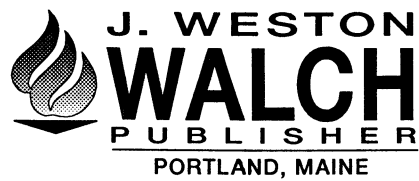


MYTHOLOGY

A Teaching Unit

Aileen M. Carroll



CONTENTS

Foreword vi
To the Teacher vii
Teacher's Ready Reference viii
Pronunciation Guide (reproducible) xxviii

PART I



1. **Myth, The Museum of the Mind** 1
 Worksheet: Finding the Message in the Myth 2

2. **Myths in Our Modern World** 3
 Worksheet: Mythic References in Everyday Life 4

3. **Where Do All Our Heroes Come From?** 5
 Worksheet: Tracing Our Beliefs and Ideals to Their Source 6

4. **Why Study Myths?** 7
 Worksheet: Learning to Read the Language of Allusion 8

5. **Why Study Myths? II** 10
 Worksheet: Recognizing Symbols from the Myths 11

6. **Why Study Myths? III** 12
 Worksheet: Words from the Gods 13

7. **Let's Take a Look at How It All Began** 14
 Worksheet: Words and Meanings from the Creation Myth 15

8. **The Old Gods Give Way to the New** 16
 Worksheet: The Gods' Family Tree 17

9. **Zeus and His Brothers** 18
 Worksheet: Symbolic Language from the Gods 19

10. **The Major Goddesses** 20
 Worksheet: How Well Do You Know the Goddesses? 21

11. **Other Great Olympians** 22
 Worksheet: More Words from the Gods 23

12. **The Creation of Man and Woman** 24
 Worksheet: Reading the Moral in the Myth 25

	13. The Gods As Lovers 26
	Worksheet: A Chance to Review 27
	14. When Gods Walked the Earth 28
	Worksheet: Some Parallels and Posers 29
	15. Myths and Morals 30
	Worksheet: You Have the Last Word 31
	16. Hades' Kingdom, the Underworld 32
	Worksheet: Thinking It Over 33
	17. Death and Immortality 34
	Worksheet: A Secret Message from the Underworld 35
	18. The Hero, A Representation of All Virtues 36
	Worksheet: Thinking It Over 37
	19. The Heroes Perseus and Theseus 38
	Worksheet: Analyzing the Heroes' Actions 39
	20. Achilles and Odysseus, Homer's Warrior-Heroes 40
	Worksheet: If the Ancients Advertised 41
	21. The Gods of Greece Meet the Gods of Rome 42
	Worksheet: The Match Game 43
	22. The Zodiac, The Circle of Life 44
	Worksheet: A Close Look at Words 45
	23. The Principal Norse Gods 46
	Worksheet: Some Similarities and Differences 47
	24. Yggdrasil, The Norse Tree of Life 48
	Worksheet: Let's See What You Remember 49
	25. Beowulf and King Arthur, Two Northern Heroes 50
	Worksheet: A New Concept of the Hero 51
26. Test I 52	
PART II	
27. Some Sacred Animals and Gods of Ancient Egypt 54	
Worksheet: Let's See What You Remember 55	
28. Creators and Protectors 56	
Worksheet: The Gods on Trial 57	
29. The Egyptian View of Death and the Afterlife 58	
Worksheet: Mapping the Underworld 59	



30.	Chinese Creation Myths	60
	Worksheet: Reading Between the Lines	61
31.	Animals in Chinese Mythology	62
	Worksheet: Beasts, Real and Imaginary	63
32.	Gods and Ancestors	64
	Worksheet: Words in Context and a Few Thought Questions	65
33.	The World's Cycle of Death and Rebirth	66
	Worksheet: Words and Thoughts	67
34.	In the Beginning	68
	Worksheet: How Good Is Your Recall?	69
35.	Test II	70
 PART III		
36.	African Animals and Gods	72
	Worksheet: Rituals and Reflections	73
37.	Two African Tales	74
	Worksheet: Words and Meanings	75
38.	When Our Land Was Young—Native American Myths	76
	Worksheet: What Do You Remember? What Have You Learned?	77
39.	A Wabanaki Myth	78
	Worksheet: A Closer Look	79
40.	Myths and Rituals of the Plains Indians	80
	Worksheet: Coming of Age, Yesterday and Today	81
41.	Two Indian Myths of the Northwest	82
	Worksheet: Thinking It Over	83
42.	Two Myths from the Indians of the Southwest	84
	Worksheet: Words and Meanings	85
43.	Test III	86
44.	Summing Up	88
	Worksheet: Let's Try Some Word Associations	89

