

Comparative World Mythology

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INTRODUCTION

The high school where I teach is in the process of a transformation. It was once a predominantly white school with a high number of graduates going to four-year colleges on academic scholarships. In the past fifteen years, the focus has changed. Discipline relegates academics to the back seat. Many of our students come from lower income families and must work to make ends meet at home. They are happy to get the 70 they need for passing rather than strive for a higher grade because they do not have the time to do their homework. Many of the parents do not encourage the students in the way that is a teacher's dream. Most of the motivation comes from the students themselves or from the teachers.

Few students have access to computers, books, magazines, or encyclopedias. The school also does not have adequate facilities to accommodate an entire classroom set aside to have one computer per student with a working printer. The only classrooms with a "class set" of computers are the computer labs. This makes it difficult to use the Internet as the powerful teaching and research tool it could be. Also, the library in my school has very few recent books on mythology. Some of the books even date back to the 1930's. Because the students do not have much time once they leave school to work on their projects, I have set up a unit that takes place in the classroom. It combines both group work and individual work.

Teaching World History at the high school level is a daunting task. In one academic year, I must cover five thousand years of history. This does not leave much time to focus on one area. I must continuously move forward in history to allow myself adequate time, hopefully, to cover the Cold War, while incorporating the many cultures represented by the students. My goal for the next year is to finish the Middle Ages by the end of the first semester. This would mean covering Mesopotamia, Egypt, China, Greece, Rome, the Americas, Africa, and Europe. To sum up the entire semester, I thought that it would be useful to the students to try to combine the different cultures and discover the similarities and differences. By synthesizing the work done in the first semester, the students will hopefully gain an appreciation for other cultures and maybe realize that people have some of the same ideas and beliefs despite the distance of space or time.

AN OVERVIEW OF THE UNIT

After a brief review of the areas that can be selected for the project, I would discuss myths with the students, dispelling any misconceptions about mythology that the students may have. The students would then break into groups and I would give them a myth to analyze. The myths would be from various cultures and with various themes. These mini-projects could then be presented orally or on paper, in order to prepare the students for the major task ahead of them, namely taking three or four cultures and comparing a specific type of myth across these cultures.

Some examples of the types of myths that can be used are myths on:

- a) creation
- b) the flood
- c) twins and brothers.

I chose these three topics because they are found in many parts of the world. They span both time and place with many similarities and yet some differences. They will allow the students to see how cultures can interact as they develop, and will teach them to appreciate commonalities among human societies that cannot have interacted historically.

Mythology

Mythology is often thought of as a narration of events that could not be explained by ancient man. As more research has been done in the field of mythology, that narrow definition no longer holds true. Myths can encompass the goodness that people are expected to show. They can demonstrate the virtues and values that are important in a culture. Myths can be associated with religion, government, warfare, discrimination, or any other aspect of cultures. Some narratives do express things beyond rational explanation; mythologies, however, go deeper and develop a sense of what ideal society involves and also symbolize human society as a whole. Ideal societies are often shown or presented through their opposites. Characters in the myths are often punished for breaking some known rule or not paying homage to a custom that is common. This is used to teach people how to be good citizens and follow the way of the land.

Myths were often lengthy songs that were transmitted orally before they were written. The poetic form of the song, including formulas the singer could repeat and reshape, allowed him to remember great amounts of stories and relay them to a listening audience. Myths were sometimes used to bolster the power of the ruling classes. Kings and warriors were venerated in the myths and often looked up to as heroes. These same rulers were often brought down by the very power they had on account of *hubris*, or their own pride. These are just broad descriptions of myths and their many uses in societies around the world.

a) Creation Myths

It is reasonable to imagine that every society needs a set of creation myths. People must have the opportunity to explain where they came from and how they got where they are. Creation myths often order society and put gods, people, and animals in the places where they belong: gods above kings, kings above the other humans, humans above animals. The creation myth gives the ruling class the ability to name someone in power and then trace the lineage back to his ancestor. Creation myths also glorify the gods. The gods breathe life into the world and the human beings. The gift of life to humanity requires that men pay the gods back through rituals. Some myths of different cultures betray the belief that the main reason humans were created was to be able to pray to the gods and make sacrifices to them. The creation myths often give the specific gods specific areas that they rule. Different deities were thought to protect and control specific realms of human activity or defined areas of the world; thus, for example, to alleviate a drought, prayers and offerings would be addressed to the rain god. The messages conveyed by myths served mythmaking societies or groups to justify their domination of others or to impose rules that would command respect because they were supported by divine authority.

