



WHAT THE EXPERTS SAY

SPOT: Myths *Jumping Into Genre: Folklore* (developing wide reading)



The Role of Myths

Since humans first began to think, they have wondered, “Why are we here?” “Who are we?” “What is our purpose?” Myths were told to answer these questions. They explained the origin of the universe and how it came to be, the powers of the natural world, and the culture’s moral values in human terms. Although myths originally served a religious purpose, they may also be considered the earliest form of history, science and philosophy.

As an early form of religion, myths explained the nature of a culture’s divinities (gods and goddesses) and human’s relationship to these divinities. As history, myths related the way in which the universe and its various forms of life were created and the events that followed in the early periods of human existence. As science, myths explained the origin of natural phenomena (lightning, thunder, fire, wind, etc.), and how, in the hero tales, humans received the knowledge and technology that they needed in order to survive. Finally, as philosophy, myths provided a view of life, unwritten laws governing social conduct, and models of expected attitudes, moral values, and behavior.

Myths Around the World

While the myths of the Greek, Romans, and Norse are the most familiar to many of us, myths for children and young adults have been recorded on six continents. (No myths have been collected from Antarctica, yet!) Fascinating patterns begin to emerge as children compare and contrast these tales.

Myths for all Ages

Modern editions bring myths to young and old alike. No longer limited to children in the middle grades and above, myths are now available in single-edition picture books for even the youngest listener.

Myths Form the Basis for High Fantasy and Superheroes

The ancient hero tales of mythology have influenced storytellers to this day. So much so, that some researchers consider the heroes found in the myths of the ancients so similar to the heroes found in modern high fantasy or the superheroes of cartoons, they could be considered the same. The cultures and times may be different as in different settings, characters, or details, but they are essentially stories about the same heroes. Whether the ancient characters, Jason or Odysseus, or the modern superheroes, Superman or Batman, they all lack details of their birth, go on quests, possess magical powers, and battle evil so good can triumph. Children who experience the myths of old develop a frame of reference for more modern literature and an appreciation for these connections.

References:

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