

# #9315

## MYTHOLOGY IN LITERARY CULTURE

CLEARVUE/eav  
2000  
Grade Levels: 7-12  
22 minutes



### DESCRIPTION

Ancient myths from all cultures help shape the stories we know today and give us modern stereotypes. Takes a look at five classical archetypes and cites examples of each found in familiar literature, film, art, and popular culture. Identifies and discusses the Hero/Warrior, Temptress, Trickster, Destroyer, and Transgressor.

### ACADEMIC STANDARDS

#### Subject Area: Language Arts - Reading

- Standard: Uses the general skills and strategies of the reading process
  - Benchmark: Extends general and specialized reading vocabulary (e.g., interprets the meaning of codes, symbols, abbreviations, and acronyms; uses Latin, Greek, Anglo-Saxon roots and affixes to infer meaning; understands subject-area terminology; understands word relationships, such as analogies or synonyms and antonyms; uses cognates; understands allusions to mythology and other literature; understands connotative and denotative meanings)
- Standard: Uses reading skills and strategies to understand and interpret a variety of literary texts
  - Benchmark: Knows the defining characteristics of a variety of literary forms and genres (e.g., fiction, nonfiction, myths, poems, fantasies, biographies, autobiographies, science fiction, tall tales, supernatural tales)
  - Benchmark: Know archetypes and symbols (e.g., supernatural helpers, banishment from an ideal world, the hero, beneficence of nature, dawn) present in a variety of literary texts (e.g., American literature, world literature, literature based on oral tradition, mythology, film, political speeches)

#### Subject Area: Language Arts - Writing

- Standard: Gathers and used information for research purposes
  - Benchmark: Uses a variety of primary sources to gather information for research topics

## INSTRUCTIONAL GOALS

1. To discuss the importance of Greek and Roman mythology to literary culture.
2. To discuss three different ways people interpret myths.
3. To name and describe five essential character archetypes, including transgressor, trickster, temptress, destroyer, and hero.
4. To classify literary characters as a representation of one of these specific archetypes.
5. To analyze modern literature from the perspective of mythological archetypes.
6. To discuss how mythological tales represent philosophical and psychological ideas.

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The mythological framework of the Greek and Roman eras may often seem outrageously fantastic and dated in comparison to our modern story-telling industry. Yet, the characters of those myths, typically doomed to suffer the extraordinary wickedness of jealous deities or live out the consequences of a self-imposed tragedy, have become foundations for many characters within modern literary culture.

This video examines the profound relationship between the characters of modern literature and film and those of our ancient mythological heritage. Classifying characters into five fundamental modes—transgressor, trickster, temptress, destroyer, and hero—this program explains the recurring archetypal themes of a cross-cultural paradigm and its manifestation in literature.

Look into the philosophical, psychological, and historical foundations of myths and their characters. Discover that some of your favorite fictional heroes and villains were developed from the legends of ancient societies.



## VOCABULARY

- |                |                  |
|----------------|------------------|
| 1. amoral      | 7. myth          |
| 2. aphrodisiac | 8. mythology     |
| 3. archetype   | 9. stereotype    |
| 4. destroyer   | 10. temptress    |
| 5. hero        | 11. transgressor |
| 6. immoral     | 12. trickster    |

## BEFORE SHOWING

1. Ask students to list and describe any Greek or Roman myths they are familiar with. Write this list on the board. Discuss what role these stories may have played in ancient societies and ask students if they believe these stories have any relevance to our modern society. Do any of these stories remind them of films they have seen or books they have read?
2. From the myths mentioned, highlight some of the characters within them. List some of their characteristics, describe their mission or goal, and discuss their relationship to other characters in the story. Ask students if they see any consistent themes or characteristics throughout these myths.

3. Explain to students that the program they are about to see is going to discuss the concept of archetypes. This literary concept will help them analyze and classify characters found in all of their favorite books, films, even television programs.