PART II

LESSON 30



CHINESE CREATION MYTHS

As you learned from studying Egyptian mythology, ancient civilizations accumulated numerous myths, and individual storytellers created their own versions of the old tales. China, being of great antiquity, probably has a larger store of literature than any other civilization; and since many Chinese myths were collected long after their period of origin, seemingly conflicting versions of the same story exist.

This is true of the creation myths. In one, dating possibly to the third century B.C., Hu was the emperor of the Northern Sea and his counterpart Shu, was emperor of the Southern Sea. Half-way between their kingdoms was the territory of Hundun, emperor of the center, whose name meant chaos.

Hundun, unfortunately, had no orifices for seeing, hearing, breathing, or eating. To help him, Hu and Shu bored holes in him, one each day, until on the seventh day, Hundun died. From the holes his friends bored, the world emerged. Thus Hundun, the creator, died to produce the world.

In an earlier story, P'an Ku was the creator. He was a man, not a god, born of an egg that separated into two parts: heaven and earth. The heavy part (earth) became yin, and the light part (sky) became yang.

For the next 18,000 years, the distance between heaven and earth grew at the rate of ten feet a day. P'an Ku grew at the same rate to fill the void between them. At the end of that time, he died. From his body parts emerged the features of the universe: mountain ranges from his head, stomach, arms, and feet; the sun and moon from his eyes; plants, stars, and planets from his hair; metal and stones from his teeth and bones; jade from his bone marrow; and pearls from his

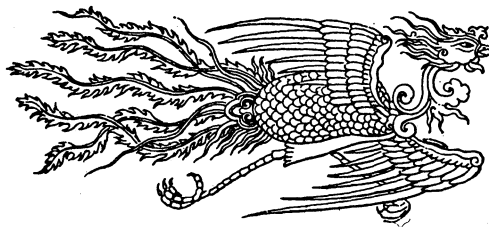
semen. As for human beings, they were created from the fleas on his body.

In another myth, the goddess Nugua created men and women. At first, she modeled them carefully from clay; but soon she became impatient with the process. So she took a rope and dragged it through mud. The drops that fell off the rope became peasants while the modeled figures became aristocrats.

In yet another story, P'an Ku tried to make people from clay and to endow them with yin or yang (female or male life force). When a storm came up suddenly, he hastily gathered up the figures, marring some in the process. The damaged ones became deformed people.

While the P'an Ku creation myth has yang and yin as parts of the egg from which he emerged, in other accounts, yang and yin are the parents of all creatures, of all natural geographic features, of the stars, and even of the seasons. This theory is in keeping with the beliefs of one of China's great religions, Taoism, which holds that there is a universal energy that is the basis of everything in nature. In this system, yang and yin—positive and negative, male and female, light and darkness, heat and cold—balance each other and make creation possible.

By now, you are probably aware that many creation myths have certain features in common: the selfless person or god whose sacrifice or death makes life possible for others; the state of chaos before some force brings order to the world or universe; and the egg as a symbol for the beginning or the emergence of life as we know it. As you look at other stories of creation, try to determine if their underlying concepts are ones you have encountered before.



 **READING BETWEEN THE LINES**

- Answer the following in the fewest possible words.

1. In the myth of Hu, Shu, and Hundun, why was it inevitable that Hundun die in order for the world to emerge? (Think of what the name Hundun actually means.)

2. In the two stories of creation of human beings—from the fleas on P’an Ku’s body, and from the mud droplets on Nugua’s rope—what attitude toward individuals of the human species seems to be expressed? _____

Do you think the individual was important? Explains _____

3. What did Hundun and P’an Ku have in common? (Think of their greatest contribution.) _____

4. Without referring to the lesson, list the properties of yin and yang.

YIN

YANG

PART II

LESSON 31



ANIMALS IN CHINESE MYTHOLOGY

Remember Beowulf (Lesson 25), who as a young warrior wrestled with and killed Grendel and Grendel's mother? In old age, Beowulf, by then the king of Sweden, fought and killed a dragon who was terrorizing his people. In the struggle, Beowulf received a mortal wound as well.