Creation myths vary throughout the world; however, many of them begin with a vision of chaos or complete disorder. The aim of the creation myth is to bring the chaos under control and promote civilization. Creation myths from around the world often start with water or darkness enveloping the entirety of the known universe. Out of that emptiness comes earth, air, water, and the heavens. Often, an image of the underworld is also developed. Humans and animals are created and placed on earth.

Greek myths offer examples of the creation myth. The Greek myths of the Theogony describe how primal deities associated with the perceived parts of the physical world emerge from an original emptiness thanks to the fertility of the Earth. The creation myth includes a succession myth. Eventually the heaven, the earth and the sea are ruled by the gods and goddesses that become the Olympians, with Zeus as the supreme god. After Zeus and his allies overthrow the Titans, he faces a great monster, Typhon, in a battle that shakes the Earth and causes great turmoil in the universe. In one version Prometheus is given the task of giving traits to each of these creatures and finally gives fire to man. The fire represents both the actual fire that can be used for warmth, cooking, and metalwork, and the knowledge that is associated with light. Zeus, angered by the knowledge presented to man, punishes Prometheus for bestowing fire to the humans.

The Babylonian Creation Epic (Enuma Elish) contemplates the harsh reality of the lives of the early Mesopotamians. The area of Mesopotamia was inhospitable and plagued with natural disasters, most notably the unpredictable floods of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. The Babylonian myth relates the creation of the world and man: the gods and their personalities and traits, and the relationship between the two. As in Greek mythology, there is a battle between the gods for power. This battle causes universal

events and changes that affect the lives of the ancient Mesopotamians. Eventually, Marduk overthrows Tiamat and her consort thereby ridding the earth of chaos. Order rules the universe. My source for this myth is Meyer.

Other groups in the Near East had creation myths also. The Hebrew creation myth is outlined in the Bible. Genesis begins with a void; earth is not formed and there is only darkness. Unlike the previous two myths, the universe in the Old Testament is created by a single entity, God. God speaks and His desire is done. The first development is light, which is differentiated from the darkness. The creation continues for five days until the earth is ready for man. Then on the sixth day, God creates animals and man and places them into the Garden of Eden. Once in the Garden of Eden, Eve is created to be a companion to Adam. Eventually, Adam and Eve eat from the Tree of Knowledge and are banished from the garden. As in the Greek myth, the light of knowledge begins the cycle of history for man. (Source: the Bible)

In the Americas, the Quiche had a strong creation myth. The Quiche believed that in the beginning there was nothing. There was no sound, no movement, and no man or beast. The land had not been created and there was only a still sea. The only beings at this time were the creation gods. The gods decided that man needed to be created; therefore, the water had to recede and land had to be formed. After the land was created, the animals were placed on the land. The gods tried to get the animals to praise the gods, but they could not speak. It was decided that animals should live outside and be sacrificed and eaten. The gods then attempted to make man. The first try was using mud, but man was too soft and melted away. The gods used wood, but this man had no soul. Most of the wood men were destroyed, and the remainder became the monkeys that live in the jungles of Central America. (Source: Meyer)

The Yoruba peoples of Nigeria tell a creation myth that begins with Oloron, the sky god. Oloron dropped a chain from the sky to earth, and his son, Oduduwa, climbed down the chain. With him, he took a handful of dirt, a five-toed chicken, and a palm nut. Oduduwa threw the dirt on the waters that covered everything below the sky and put the chicken on the dirt. The chicken moved the dirt until the first dry ground developed. On this first ground, Oduduwa created the Ike kingdom and became the first king. He planted the palm nut which grew into a large tree representing his offspring. Oduduwa is considered the father of all the Yoruba. He crowned the male offspring and sent them to establish their own kingdoms. They alone were the divine rulers. (Source: Encyclopedia Mythica)

