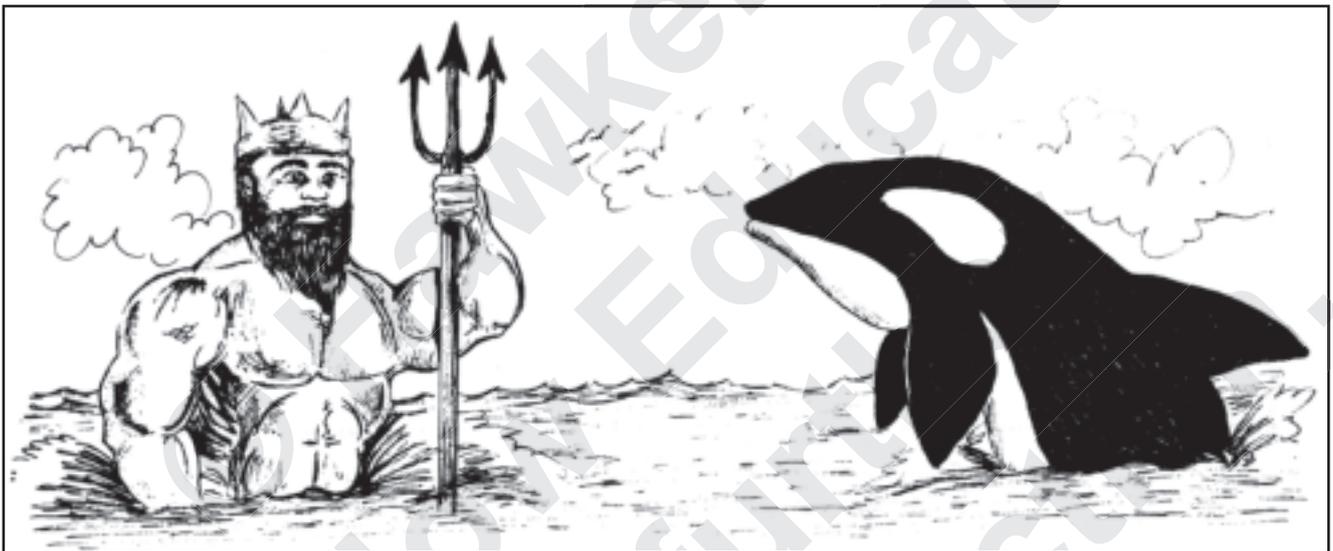
- 2.** The gods and goddesses were identified with the elements of nature over which they presided; therefore, incidents involving the elements of nature—storms, earthquakes, calm weather and so on—were believed to result from the activities of the gods. Create an original myth to explain a natural disaster such as the San Francisco earthquake of 1906, the eruption of Mt St Helens in 1980 or the Queensland floods of 2009.

*From *The Macquarie Dictionary, Fourth Edition* NSW: The Macquarie Library, 2005.

MYTHOLOGY OF THE ANCIENT GREEKS

The ancient Greeks, like other primitive peoples, believed that their lives were subject to external powers beyond their control—for example, the weather. Those powers were the “gods” and “goddesses”. The gods weren’t looked upon as having created the world, but as maintaining and preserving the existing order. They had extraordinary physical strength and were believed to be immortal.

In time the polytheism of the ancient Greeks spread to cover every phase of nature and of human life. The sky, the sea and the earth—everything—had a special guardian and controlling deity. Some of the minor deities were worshiped only among people connected with the sea. All, however, believed in the superior deities thought to inhabit Mt Olympus.



