

Freshman



Mythology Anthology

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CYCLE OF LIFE

People are Storytellers

People are storytellers. Fighting to survive in a threatening world, they have used their imagination to try to make sense out of life on the sometimes cruel, sometimes generous earth. They have told themselves stories that give human meaning to the changes and cycles they are subject to: Why does the sun come up, go down, and then come up again? Why is there summer, then winter, then summer again? Will we, like the sun and like the summer, be reborn after death? The meaning-giving stories people have created are called myths.

Passed on at first by word of mouth, myths eventually stick together to form a society's storehouse of stories - or mythology. Their mythology tells a society everything it is most concerned about: Who are they? Where did they come from? What are their laws? What is their destiny?

Myths are usually stories about the gods. Though these gods are identified with the immense powers of the universe, they are often given human forms and feelings and, like humans, they have families. After all, it was much easier to make sense out of life if the gods acted the way humans do. Myths, then, created a human universe. They made it possible for people to understand and communicate with things they could neither see nor control.

In their myths, people often imagined they originated in a time of peace, when the seasons did not change and threaten them with cold and hunger, when they were not lonely, when they were loved by the gods. As people have advanced, they have continued to use their imagination to try to recover that sense of belonging to the earth they had once possessed. Though the gods eventually disappeared from our stories, our literature continued to be a search for our lost human identity, a quest to rebuild or rediscover our lost perfect world.

Literature, then, is the continuous journal of the imagination. It still expresses our desire to know, to pierce the mysteries the old myths tried to pierce, to see the universe as a human home. We still tell myths - we only call them by different names.

This unit focuses on some of the patterns or "tools" the imagination uses in storytelling. Some of the myths told by the Greeks have been a major influence in Western literature. Some of the characters, events, stories, and images used in Greek myths also recur in the imaginative life

of other peoples. These recurring characters, events, stories, and images are called archetypes. Archetype is a Greek word meaning "original pattern or model." It is these archetypes, or very old patterns, hidden away in our stories that unify our imaginative expressions. One archetype is the image of the Golden Age. The term Golden Age originated with the Greeks but, like any archetype, the image of an original perfect world is a basic imaginative pattern. In Chinese myth it is called a time of "peace." It can also be a Garden of Eden, or an island called ~~Innisfree~~.

By looking at certain recurring characters, events, stories, and images we can begin to see the oneness of "the journal of the imagination" we call literature. As you read, make connections among the stories and poems of different cultures. Find what links these and you will also find what links people everywhere together.

from As You Like It - William Shakespeare

All the world's a stage,
And all the men and women merely players.
They have their exits and their entrances,
And one man in his time plays many parts,
His acts being seven ages. At first the infant,
Mewling and puking in the nurse's arms.
Then the whining schoolboy, with his satchel
And shining morning face, creeping like a snail
Unwillingly to school. And then the lover,
Sighing like furnace, with a woeful ballad
Made to his mistress' eyebrow. Then a soldier,
Full of strange oaths and bearded like the pard,
Jealous in honor, sudden and quick in quarrel,
Seeking the bubble reputation
Even in the cannon's mouth. And then the justice,
In fair round belly with good capon lined,
With eyes severe and beard of formal cut,
Full of wise saws and modern instances,
And so he plays his part. The sixth age shifts
Into the lean and slippered Pantaloon
With spectacles on nose and pouch on side,
His youthful hose, well saved, a world too wide
For his shrunk shank, and his big manly voice
Turning again toward childish treble, pipes
And whistles in his sound. Last scene of all,
That ends this strange eventful history,
Is second childishness and mere oblivion,
Sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything.

Demeter - from Heroes, Gods and Monsters of the Greek Myths by Bernard Evslin

Demeter means "Barley-mother." Another name for her is Ceres, from which we get the word "cereal." She was the goddess of the cornfield, mistress of planting and harvesting, lady of growing things. Zeus was very fond of her. He always obliged her with rain when her fields were thirsty. He gave her two children, a boy and a girl. The girl was named Persephone, and Demeter loved her very much.

Persephone was raised among flowers and looked like a flower herself. Her body was as pliant as a stem, her skin soft as petals, and she had pansy eyes. She took charge of flowers for her mother. She was adept at making up new kinds and naming them.