The Potawatomi Nations of the Great Lake region of North American tell the story of the Anishnabe. The Great Creator told Anishnabe to go and name everything. During his wanderings, he realized that he was the only species that did not have a mate, and he was lonely. His travels took him to the Great Lakes, where he heard a song coming across the lake. A woman was singing about making a home for him. He fell in love

with the song and the woman. He learned how to cross the river and married the woman, The Firekeeper's Daughter. They had four sons who helped populate the world.

Each of the four sons went one of the four directions of the earth. They each married the daughter of the Spirit of the direction in which they went. One son went North. He had a hard life but realized that the snow cleansed the earth. Because of the snow, North is represented by the color white. The second son went East. He discovered the rising sun and that fire was the center of all life and knowledge. The fire and sun led to yellow becoming the color of the East. Son number three went South. He found the seeds that life comes from, with the color red representing the life's blood. And lastly, the fourth son went to the mountainous West. He found the setting sun which represented the circle of life. West's color is black to represent the dark time. (Source: Bierhorst)

P'an Ku mythology can be found in China. In this creation myth, P'an Ku grew in a cosmic egg which contained all the elements of the universe. As P'an Ku grew, he separated earth and sky from each other. As he grew even larger, he divided the opposites of nature, such as male/female, light/dark, and Yin/Yang. P'an Ku also created the first human while still inside the egg. After 18,000 years of developing inside the egg, P'an Ku hatched and the universe was created. P'an Ku, however, died immediately because of the difficulties of making the universe. P'an Ku's eyes became the moon and sun; his sweat the rain. His voice is found in the thunder, and his body formed the geological features of the earth. (Source: Encyclopedia Mythica)

b) Flood Myths

Flood myths are also found in many parts of the world. Across cultures and times, the flood myth keeps appearing as a reminder of the destruction the gods can unleash when provoked. Prior to the flood, in most myths, humans have behaved so poorly as to intensely anger the gods. The gods are so disappointed in the humans, who have been created to sanctify the gods, that they are willing to destroy every living thing on earth so as to punish the erring humans. In most flood myths, humanity is destroyed with one or two exceptions. These people are usually above reproach and have pious souls. The complete destruction of the known world of the myth-tellers is the result of gods that have been insulted by the behavior of the humans. The gods want to rid the world of the evil and begin anew with a race that will respect the gods and their wishes.

The flood myth is usually followed by a rebuilding. The humans start over and build new civilizations that replace the old. The structures of life are put in order and reerected with the good on top and the evil absent. This shows the resilience of the ancient peoples around the world. Even though the human race is decimated by horrendous flooding, the survivors turn to their gods once more for strength and civilization repairs the problems that led to the first flood, at least for a while. In this

way, creation and flood myths are often interlinked and impossible to separate from each other.

There are two schools of thought surrounding the development of the flood myth. The first is based upon the notion of cultural diffusion. This concept entails one myth being passed around the world through trade and travel with changes occurring to correspond with each culture's gods and beliefs. This idea is commonly supported when dealing with the myths from the Middle East and Mediterranean area. These myths are very similar when the names of the gods are taken away. However, the cultural diffusion theory falters when myths are discovered from areas that had no contact with the Middle East or any Mediterranean group. There is historical evidence that, when the myths from these areas developed, certain groups were isolated, and yet these groups have flood myths that have similarities to most flood stories. This fact suggested to historians that catastrophic flooding occurs in most parts of the world and that it was normal for people to write about a subject they knew and had witnessed.