SOURCES OF GREEK MYTHOLOGY

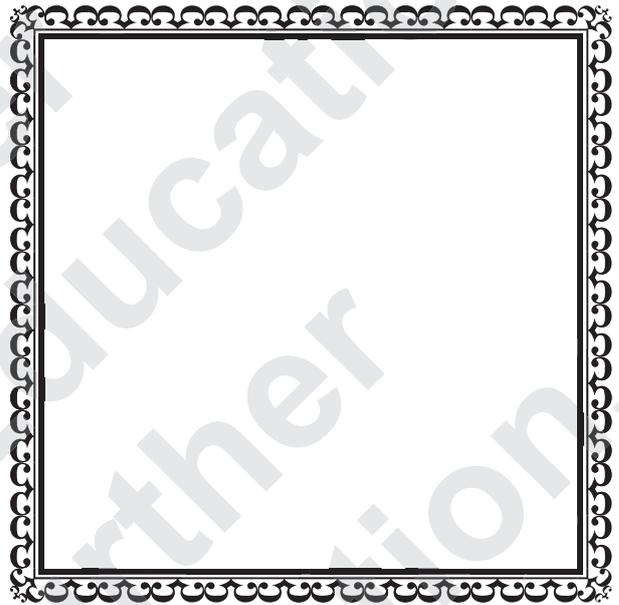
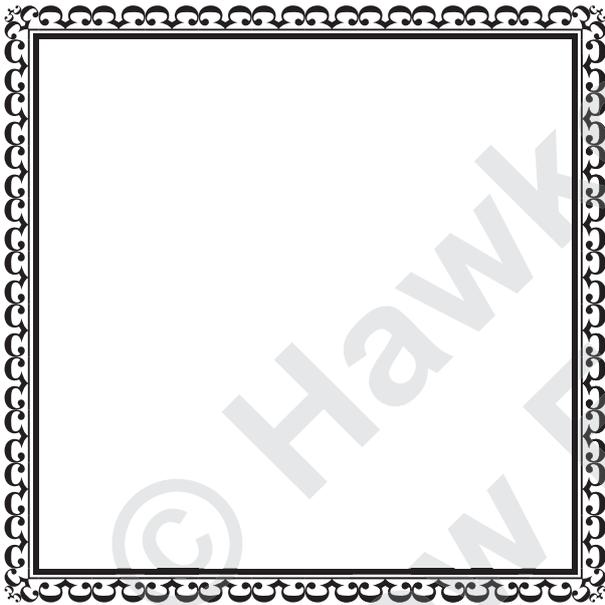
One of our most important sources of knowledge about Greek mythology is Homer. Homer is credited with having written the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*; however, some scholars doubt that these epics were the work of any one mind.

1. Research the reasons for and against the opinion that Homer wrote the entire poems. Write one or two paragraphs explaining both points of view. Give your opinion as to which is correct.

A FAMILY PORTRAIT

Loki is one of the most puzzling figures in Norse mythology. Although he was not a god, he was allowed in Asgard as he wished—supposedly because of a bargain he had made with Odin. He often caused trouble for the gods, although he sometimes helped get them out of the trouble he had caused. Loki was viciously cunning and could not be trusted.

1. Loki and Angrboda, or Distress-Bringer, were the parents of three evil children. Draw their pictures as they might appear in a family album.



RA (RE)

Ra was different from the other Egyptian deities in that he was never a local god. He originally was the god of the physical attributes of the sun; however, he later became the supreme god of all Egypt. Ra became associated with many other gods who were manifestations of his various attributes: Horus as the strong, young sun of the day; Amun of Thebes as the hidden and mysterious power of the sun that sustains the universe; Mentu as the rising sun; Atmu as the setting sun; and Shu as the solar light.

1. A temple was built to Ra at Heliopolis in north Egypt; a large staff of priests resided there. This was long before such institutions were common. Compare and contrast Ra and his Greek counterpart, Helios.

2. Explain what a scarab is and what it represented. Draw a picture to accompany your explanation.

SCARAB	<hr/>
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3. One of the gods identified with Ra (Ra) was Amun. Amun (also known as Ammon, Amon, Amen, Amen-Ra and Amun-Num) represented the power that creates and sustains the universe. Amun was the god of Thebes. His identification with the sun-god was largely due to the work of his priests. Research and find out why the priests of Amun would want him to be associated with Ra.