One day she went farther than usual - across a stream, through a grove of trees, to a little glade. She carried her paint pot, for she had seen a strand of tall waxy lilies she hadn't noticed before. She went to look at it. It was a very strange bush. She didn't know whether she liked it or not. She decided she did not and seized it by its branches and pulled. But it was toughly rooted and hard to pull. She was used to getting her own way. She set herself and gave a mighty tug. Up came the bush; its long roots dragged out of the ground, leaving a big hole. She tossed the bush aside and turned to go back to her lilies, but she heard a rumbling sound and turned back. The noise grew louder and louder and was coming from the hole. To her horror, the hole seemed to be spreading, opening like a mouth, and the rumbling grew to a jangling, crashing din.

Out of the hole leaped six horses, dragging behind them a golden chariot. In the chariot stood a tall figure in a flowing black cape. On his head was a black crown. She had no time to scream. He reached out his long arm, snatched her into the chariot, and lashed his horses. They curvetted in the air and plunged into the hole again. When they had gone, the hole closed.

Demeter was frantic when the girl didn't come home, and rushed out to search for her. The tall green-clad goddess rode in a light wicker chariot behind a swift white horse, a gift from Poseidon. She sped here and there, calling, "Persephone . . . Persephone . . ." But no one answered. All night long she searched, and as dawn broke, she came to the glade. There she saw the uprooted bush and the trampled grass. She leaped from her chariot. Then she saw something that stabbed her through - Persephone's little paint pot, overturned. She lifted her head to the sky and howled like a she-wolf. Then she fell still and listened. The sun was rising; the birds had begun to gossip. They told each other of the heedless girl and the strange bush and the hole and the chariot and the black rider and how surprised the girl was when he caught her.

Then Demeter spoke softly, questioning the birds. They told her enough for her to know who had taken her daughter. She put her face in her hands and wept. Just then a little boy came running into the meadow to pick some flowers. When he saw Demeter, he laughed. He had never seen a grownup crying before. But when she looked up, he stopped laughing. She pointed at him, whispering, and he was immediately changed into a lizard. But he hadn't learned to scuttle yet and just sat there looking at Demeter a moment too long for a hawk swooped and caught him. He was a lizard for only a short while.

Demeter climbed back into her chariot and sped to Olympus. She charged into the throne room where Zeus sat.

"Justice!" she cried. "justice! Your brother Hades has stolen my daughter - our daughter."

"Peace, good sister," said Zeus. "Compose yourself. Hades' wooing has been a trifle abrupt, perhaps, but after all he is my brother - our brother - and is accounted a good match. Think, sweet Demeter. It is difficult for our daughter to look beyond the family without marrying far beneath her."

"Never!" cried Demeter. "It must not be! Anyone but Hades! Don't you realize this is a spring child, a flower child, a delicate unopened bud. No ray of sunlight ever pierces that dank hole he calls his kingdom. She'll wither and die."

"She is our daughter," said Zeus. "I fancy she has a talent for survival. Pray think it over."

Then Demeter noticed that Zeus was holding a new thunderbolt, a marvelously wrought zigzag lance of lightning, volt-blue, radiant with energy. And she realized that Hades, who in his deep realms held all stores of silver and gold, had sent Zeus a special gift. It would be difficult to obtain justice.

"Once again," she said, "will you restore my daughter to me?"

"My dear," said Zeus, "when your rage cools, you will realize that this is a fine match, the very best thing for the child. Please, go back to earth and give yourself a chance to be intelligent about this."

"I will go back to earth," said Demeter, "and I will not return until you send for me."

Weeks passed. Then Zeus found his sleep being disturbed by sounds of lamentation. He looked down upon the earth and saw a grievous sight. Nothing grew. The fields were blasted and parched. Trees were stripped of leaves, standing blighted, with the blazing sun beating down. The soil was hard and cracked, covered with the shriveled brown husks of wheat and corn and barley killed in the bud. And there was no green place anywhere. The people were starving; the cattle had nothing to eat; the game could find nothing and had fled. And a great wailing and lamentation

arose as the people lifted their faces to Olympus and prayed for Zeus to help them.

"Well," he thought to himself, fingering his new thunderbolt, "I suppose we shall have to compromise."