An ancient Babylonian text known as the Atrahasis Flood is a classic example of the flood myth. The gods have created man to do the work that the gods and goddesses no longer want to do. The gods and goddesses, because they do no work, depend on mankind to insure their food and drink through sacrifices. The population of the humans grows and grows until they are so loud that they disturb the immortals. The gods decide to rid the Earth of the humans. To do so, they attempt plague, famine, and drought, but each time the human population explodes and stresses the Earth. Enki, the god of the deep, gives the humans advice each time that saves their race and stops the destruction. Finally the gods are so angry with the humans because of the damage to the Earth and the disturbances to the gods that they send a flood to destroy the population. Once again, Enki steps in and saves the human race by telling Atrahasis, a pious man, to build an ark and save himself. Later, after the humans are gone, the gods are hungry but have no source for food. Then, Atrahasis sacrifices to the gods who eat. Rules are then established to control the human populations. Certain women are set aside as non-childbearers. Also new immortals are created that cause miscarriages and infant mortality in Babylon. These creatures lead to a population control that keeps the world in balance. (Source: Dundes)

In Genesis, Noah is faced with the same destruction of the human race. God thought that man was evil and had to be destroyed. Despite being sad about having to destroy what He had made, God made his decision. There was one exception to the complete evil that God saw in man. He saw the good in Noah and his family and vowed to save them. He warned Noah of what was to occur in the future and told him to build an ark to save his family and the animals. God instructed Noah in the exact specifications of the ark and Noah set to building the ark. When the rain began to fall, Noah took his family and two of each animal into the ark. The rain finally ceased and Noah sent a dove to see if the water level had fallen. The bird came back but brought

nothing. Noah then sent the bird out a second time and this time the dove brought back an olive branch, signifying the end of the flooding.

Noah and his family left the ark, and God made a vow to never flood the Earth in such a destructive way. God said that evil exists in mankind and that never will all the creatures of the Earth be killed in such a destructive way. God sealed this vow with a rainbow to signify the promise He made to man. Noah's sons now had the task of reestablishing the world as they knew it. The story goes on to say that Noah's sons repopulated the world with their descendants. Their children and their children's children are listed as the great societies that were in existence at the time of the biblical tradition, for example Cush, Canaan, Raamah, Babylon, etc. (Source: the Bible)

The Roman poet Ovid retells the flood myth in *Metamorphoses*. The tale of Philemon and Baucis is a prime example of the destruction of humans with two god-honoring people, a man and a woman, surviving. The story takes place in Phrygia, in Asia Minor. Two strangers were in Phrygia and had been turned away from many houses. It was the Middle East tradition to take in strangers and offer them a meal and shelter. This custom was, and is still today, followed throughout the Middle Eastern area. The two strangers continued in their search for shelter, when they happened upon the home of Philemon and Baucis. The elderly couple was poor and barely had enough food for themselves; however, they offered the strangers a full meal using all that they had in the house. The two strangers then revealed themselves as Juppiter and Mercury. The gods decreed that because of the inhospitable reception by those in the region, the area must be punished. The entire area was flooded, barring the house of Philemon and Baucis, which was spared because of the couple's goodness. Their house was changed into a temple with the couple becoming the priest and priestess. When they died, they became two entwined trees with their trunks meshed together for eternity.

This story does not have the entire world destroyed by a great flood, as many flood myths do. In contrast, only a small region was deemed evil enough to destroy. The myth is specific to the region that is flooded. This myth stresses the importance of the custom to respect strangers and serve them in the house as one would want to be served if on the road. Gods and goddesses traveling the earth in human form testing humans was a common theme in ancient mythologies. (Source: Dundes)

In Mesoamerica, the Aztec culture includes a destructive flood myth, but it has a twist on the survivors. The Aztecs believed that earth was created in cycles and each cycle was called a sun. In the fourth sun, earth is flooded and mankind is changed into fish. The exception are Tata and his wife, Nene, who are saved from the flood by hiding in a hollow tree. When the floodwater recedes, Tata and Nene come out of their hiding and are hungry. They begin to cook the fish (the other humans) and eat them. This so angers the gods that Tata and Nene are transformed into dogs and their heads are switched to their rear. After the floods, Tezcatlipoca and Quetzalcoatl, the gods who helped to destroy the earth during the four suns, began to rebuild the earth and the

heavens. They created supports for the heavens by chopping up the dual-sexed Tlaltecuhli, The Earth Lord, then they decreed that all plants needed to support human life would come from Tlaltecuhli. People were created from the bones of the fish-people from the fourth sun. These bones were mixed with blood from the gods and the present human race was born. (Source: Taube)