## AFTER SHOWING

### Discussion Items and Questions

1. Where do we find mythological themes? In which of these do we find the most prevalent uses of mythological themes?
2. What are some of the most common ways we look at myths today?
3. What do all myths have in common? What do we call these common character types?
4. What is the nature of the transgressor archetype? Who are some examples of transgressors from mythology? Name some modern transgressors.
5. What is the nature of the trickster archetype? Name a trickster from ancient mythology. Name some modern tricksters from our literary culture.
6. Describe the temptress archetype. Who is the most well-known temptress of ancient classical mythology? Where do we see this archetype represented in modern society?
7. What are the characteristics of the destroyer archetype? Who is the most well-known destroyer archetype of classical mythology? Name characters from modern stories that represent this archetype.
8. Describe the hero archetype. Who are some of the most well-known heroes of classical mythology? Name some characters from modern literary culture that fall into this category.
9. Invoke a discussion about the limitations and dangers of archetypes. Do we limit our analysis of literary characters using archetype? Do archetypes enhance our analysis? Bring the discussion into the realm of the social, as well. Does our discussion of archetypes create unreasonable expectations or harmful stereotypes in our society? Elaborate on the relationship between literary culture and society with regards to archetypes.

### Applications and Activities

1. Take students to the library and have them pick out books, poems, short stories, films, or periodicals with characters representing the different archetypes. Discuss the relationship between the Greek and Roman myths they learned about and the characters from these works. Also, have students attempt to list characters that they think do not fit into these archetypes. After writing them down, talk about each character. Do they perhaps represent overlapping archetypes? If so, discuss how our interpretation and understanding of the role of each archetype may have changed over time in order to accommodate different aspects of the human condition. If possible, generate a different archetype students believe to be represented in modern literature.
2. Have each student pick the archetype they are most interested in and write a short myth with that character type. When they have completed their myths, put students into groups of five with a myth representing each different archetype. Have them read their myths to each other then discuss the different roles each archetype plays. After they have finished the discussion, have them attempt to bring each character together into a single myth. Have a further discussion focusing on the relationship between each archetype.
3. Design a research project in which students investigate the myths of nonclassical culture and compare the characters to the archetypes described in this program. Students may study

the folk tales of Africa, Hindu mythology, Native American mythology, or any number of other traditions. Encourage them to draw parallels as well as define differences between the characters of Greco-Roman myths and those of their cultural area of choice.

4. Have the students read different versions of the same myth (they were written differently according to the country they originated from). Have the class describe the similarities and differences in the various versions.
5. Have the students rewrite a favorite myth in an updated, modern version.
6. Have your students choose a myth and rewrite it from a different character's perspective. Follow-up with a discussion of students' changed understanding of that myth. How does this transform our understanding of archetypes?
7. Have students analyze a myth of their choice, focusing on the role women play. Are some archetypes overly represented by a particular gender? How might this have affected modern literary culture as well as modern standards for gender roles?
8. Conduct an activity where students compile a list of related topics depending on personal interest and form their own research projects based on that list.

## RELATED RESOURCES



### Captioned Media Program

- Parts of a Story #9341
- Universal Themes in Literature #9467



### World Wide Web

The following Web sites complement the contents of this guide; they were selected by professionals who have experience in teaching deaf and hard of hearing students. Every effort was made to select accurate, educationally relevant, and "kid safe" sites. However, teachers should preview them before use. The U.S. Department of Education, the National Association of the Deaf, and the Captioned Media Program do not endorse the sites and are not responsible for their content.

- **GREEK MYTHOLOGY**

<http://www.pantheon.org/areas/mythology/europe/greek/a.html>

A comprehensive site on names from Greek mythology from Abaris to Zibelthiurdos. Also provides a short overview of Greek deities.

- **ENCYCLOPEDIA MYTHICA**

<http://www.pantheon.org/mythica.html>

An encyclopedia on mythology, folklore, and legend. Explore through the encyclopedia, search for articles, and read updates.

- **A BIBLIOGRAPHY FOR GREEK & ROMAN MYTH**

<http://www.theoi.com/SourceGuide.htm>

Listing of the principal literary sources for Greek mythology.

- **MYTHWEB**

<http://www.mythweb.com/>

Devoted to the heroes, gods and monsters of Greek mythology.