He sent for Demeter. When she came, he said, "I have been thinking. Perhaps I have not been quite fair to you."

"No," said Demeter.

"Do you still wish your daughter's return?"

"Yes," said Demeter. "While she is gone, no crops will grow. No tree will bear, no grass will spring. While she is gone and while I mourn, the earth will grow as dry and shriveled as my heart and will put forth no green thing."

"Very well," said Zeus. "In light of all the facts, this is my judgment. Your daughter shall be restored to you and shall remain with you. However, if any food has passed her lips during her sojourn in Tartarus, then she must remain there. This is the Law of Abode, older than our decrees, and even I am powerless to revoke it.

"She will have been too sad to eat," cried Demeter. "No food will have passed her lips. She shall return to me and remain with me. You have spoken, and I hold you to your word."

Zeus whistled, and Hermes, the messenger god, appeared. Zeus sent him with a message to Hades demanding Persephone's release.

"Will you ride with me to the gates of Tartarus?" cried Demeter. "I have the swiftest horse in the world, given to me by Poseidon."

"Thank you, good aunt," said Hermes. "But I believe my winged shoes are even faster."

And he flew out of the window.

In the meantime, Persephone was in Rebus with the dark king. After the first few days of haste and brutality and strangeness, he began to treat her very gently, and with great kindness. He gave her rubies and diamonds to play jacks with, had dresses spun for her of gold and silver thread, ordered her a throne of the finest ebony, and gave her a crown of black pearls. But she made herself very difficult to please. She tossed her head, stamped her foot, and turned from him. She would not speak to him and said she would never forgive him. She said she wanted to go home to her mother, and that she had to attend to her flowers, and that she hated him and always would. As she launched these tirades at him, he would stand and listen and frown and keep listening until she flounced away. Then he would go and get her another gift.

Secretly, though, so secretly that she didn't even tell it to herself, she was rather enjoying the change. She did miss the sunshine and the flowers, but there was much to amuse her. Secretly she gloated upon her power over this most fearsome monarch. Secretly she marveled at the way he was obeyed. Although she never forgot how he had frightened her when he

came charging out of that hole in his chariot, she admired the lofty set of his black-robed figure, the majestic shoulders, the great impatient hands, and his gloomy black eyes. But she knew that part of her power over him was her disdain, and so kept flouting and abusing him, and, which made him gloomier than ever, refused to let a crumb of food pass her lips.

He tried every way he knew to tempt her into eating. His cook prepared the most delicious meals, and his servants bore them to her chamber. But she would pretend not to notice a thing and sit there holding her head high, not even allowing her nostrils to twitch, although the rich smells were making her wild with hunger. She swore she could not eat a mouthful until he had returned her to her mother.

He was desperate to please her. He set aside a corner of the palace grounds for a dark garden and gave her rare seeds to plant - magical blooms that did not need the sunlight. She grew a species of black orchid and mushrooms and nightshade, henbane, and hellebore. He gave her a little boy to help her garden, a very clever little gardener, a new spirit. He was very deft and good company too, although she noticed that his eyes were a bit lidless. She had no way of knowing that he was the same little boy her mother had turned into a lizard and fed to a hawk. But he knew who she was.

She had other amusements too. She liked to wander in the Elysian Fields and dance with the happy shades. She was fascinated by the torments, particularly the funny man trying to roll the stone uphill and always having to start over again. She pitied Tantalus, and when no one was looking, cupped some water in her hands and gave it to him to drink. And he thanked her in a deep sad voice. But after she left, it was worse than ever; he knew she would not remember him again, and this one flash of hope made his ordeal worse.

Still, she liked her garden best, and that was where she spent most of her time - more time than ever, because she was so hungry she didn't know what to do, and she didn't want Hades to see how she felt. She knew he would think up more delicious things to tempt her if he thought she was weakening.

Standing in the garden one afternoon, half-hidden in a clump of nightshade, she saw the little boy eating something. It was a red fruit, and he was eating it juicily. He saw her watching and came toward her smiling, his mouth stained with red juice. He held out his hand. It was a pomegranate, her favorite fruit.

"We're alone," he whispered. "No one will see you. No one will know. Quickly now - eat!"