India also has a version of the flood myth. As in many flood myths, a male and a female are warned of an imminent disaster. In the Indian myth, a woman goes to get water from the river. A fish warns her to take her brother, some pumpkin seeds, and a rooster and build a cage. As the water begins to fall, the girl and her brother, with the seeds and the bird, climbed into the cage. When the floods covered the earth, the god Bhagwan, after being told by the rooster, realized that at least one human was alive. Bhagwan found the girl and her brother and asked her who told her to hide; she replied that the fish had warned her. The fish was called and lied at first. He eventually confessed to warning the girl, but his punishment was to have his tongue cut out. Fish no longer could talk, and leeches grew out of the tongue. The girl and the boy were married, and they began the human race that is in existence today. Unlike other flood myths, the reason for the flood is not known. All that is known is that the flood came and destroyed the human race except for the girl and the boy.

c) Twins and Brothers

Twins and brothers hold a special place in mythology. Many cultures have at least one story describing the relationships between brothers. Some of these brothers are immortals and some are mortals. In some cultures they are twins, while in others the relationship is between brothers of different ages. Often the twins or brothers are regarded with respect and honored, while in a few stories, twins are regarded with fear and sometimes are said to have been separated or killed at birth.

The twin and brother myths usually follow one of two story lines. The first plot involves two brothers who are at odds with each other. They fight over everything and never agree. They are usually jealous of each other, and in some myths one kills the other in a fit of rage. These stories represent the struggle of power in society and the need for a single leader. The struggling brothers may also represent a change in society. When a culture moves from one type of government or economic system to another, a brother story often develops with the brother representing the new society killing the brother of the old system. The second type of brother myth involves the complementary brothers. These brothers work together, often as one. When the two are together, they form a complete and strong bond. A number of ancient myths assign to one brother the functions of a lower class and to the other the traits of a superior or ruling class. These brothers represent the need in society for different skills.

In the Hebrew Bible, Cain and Abel are an example of the classic brother story. Cain and Abel were born to Adam and Eve. Cain became a farmer, and Abel was a

shepherd. Cain and Abel each took their goods to the altar and sacrificed them to God. God ignored Cain's offering, but accepted the sheep. Cain was distressed about this, but God just told Cain to watch out for sin. Cain's jealousy became too great to control, so he took Abel out into the fields and killed him. God came to Cain and asked about Abel, but Cain lied and said that he did not know where he was. Cain was punished by becoming a nomad, but he was also protected by God. Cain settled in the land of Nod.

A similar story is found in Rome's myth of foundation. Romulus and Remus are the twins who were suckled by a she-wolf and founded the city of Rome. The twins were the sons of Rhea Silvia and the god Mars. The twins were put in a basket and sent down river where they ran ashore and were rescued by a she-wolf. They grew up and joined a "Robin Hood" type band of youths. They would steal from the robbers and give the money to the poor. The city of Alba was overcrowded, so the twins decided to found their own city. The two began to fight over who would found the city and name it. They fought about who was the most important and strongest. Romulus killed Remus.

There are two stories regarding the killing of Remus. The first story tells that the arguments get so bad the twins turn to augury. Remus and Romulus each go to one of the seven hills around Rome. Remus sees six vultures, then Romulus sees twelve. Remus claims power because he saw the sign first. Romulus believes that more vultures signalled his power. The two fight and Remus is slaughtered. The second story says that Remus made fun of Romulus' half-built walls and jumped over them. Romulus got so mad that he killed Remus and declared that no one would ever cross the walls again. Romulus is credited with founding Rome.