In Western literature such as *Beowulf*, dragons were depicted as destructive and death dealing. In the Chinese myths, they played a different role. They were considered useful and beneficial creatures, responsible for such tasks as guarding the mansions of the gods and protecting hidden treasure from would-be thieves. Because they controlled the wind and rain, dragons benefited farmers. They were also capable of clearing streams and deepening the seas—engineering feats that benefited everyone.

The dragon was a symbol of spring; thus, its color was green. It represented yang, the positive male force. The dragon was so admired by the Chinese that they frequently depicted it in their art. In fact, they still do.

Another mythical animal, the unicorn, is probably already familiar to you. In recent years, it has appeared on T-shirts, greeting cards, and posters. It seems to be enjoying a renaissance. In appearance, it is a cross between a deer and a horse, with a large horn protruding from its forehead—its most distinctive feature.

Despite its gentle appearance, the the unicorn of Chinese legend was capable of using its horn as a lethal weapon in combat against evil. In these animals, the Chinese saw strength and virtue combined—both the yang and the yin.

Later, in the medieval period, the unicorn was actually hunted, but it remained elusive. In one tale, however, hunters tricked it, using a beautiful maiden as a decoy. The unicorn saw the maiden and was attracted by her apparent innocence and purity. He rested his head on her lap and went to sleep. The maiden then summoned the hunters to capture the unicorn.

Like the Egyptians and other ancients, the Chinese revered the red bird, or phoenix—a bird of prey, eaglelike in appearance. The bird symbolized fire, since it seemed able to regenerate or resurrect itself from the ashes. In another version of this myth, the young bird emerged from the dead body of its parent. Thus, although the bird was associated with resurrection, it was also associated with death. To the Chinese, the phoenix embodied the female force, yin. Its season was summer.

The creature whose season was autumn was for the Chinese the king of the beasts. He was not the lion, but the white tiger—an animal both respected and feared. Any human being eaten by a tiger fell under the animal's power and, in turn, preyed like a tiger on other humans.

The tortoise represented winter. A slow-moving and somewhat withdrawn creature, it was credited with very special powers. Supposedly, it knew the secrets of life and death.

Certain domestic animals earned the gratitude of the Chinese. The dog was credited with introducing them to their staple food, rice. The ox, it was said, had come down from heaven to urge people to work hard so that they would have food to eat. The ox also helped them with the plowing to make certain that they had abundant crops.

By now, you must realize that although the Chinese attitude toward animals differed from the Egyptian, both civilizations saw animals as important inhabitants of their world.



 **BEASTS, REAL AND IMAGINARY**

- Without reviewing the lesson, see how well you can match the characteristics in Column I with the beasts in Column II

COLUMN I CHARACTERISTICS	COLUMN II ANIMALS
1. _____ knew the secrets of life and death	A. dragon
2. _____ appreciated purity and innocence	
3. _____ was able to regenerate itself	
4. _____ had one remarkable weapon of defense	B. tortoise
5. _____ occasionally ate a person	
6. _____ represented winter	C. unicorn
7. _____ was a bird of prey	
8. _____ had a balance of yang and yin within itself	
9. _____ was a good civil engineer	D. dog
10. _____ controlled the wind and rain	
11. _____ represented spring	
12. _____ was feared in other societies	E. ox
13. _____ guarded treasure	
14. _____ encouraged humans to work	
15. _____ gave human beings the gift of rice	F. phoenix

MYTHS IN TODAY'S WORLD

16. What two mythlike creatures apparently inhabit today's world, since sightings of them are frequently reported in the newspapers?

PART III

LESSON 38



WHEN OUR LAND WAS YOUNG— NATIVE AMERICAN MYTHS

Nineteenth-century poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow wrote a long narrative poem, *Hiawatha*, about an Indian boy who grows up to be a prophet to his people. Early in the poem, Longfellow describes Hiawatha's attitude toward the animals of the forest.

Of all beasts he learned the language,
Learned their names and all their secrets,
How the beavers built their lodges,
Where the squirrels hid their acorns,
How the reindeer ran so swiftly,
Why the rabbit was so timid,
Talked with them when'er he met them,
Called them Hiawatha's brothers.

