

World Myths and Folktales: *The Stories of Human Kind*

Language Arts
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Tales About Beginnings

Origin Myths

- Definition: Stories that explain how things came to be.
- Most cultures have myths that explain how the universe was created, how the world might end, and a “Golden Age” – a time when the world enjoyed perfect peace, happiness, and prosperity – but the Golden Age is lost when evil, sickness, and death come into the world.

The Roles of Gods and Goddesses

- Gods and goddesses are nearly always associated with origin myths.
 - A god/goddess usually forms the earth and life on it.
- Like human beings, gods and goddesses form family groups, or pantheons.
- Often, a culture’s pantheon is ruled by a powerful “father” god and a “mother” goddess.

The Staying Power of Mythic Patterns

- **Motif**- Themes, characters, and images that recur throughout different myths.
- **Archetype**- A pattern or model that serves as the basis for different, but related, versions of a character, plot, or theme.

The Purpose of Origin Myths

- Origin myths gave people who told them a sense of their place in the universe.
 - These myths told people who they were, where they came from, and what their destiny would be.
- The stories we tell today serve practically the same purpose.
 - All stories are outgrowths of myths; all stories ultimately deal with the *hows* and *whys* of human existence.

Tales About Beginnings

“In the Beginning” *from* Genesis

The Hebrew Bible

- The Hebrew Bible tells the history of the Jewish people and presents the basic laws and teachings of their faith.
- The contents of the Hebrew Bible existed first in the oral tradition.
- It consists of 24 separate books, beginning with the Book of Genesis.

The Torah

- The Book of Genesis is the first of the Five Books of Moses, or the Torah.
- The Torah contains the earliest historical narratives of the Jewish people.
 - Narrative: a kind of writing that tells a story or relates an event.
- The Torah also contains the basic tenets, or beliefs, and laws of Jewish faith.

Themes of the Hebrew Bible

- The Hebrew Bible is concerned, above all, with exploring the Hebrews' developing relationship with God.

Literary Significance: Origin Myths

- Genesis (in its entirety) explains:
 - Birth of the universe
 - Emergence of evil
 - Cause of the Great Flood
 - Origin of language
 - Development of God's covenant with the Hebrew people

Literary Significance: Repetition

- Characteristic to many origin myths is the use of repetition – the repeating of words, phrases, or even entire sentences or passages.
- Repetition can serve several functions in a work of literature:
 - Creates rhythm
 - Builds suspense & adds dramatic intensity
 - Serves to emphasize important words and ideas



Literary Significance: Scholarship

- Most scholars today believe that Genesis is a composite of separate narratives by different writers collected over several hundred years.
- This may explain why Genesis contains two accounts of the creation of human beings.