

Myths and Folktales



What Are Myths and Folktales?

The world's oldest stories passed on from generation to generation through talking.



Orpheus' Descent into the Underworld

Background of a Myth

Myths are stories about beginnings. They attempt to explain mysteries such as:

- A. How the world was created,
- B. Why people must eventually die, and
- C. Why the world is imperfect.



Types of Myths - Origin Myths

- Probably the first stories told by human beings: origin myths
 - explained how things came to be.
- “Golden Age”: all peace and happiness in the world
 - was lost when evil, sickness, and death came into the world.



Role of Gods and Goddesses in Origin Myths

- Gods and goddesses are usually always associated with origin myths.
- Gods often form family groups, or pantheons, which are ruled by a father god, a mother goddess, and other family members.
- The gods are often associated with other aspects of life, such as fertility, wisdom, love, and justice.
- They may represent concrete forces of nature, such as the wind, the sea, the moon, and earthquakes.



Other Types of Myths: Flood Myths

- Flood myths are found in almost all cultures
 - People, who have been tempted by evil, are punished by an angry god.
- The god destroys all inhabitants in the world except for a chosen man and his family.



What does “myth” mean?

The origin of the word
“myth” is the Greek word
“muthos,” or story



Theseus and the Minotaur

Functions of Myths

1. To explain the creation of the world and the universe



Bronze of Oceanus
1st - 2nd centuries A.D.

Functions of Myths

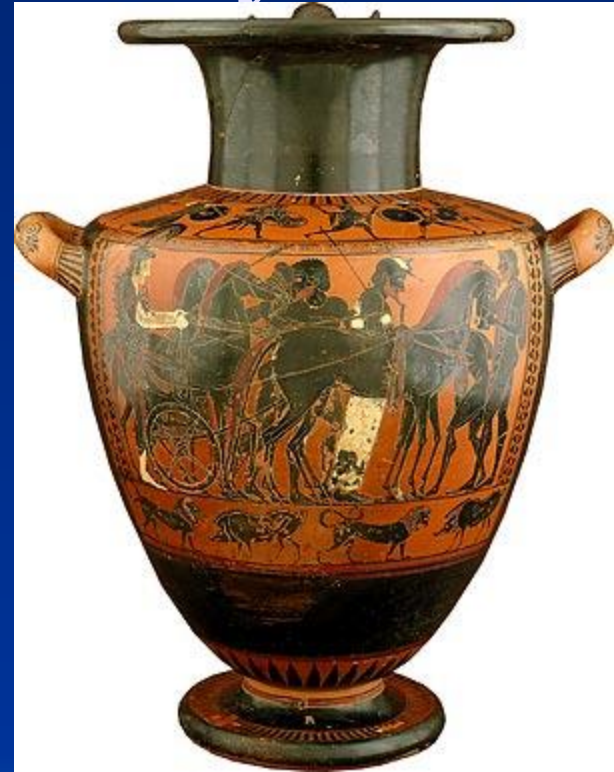
2. To explain the human condition:
- why people were created,
 - why they are flawed,
 - why there is suffering in the world,
 - why people must eventually die, and
 - what happens to people after death.



Carving of Egyptian Boat Used to Ferry the Dead to the Underworld

Functions of a Myth

3. To explain natural phenomenon, such as the setting of the sun and phases of the moon.



Grecian Urn Depicting the Passage of the Sun

Functions of a Myth

4. To explain the nature of gods and goddesses and how these deities and human beings interact.



Egyptian Goddess Isis

Functions of a Myth

5. To explain the meanings behind religious rituals, customs, and beliefs.



Ancient Japanese Warriors

Functions of a Myth

6. To explain historical facts or events

7. To teach moral lessons



Egyptian Mummy of a Ruler

Background of Folktales

- Stories told by common people
- Passed on by language, discussion, and storytelling from generation to generation.
- Used to entertain and teach moral values
- Not focused on religious purposes.



More About Folktales

- Folktales include legends, fables, tall tales, fairy tales, and ghost stories.
- Folktales are entertaining stories about ordinary people, who
 - survive by
 - luck,
 - using their wits, and
 - relying on their own natural goodness.



How Folktales Differ from Myths

1. Folktales, unlike myths, are secular, or non-religious.
2. Folktales were created as much for entertainment value, as for the teaching of social or moral values.
3. Folktales feature magic transformations and enchantments, just like myths.
4. Gods and goddesses are usually not central characters in the story.



How Folktales Differ from Myths

5. Folk heroes tend to be common, everyday folk who don't have special powers.
 - The heroes of myths are superhuman offspring of gods or goddesses and human parents.



Fairy Tales

Now, what about fairy tales?