She looked about. It was true. No one could see them. She felt her hands acting by themselves, as though she had nothing to do with them. She watched as her fingers curled savagely and ripped the fruit across. They dug in, plucked out seeds, and offered them to her lips. One . . . two . . . three . . . she thought she had never tasted anything so delicious as these

tiny tart juicy seeds. Just as she swallowed her sixth seed, a high glad yelling cry split the air, and the pomegranate dropped to the ground. It was a cry that any god recognized - Hermes' keen herald shout, meaning that he was coming with news, good or bad, but worthy of high attention.

She raced to the palace. The little gardener scooped up the pomegranate and raced after her. Sure enough, it was cousin Hermes, his hair tumbled from the wind, the wings on his feet still fluttering from the speed of his going.

"Good day, cousin," he said.

Hades loomed next to him, scowling blackly.

"I bring you a message from your mother. She wants you home. And your host has kindly agreed to an early departure. How are you? Haven't eaten anything here, I hope. No? Good! Let's be on our way."

He put his arm around her waist, and they rose in the air. And Persephone looked back and saw the little gardener rush to Hades with the pomegranate in his hand.

By the time Persephone had come home to her mother, Hades had already been to Olympus and had presented his case to Zeus. Zeus pronounced his judgment. Because the girl had eaten six seeds of the pomegranate, she would have to spend six months with Hades each year.

"Never mind, Mother," said Persephone. "Don't cry. We must be happy for the time that I am here."

"I suffer!" cried Demeter. "I suffer! Here -" she struck herself on the chest - "Here in my mother's heart. And if I suffer then everyone else shall suffer too. For the months that you spend with that scoundrel, no grass will grow, no flowers blow, no trees will bear. So long as you are below, there will be desolation everywhere."

That is why summer and winter are the way they are. That is why there is a time for planting and a time when the earth must sleep under frost.

Apparently With No Surprise - Emily Dickinson

Apparently with no surprise
To any happy flower,
The frost beheads it at its play
In accidental power.

The blond assassin passes on,
The sun proceeds unmoved
To measure off another day
For an approving God.

Nothing Gold Can Stay - Robert Frost

Nature's first green is gold,
Her hardest hue to hold.
Her early leaf's a flower:
But only so an hour.
Then leaf subsides to leaf.
So Eden sank to grief,
So dawn goes down to day.
Nothing gold can stay.

The Human Seasons - John Keats

Four seasons fill the measure of the year,
Four seasons are there in the mind of man.
He hath his lusty spring when fancy clear
Takes in all beauty with an easy span:
He hath his summer, when luxuriously
He chews the honied cud of fair spring thoughts,
Till, in his soul dissolved, they come to be
Part of himself. He hath his autumn ports
And havens of repose, when his tired wings
Are folded up, and he content to look
On mists in idleness: to let fair things
Pass by unheeded as a threshold brook.
He hath his winter too of pale misfeature,
Or else would forget his mortal nature.

Ecclesiastes 3:1-11 - the Bible

To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heavens:

A time to be born, and a time to die;
A time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted;
A time to kill, and a time to heal;
A time to break down, and a time to build up;
A time to weep, and a time to laugh;
A time to mourn, and a time to dance;
A time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together;
A time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing;
A time to get, and a time to lose;
A time to keep, and a time to cast away;
A time to rend, and a time to sew;
A time to keep silence, and a time to speak;
A time to love, and a time to hate;
A time for war, and a time for peace.

What profit hath he that worketh in that wherein he laboreth? I have seen the travail which God hath given to the sons of men to be exercised in it. He hath made every thing beautiful in its time: also he hath set the world in their heart, so that no man can find out the work that God maketh from the beginning to the end.

The Day - Theodore Spencer

The day was a year at first
When children ran in the garden;
The day shrank down to a month
When the boys played ball.

The day was a week thereafter
When young men walked in the garden;
The day was itself a day
When love grew tall.

The day shrank down to an hour
When old men limped in the garden;
The day will last forever
When it is nothing at all.

The Frost - Tzu Yeh

Young man,
Seize every minute
Of your time.
The days fly by;
Ere long you too
Will grow old.

If you believe me not,
See there in the courtyard,
How the frost
Glitters white and cold and cruel
On the grass
That once was green.