Osiris and Seth, from Egyptian mythology, are another example of sibling rivalry. Osiris is the god of the underworld, but he is also the god of fertility, resurrection, and vegetation. His brother, Seth, is the god of chaos, hostility, evil, the desert, wars, and storms. Osiris represents rebirth and growth, while Seth represents destruction. Seth puts Osiris in a trunk and throws it in the Nile River. The trunk washes onto the shore and into a tree. Isis, Osiris's wife, finds the trunk, but Seth steals the body and cuts it into small pieces which are scattered throughout Egypt. Isis once again comes to the rescue and finds all of the pieces. She cries so much, that Ra, the sun god and head of the Egyptian gods, has pity on Osiris and Isis. Isis mummifies Osiris, and he is brought back to life. He cannot live in the land of the living, however, and has to reside in the underworld where he is king. Osiris also serves as the judge of the souls of the dead.

In the Americas, twins were often viewed with fear because of their connection to the gods of the creation. Twins are often found in the creation myths of the Mesoamericans. There are two sets of twins involved in the Mayan Popul Vuh. Hun Hunahpu and Vucub Hunahpu are the older twins in the story. Hun Hunahpu had two sons named Hun Batz and Hun Chouen; he also had twins by Xquic named Xbalanque and Hunahpu. Hun Hunahpu and Vucub Hunahpu liked to play a ballgame common in

Mayan society, but the game was loud and upset Hun Came and Vucub Came, who represent death. The later pair challenged the former pair to a game. Hun Hunahpu and Vucub Hunahpu went into the netherworld to play the game with Hun Came and Vucub Came, where they were humiliated by the demons of the underworld. They were tricked and killed by the underworld demons.

The second set of twins did not get along with Hun Hunahpu's older sons. The older sons stole the twins' game until finally the younger sons tricked the older ones. They came back from hunting one day and said their game was at the top of a tree. The older brothers went to get the game, but the trees grew and they could not get down. They asked for help, and the twins told them to hold their loincloths down. The loincloths became tails and the older twins monkeys.

Hunahpu and Xbalanque were known for their use of trickery to overcome their enemies. The twins were famous for using their tricks to overpower and kill Vucub Caquix, the monster bird. The twins used their cunning to overcome the demons of the underworld, who were angered by the noise from the young twins' ballgame. Just as their father had done, Hunahpu and Xbalanque went into the underworld to play their game. The twins had sent spies in, however, and found the secrets to surviving the underworld. The twins killed a dog and a man and brought them back to life. Hun Came and Vucub Came were so impressed that they told the twins to kill them and bring them back. The twins agreed and killed one of the death gods, but they did not bring him back to life. The other god bowed in defeat to the twins. Hunahpu and Xbalanque became the sun and the moon. (Source: Taube)

The last brother plot is another myth of the Americas. The Navajos tell a story about Monster-Slayer and Child-of-the-Water. When man was first created, earth was occupied by man-eating creatures and huge animals. These creatures attacked the humans, and the population was shrinking. White-Shell Woman was born from the earth and the sky. She lived on earth at the foot of a mountain. She became pregnant by the sun and water, and she gave birth to twins. They grew quickly and were full-grown in days. The boys wandered off one day to find their father; the Wind told the boys that their father was the Sun. They got help from people along the way and eventually met their father. At first the Sun did not believe they were his children, but after a series of tests, he agreed they must be. He gave them weapons they would need for their lives. They returned to earth and destroyed the monsters and creatures that were ravaging the humans. Monster-Slayer and Child-of-the-Water worked together in their attacks against the monsters and destroyed them with ease. (Source: Bierhorst)

LESSON PLANS

Lesson Plan Number One

This lesson is useful as introduction to the mythology unit. It is important that the students be able to read and comprehend the stories that are given to them. If the students are just given the myths with no prior knowledge of how to decipher them, then later they will not have the tools to do the comparisons. I have found that working with the first myth as a class gives good results.