Actually, those lines express all Indians' attitude toward wild animals. Indians respected them and depended on them for life itself.

Animals played an important role in their creation myths. In fact, some western Indians believed there had been an Age of Animals before human beings existed. In that age, Old Coyote Man was chief. He was not a totally admirable creature. He was curious and cunning, able to assume many deceptive shapes, gluttonous, and boastful. Yet he was also the creator.

In that long ago time, a great flood occurred. But foresighted Old Coyote Man had built himself an ark. When the rains finally ceased, he hailed two passing ducks and asked them to dive until they found earth. The first duck failed, but the second finally brought some dirt to the surface. From it, Coyote Man created the land, the animals, and the Indians.

In the northeastern Indians' version of the same myth, Glooscap, the Great Hare, is the creator. During the flood, he climbs a pine tree. As the waters rise, he keeps extending the top of the tree. To find earth for a new beginning, he eventually sends the diving animals, otter, beaver, and muskrat, and it is the muskrat who succeeds.

In the Cheyenne version of the same myth (Cheyennes lived in the Great Lakes area), the All Spirit first creates a lake, then water creatures,

and finally birds. It is the coot who dives for the mud, which the All Spirit places on Grandmother Turtle's back to build up Earth. Then Earth becomes the grandmother and brings forth trees, fruits, and flowers. Next, the All Spirit makes man from one of his ribs, and woman from another. Finally, he creates the buffalo so that his people will have food.

The Indians of the Northwest believed that Raven was their creator, fashioning first women and then men from clamshells. He also stole fire from the King of Light to give it to his people.

In another version, Raven changes himself into a cedar leaf and is swallowed in a sip of water by the daughter of the Chief-Who-Had-Light. She becomes pregnant, and her child (Raven in disguise) steals the stars, moon, and sun from his grandfather before flying away.

The Cherokees believed all the animals once lived in darkness, but knew there was light in the East. Possum went first to snatch a bit of light (the sun), but he hid it with his tail and it burned off all his tail fur. Buzzard's attempt wasn't successful either; the sun burned off all his head feathers. But Grandmother Spider was wise; she fashioned some damp clay into a little bowl to carry the light in, and she spun a thread on her way to the East so that she'd know how to get back. Ever since, a spider's web looks like the sun surrounded by rays.

To the Indians, thunder was evidence that the Thunderbirds (powers for goodness) were beating their wings. Their flashing eyes made the lightning. They could destroy or encourage crops as they chose, but generally they were kind to the Indians. The Thunderbirds were often in conflict with the Panthers and Great Horned Snakes who inhabited the Underwater Realm and who were capable of great evil. When the Thunderbirds and the Underwater creatures were in serious conflict, violent storms, floods, and earthquakes occurred. Of course, the conflict also symbolized a struggle between good and evil.

 **WHAT DO YOU REMEMBER?
WHAT HAVE YOU LEARNED?**

- First, let's try matching names and descriptions. Fill in the spaces in Column B with the correct names from Column A. One name may be used twice.

COLUMN A	COLUMN B
Old Coyote Man	1. _____ He succeeded where the beaver and otter had failed.
Raven	2. _____ He was a thief whose stealing helped mankind.
Great Hare	3. _____ The smallest of the diving birds, he was the one who found a bit of earth.
Coot	4. _____ She was a potter and a spinner.
Grandmother Spider	5. _____ He lost his head feathers.
Muskrat	6. _____ He lost his tail fur.
Grandmother Earth	7. _____ She swallowed a cedar leaf with strange results.
All Spirit	8. _____ They are powers of evil.
Buzzard	9. _____ They are generally benefactors to humans.
Opossum	10. _____ He made a great lake.
Thunderbirds	11. _____ He climbed an extendable pine tree.
Great Homed Snakes	12. _____ He made women from clamshells.
Daughter of the Chief-Who-Had-Light	13. _____ She produced flowers and trees and fruits.

14. In Indian myths, the porcupine was often a symbol for the sun and the grizzly bear for clouds. Can you see why?

15. Basing your answer on the few myths in this lesson, how would you compare American Indian myths with the Norse? with the Greek? with the African? *Clues:* Which seem the most cheerful to you? In which do the gods seem closest to the people? Which seem most influenced by the natural environment, that is, the place where the people live?
