

NAME _____

DATE _____

LESSON 1/MYTH, THE MUSEUM OF THE MIND

In a museum, you may already have seen a statue of a Greek goddess or a Roman gladiator. If so, you know how people looked long ago and how they imagined their gods looked.

By reading myths, you can also discover what people thought long ago, what they feared and what they hoped for—even which character traits they admired and which ones they disliked.

What kind of people created these myths? First of all, they were imaginative and capable of telling stories that have lasted for thousands of years.

They were observers of the natural world around them, but they were also in awe of it. They invented stories to account for thunderstorms, floods, eclipses, even the changing seasons, because such occurrences, once explained, seemed less frightening.

They were curious about how the world began and how the first human beings were created; they speculated about death and life after death.

They lived by a moral code which required children to obey parents, parents and children to be reverent to the gods, and all people to be generous to one another.

They pictured their gods as looking and acting as they did themselves. Thus gods quarreled and were jealous or fell in and out of love, but they were also wise and just. Gods could change their outward forms at will, had superhuman strength, and were immortal. In these last three characteristics, they differed from people.

Because ancient people revealed so much about themselves in their myths, reading those myths, like visiting a museum, makes the past come to life.

NAME _____ DATE _____

LESSON 1/WORKSHEET/FINDING THE MESSAGE IN THE MYTH

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

- A. Some were attempts to explain natural phenomena such as floods.
- B. Some were religious speculation on human beings' relationship to the gods or on such mysteries as creation, death, and the afterlife.
- C. Some examined human behavior, both people's failings and their virtues.

Read each of the following well-known myths and decide whether it belongs in Group A, B, or C above. Then state what it explains or teaches.

1. Daedalus and Icarus

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

This myth belongs in Group _____ or Group _____. It teaches that _____

2. Persephone and Pluto (Hades)

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

This myth belongs in Group _____. It explains _____

3. Orpheus and Eurydice

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

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

Vocabulary from the myths:

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