

GREEK MYTHOLOGY

Mythology (from the Greek 'mythos' for story-of-the-people, and 'logos' for word or speech = the spoken story of a people) is the study and interpretation of often sacred tales or fables of a culture known as 'myths' or the collection of stories, which usually deal with the human condition, good and evil, human origins, life and death, the afterlife, and the gods. Myths express the beliefs and values about these subjects held by a certain culture.

Myths tell the stories of ancestors and the origins of humans and the world, the gods, supernatural beings (satyrs, nymphs, mermaids) and heroes with super-human, usually god-given powers. Myths also describe origins of long-held customs or explain natural events such as the sunrise and sunset, the full moon or thunder and lightning storms. In Ancient Greece, stories about gods and goddesses and heroes and monsters were an important part of everyday life. Like other ancient civilizations, the Greeks used their religion to explain everything happening around them. They used myths to explain the natural occurrences they witnessed, like the sunrise and sunset, storms, passing of time, and why the seasons change. Their myths helped to answer questions about how the Earth was created, where people would go when they die, and how to live a happy life. They also used mythology to retell historical events so that people could feel connected with their ancestors, the wars they fought, and places they explored.

Mythology tries to answer the most difficult and the most basic questions of human existence. To ancient peoples, the meaning of the story was most important, not the literal truth of the details of a certain version of a tale. In Greek mythology, some gods or goddesses married a relative or a god would have many wives. By modern standards, these situations are not viewed as "normal," but to the Ancient Greeks these details did not necessarily matter or make them think twice. It was understood in the ancient world that the purpose of a myth was to provide the hearer with a truth, which the audience then interpreted for themselves.

Every culture has some type of mythology. The classical mythology of the ancient Greeks and Romans is the most familiar to people. In Greek mythology, there is no single original text like the Christian Bible or the Hindu Vedas that introduces all the characters and stories of their religion. At the center of Greek mythology is the pantheon (group) of gods who were said to live on Mount Olympus, the highest mountain in Greece. From their perch, they ruled every aspect of human life. Olympian gods and goddesses were portrayed as looking like human men and women and many myths focus on their human-like characteristics and activities. For example, the gods had families, fell in love, had sibling rivalries, became jealous, and celebrated during happy times.

Ancient myths still have meaning with modern people precisely because the ancient writers crafted the stories toward individual interpretation, leaving each person who heard the story to recognize the meaning in the tale for themselves. Many references in literature, art, and culture today relate back to Greek mythology. For example, the company Nike got its name from the Greek goddess of victory. Amazon.com is named after the race of mythical female warriors. Many sports teams – both school and professional get their names from mythology, such as the Spartans and Titans.

Answer these questions:

- 1) What is the purpose of myths in Ancient Greece or ancient societies in general?
- 2) What can people learn from mythological stories?
- 3) How can myths still be relevant in modern times?