The Circle Game - Joni Mitchell

Yesterday a child came out to wonder,
Caught a dragonfly inside a jar.
Fearful when the sky was full of thunder,
And tearful at the falling of a star.

CHORUS: And the seasons, they go round and round
And the painted ponies go up and down.
We're captive of the carousel of time.
We can't return, we can only look behind from where we came
And go round and round in the circle game.

Then the child moved ten times round the seasons,
Skated over ten clear frozen streams,
Words like when you're older must appease him,
And promises of someday make his dreams.

CHORUS: And the seasons, they go round and round
And the painted ponies go up and down.
We're captive of the carousel of time.
We can't return, we can only look behind from where we came
And go round and round in the circle game.

Sixteen springs and sixteen summers gone now,
Cartwheels turn to carwheels through the town.
And they tell him, take your time, it won't be long now,
Till you drag your feet to slow the circles down.

CHORUS: And the seasons, they go round and round
And the painted ponies go up and down.
We're captive of the carousel of time.
We can't return, we can only look behind from where we came
And go round and round in the circle game.

So the years spin by and now the boy is twenty,
Though his dreams have lost some grandeur coming true,
There'll be new dreams, maybe better dreams, and plenty
Before the last revolving year is through.

CHORUS: And the seasons, they go round and round
And the painted ponies go up and down.
We're captive of the carousel of time.
We can't return, we can only look behind from where we came
And go round and round in the circle game.

The Bible is a Book that Tells a Story

The Bible is a book that tells a story. Unlike other books we read, either inside or outside the classroom, the Old and New Testaments tell a complete story of man, beginning with the Creation of the world and concluding with a revelation of the end of the world. The Jewish Bible consists of what Jewish people themselves call simply the Bible or Scripture. It includes the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings. The Christian Bible consists of the Jewish Bible (the Old Testament) plus the New Testament. Each group's Bible ends with a vision of doomsday and the coming of a Messiah, that is, a savior or deliverer.

In the Old and New Testaments, we have the story of man, Adam, and the story of a people, Israel. In the New Testament, Jesus is called a second Adam, and is believed by his followers to be the Messiah whose coming was prophesied in the Old Testament. Christian biblical writers thus continue the story begun in the earlier parts of the Bible and see man (Adam) and the people chosen of God (Israel) as rescued by Jesus from the wilderness in which they have been lost. Jewish readers see the Old Testament account of the Exodus from Egypt and the return from captivity in Babylon as the great divine acts of rescue. In addition, they look to the coming of their Messiah at some future time.

The shape of the Bible stretches from the beginning to the end of time. In its first book, Genesis, we read of a man created in the image of God. He is placed in a garden which includes a tree of life and a flowing river. Hundreds of pages later, in the last book, Revelation, we read again of that same river and that same tree. Adam and Eve, we recall, were banished from their garden, Eden, for disobeying God's command, yet the writer of Revelation sees the river and tree of Eden as symbols of the Creator's triumph over all evil in the universe. Now, at the end of the story, whoever wishes may drink freely of the water of life. The leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations of the world.

Adam and Eve stand for all human beings. Each reader of the Bible is invited to take part in a metaphor, to see himself or herself as Adam or Eve. The Bible addresses us as exiles from our original home, the Garden of Eden. The human longing for a better world than the one we inhabit is presented in the Bible as a homesick urge to get back to the Promised Land or to enter the New Jerusalem of heaven. As we read the Bible, then, we identify ourselves as individuals with Adam and Eve, or as groups with the people of Israel. In so doing, we learn something more of who we are and of what it means to be human.

This great story has within it many complex parts-fragments of history, law codes, moral systems, stories, poems, prophecies, philosophies, visions, wise sayings, letters-but the main structure or outline is simple. It can be seen as a completed circle which first moves downward from the garden of Eden into the wilderness of human history, and then slowly and painfully back to the starting point, as man proceeds toward Eden restored or the New Jerusalem.

The Bible offers its readers an experience of the most complete account of man's life that exists in western civilization. Its imaginative structure has shaped the world we live in: our literature and art, many of our laws and moral beliefs, some of our sense of scientific cause and effect, and three of our great religions, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.