Objectives:

The students will be able to

- read and comprehend the myth
- orally explain the main idea of the myth
- orally describe the underlying meaning of the myth
- use the printed material to support their conclusions

Materials Needed: The only materials needed for this project are an overhead projector or chalkboard and a class-set of the story of Demeter and Persephone. This story is available on the Perseus website (*Homeric Hymn to Demeter*) or in *Demeter and Persephone*, by Penelope Proddow.

Pre-Lesson: The students need to have a basic knowledge of the Olympian Gods and how they came into power. The students should be provided with a family tree of the Greek gods and goddesses and their mortal offspring. This will help with future lessons as well. A copy of the Greek mythological family tree can be found in *Apollo and Daphne: Masterpieces of Mythology* retold by Antonia Barber.

Lesson: Read the story aloud in class. The story can be read by the students or by the teacher.

- On the overhead or the chalkboard, list the plot line.
- Then discuss the meanings of each section. The students should give the input for the teacher to write. The following topics can be discussed:
 - 1- Persephone's birth from Zeus and Demeter
 - 2- Hades' abduction of Persephone and his claim that since he got the underworld as his domain, he should be rewarded with Persephone
 - 3- Demeter's search for Persephone and the effects on vegetation during this time
 - 4- Persephone's eating of the pomegranate seeds and its consequences
 - 5- The compromise between Demeter and Hades in which Persephone spent six months with Demeter in the land of the living and six months with Hades in the underworld
 - 6- The Greek explanation of the growing season and the dormant season

The students should be encouraged to use the story as a basis for their ideas. They should be able to point out the places in the myth that support their conclusions.

Lesson Number Two

This lesson is a student-centered, cooperative activity. The class is broken into groups of three or four. The purpose for this assignment is to have the students summarize and interpret the myths themselves. The final outcome can be in several different forms.

Objectives:

The students will be able to

- demonstrate their skills at interpreting myths from around the world.
- relate a myth to the class in a variety of methods.
- work cooperatively with group members, distributing labor equally among all members.

Materials Needed:

Each group will need a different myth to analyze. The students will also need to be provided art supplies, such as markers, crayons, paper plates, socks, colored-paper, scissors, and glue. Some myths that work well in this assignment are Apollo and Daphne, Pandora's Box, Daedalus and Icarus, Arachne and Athena, King Midas, and Orion. These stories are not hard to read or comprehend. They are fairly visual and are easy to portray on paper or aloud.

Lesson:

The class is broken into groups of three or four and each group given a copy of a myth. No two groups should have the same myth. The students will analyze the myths in the groups. They will then decide whether to draw a comic strip of their myth or act the myth out in front of the class. Either way, the myth will be presented to the class and all group members must work on the art project. The comic strips that some students will opt to do must have multiple frames and they should be in color. The students who act out the play should have a written script and masks. The students should have the plot covered in the play or comic strip; however, after their presentation, they should explain their analyses of the myths (i.e. why were they told, what did they explain, what behavior did they encourage or discourage, etc.).

Lesson Plan Number Three

This lesson plan is the culmination of the entire unit. Everything builds to this final project that synthesizes the unit and the semester.

Objectives:

The students will be able to

- analyze a myth and support the analysis with quotations
- discuss how the history of a region may affect the mythology that develops
- compare cultural diffusion with independent development

Materials Needed:

The students should have an opportunity to go to a library or the teacher may bring a variety of mythology books to the classroom. The books should include myths from as many covered cultures as possible. The teacher may also need to have markers, crayons, and construction paper (for the cover sheets).

Lesson:

This is a major project that the students should do primarily outside the classroom. The teacher should spend one or two days on the project in class. The project can be used as a summary of the semester and as the essay portion of a final. The project begins with the students picking three to four myths from one of the above sections. Each myth should be from a different area of the world. Next, the student will read the myths and write a summary of the plot of each one. The student will write a short analysis for each story, then a comparison of the three or four stories. The comparison should include similarities and differences. The assignment also includes a one page summary of the history of each culture to which the myths selected pertain. The student should draw a cover sheet that illustrates one of the stories included inside. Lastly, the student should have a table of contents and a bibliography.

ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Teacher Sources

Bierhorst, John, *The Girl Who Married a Ghost and Other Tales from the North American Indian*, New York, Four Winds Press, 1978.

Bierhorst's book has a wide variety of stories from every area in North America, thus it allows the reader to compare societies within the United States and Canada regions. The stories revolve around each ethnic group and therefore are different depending on the regions.

Dundes, Alan (ed.). *The Flood Myth*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1988.

Flood mythology is universal, and this book has various essays written about flood myths from around the world. The universality results in a tool for comparison. In many of the essays, the authors give short summaries of the stories and some even quote the entire story. The flood myth can be used both by advanced students and special needs students because of the different reading and synthesis levels of these stories.

Gardner, Jane F., *Roman Myths*, Austin, University of Texas Press, 1995.

This book has a summary of the Roman creation myths. Gardner analyzes in depth the different creation stories of Rome. She also compares Livy's creation myth with Plutarch's story. She explains some of the parallels and where the differences might arise with research into different words. The book is easy to read and yet interesting.

Meyer, Marc Anthony (ed.), *Landmarks of World Civilizations: Volume one from 3500 B.C.E. to 1550 C.E.*, Guilford, Connecticut, The Dushkin Publishing Company, 1994.

This collection of primary sources assists in cross-cultural comparison. The book includes pieces from Greece, Rome, India, China, South America, and many other regions. Because of the diversity of the selections included and the short length of each, the reader can make a variety of comparisons. This book has several cultures' creation myths.

Perseus: An Evolving Digital Library on the Ancient World

<<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu>> This Internet source is invaluable. It has extensive information on Greek mythology, history, literature, art and architecture, etc. The search engine on this web site is easy to use and pulls from a vast and rich collection of databases.

Ramanujan, A.K., *A Flowering Tree and Other Oral Tales from India*, ed. by Stuart Blackburn and Alan Dundes, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1997.

This book has folk stories from India. Its main disadvantage is that it does not have an index, but the stories are colorful and interesting.

Tanakh: A New Translation of the Holy Scriptures According to the Traditional Hebrew Text, Philadelphia, The Jewish Publication Society, 1985.

This translation of the Bible is easy to read and uses everyday words that are easily understood. It translates the Hebrew and Aramaic closely without much editorialization. Any other copy of the Bible may be used in its place, if readily available.

Taube, Karl, *Aztec and Maya Myths*, Austin, University of Texas Press, 1994.

Taube's book is well organized. It explains the myths well and is easy to comprehend. It has beautiful pictures from Mesoamerica. The stories comprise Aztec, Mayan, and other Mesoamerican tales. The index is extensive.

Student Sources

The following sources, listed above, can easily be used by students who are good readers:

Bierhorst, John, *The Girl Who Married a Ghost and Other Tales from the North American Indian*, New York, Four Winds Press, 1978.

Dundes, Alan (ed.). *The Flood Myth*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1988.

Gardner, Jane F., *Roman Myths*, Austin, University of Texas Press, 1995.

Perseus: An Evolving Digital Library.

A wonderful opportunity to train students to conduct educated searches on the Internet.

Taube, Karl, *Aztec and Maya Myths*, Austin, University of Texas Press, 1994

Myths Retold For Young Readers

D'Aulaire, Edgar Parin and Ingrid D'Aulaire, *D'Aulaire's Book of Greek Myths*, New York, Doubleday, 1962.

Penelope Proddow, *Demeter and Persephone*, Illus. Barbara Cooney, New York, Doubleday, 1970.

Gilgamesh, trans. and ed. by John Gardner and John Maier, New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1984.

McCaughrean, Geraldine, *Greek Myths*, Illus. Emma Chichester Clark, New York, Margaret K. McElderberry Books, 1992.

Lattimore, Deborah Nourse, *Why There is no Arguing in Heaven: A Mayan Myth*, New York, Harper & Row, 1989.

Philip, Neil, *The Illustrated Book of Myths*, Illus. Peter Malone, New York. Dorling Kindersley, 1995.