

Mythology and Culture in Ancient Rome

What purposes did mythology serve in ancient Roman culture?

Overview

Students research different types of myths, read about three types of myths popular in ancient Rome, and analyze the purpose of mythology in Roman culture.

For the complete activity with media resources, visit:

<http://education.nationalgeographic.org/activity/mythology-and-culture-ancient-rome/>

Program



Directions

1. Activate students' prior knowledge about mythology and introduce the activity.

Distribute copies of the KWL chart to each student and ask them to complete column 1 by writing a definition of the term *myth* in their own words, as well as the names of any myths or characters from myths they may know, or ideas about why myths may have been created. After students are done writing, invite volunteers to share their answers. Then explain to the class that a myth is "a story that was told in an ancient culture to explain a practice, belief, or natural occurrence." Tell students that, in this activity, they will explore connections between mythology and culture.

2. Have a whole-class discussion about what students want to know about mythology and culture. Encourage students to share their questions and capture them in writing on the board. Prompt students to think about questions that would be interesting to research, such as:

- *What types of myths are there?*
- *What purpose did myths serve at the time of their creation?*
- *How do myths differ in different cultures?*

Have each student select one of the questions to research and write it in column 2 of the KWL chart.

3. Have students work independently to research their question.

Have partners use library or Internet sources to research their question and write their findings in column 3 of the KWL chart. Invite representatives from each pair to share their findings with the whole class.

4. Introduce three types of myths that were popular during ancient Roman times.

Explain to students that, during the time of ancient Rome, three types of myths were prevalent:

- Foundation, or founding, myths that explain the founding of a city such as Rome
- Political myths that reinforced the government as being connected to divine law
- Moral myths that dealt with individuals' morality or lack of morality

Ask: What connections can you make between your research findings and these types of myths specific to ancient Roman culture?

5. Have students explore the purpose that different myths served in illuminating ancient Rome.

Remind students of the definition of myth that you discussed in Step 1. Write the following prompt on the board: *What purpose do you think each of the three types of myths (foundation, political, and moral) served in ancient Rome?* Divide students into pairs. Have them use the think-pair-share strategy to consider how different myths served to illuminate ancient Rome. First, have students think about the question independently and jot their notes on the back of the KWL chart.

6. Introduce the reading.

Next, have students discuss their ideas with their partner. Distribute a copy of the Ancient Roman Myths handout to each pair. Ask them to work together to read the summaries and confirm or revise their ideas about what purpose each of these types of myths served in ancient Rome. Explain to students that another definition of mythology is that it is a story of where we came from and who we are. *Ask: What do you think these myths say about who the ancient Romans thought they were and where they came from?*

7. Have pairs share their ideas with the whole class and add to their KWL charts.

Regroup as a class and invite each pair to share their answers to the prompt. Elicit from students that myths reinforced Roman people's ideas of themselves, their origins, and their values. Have them add what they learned about ancient Roman myths to column 3 of their KWL charts or to the back of the charts.

Informal Assessment

Collect and evaluate students' completed KWL charts.

Extending the Learning

Have students write their own myth about something that came to be in their own culture. Remind students to think about and apply their understanding of the purpose and types of myth as they plan and write their own myth.

Objectives

Subjects & Disciplines

Language Arts

- Reading
- Writing (composition)

Social Studies

- World history

Learning Objectives

Students will:

- define the term myth
- research types of myths and identify connections between mythology and culture
- identify the purposes mythology served in ancient Roman culture
- explain how foundation myths like "Romulus and Remus" reinforced Romans' ideas of themselves, their origins, and their values

Teaching Approach

- Learning-for-use

Teaching Methods

- Brainstorming
- Discussions
- Information organization
- Reading
- Research

Skills Summary

This activity targets the following skills:

- 21st Century Student Outcomes
 - Learning and Innovation Skills
 - Communication and Collaboration
- Critical Thinking Skills

- Analyzing
- Creating
- Geographic Skills
 - Answering Geographic Questions
 - Asking Geographic Questions

National Standards, Principles, and Practices

National Geography Standards

- **Standard 12:**

The processes, patterns, and functions of human settlement

- **Standard 4:**

The physical and human characteristics of places

National Standards for History

- **World History Era 3 (5-12) Standard 3:**

How major religions and large-scale empires arose in the Mediterranean basin, China, and India, 500 BCE-300 CE

- **World History Era 3 (5-12) Standard 5:**

Major global trends from 1000 BCE-300 CE

Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts & Literacy

- **Reading Standards for Informational Text 6-12:**

Key Ideas and Details, RI.6.1

- **Reading Standards for Informational Text 6-12:**

Key Ideas and Details, RI.7.1

- **Reading Standards for Informational Text 6-12:**

Key Ideas and Details, RI.8.1

Preparation

What You'll Need

Materials You Provide

- Pencils
- Pens

Required Technology

- Internet Access: Required
- Tech Setup: 1 computer per classroom, Projector

Physical Space

- Classroom

Grouping

- Large-group instruction
- Small-group instruction

Resources Provided: Handouts & Worksheets

- [KWL Chart](#)
- [Ancient Roman Myths](#)

Background & Vocabulary

Background Information

According to legend, Rome was founded by Romulus and Remus, twin sons of Mars, the god of war. The twins were abandoned in their cradle on the Tiber River, where they were found by a wolf. She looked after them until they were discovered by a shepherd who brought them up. The site said to be the wolf's cave was sacred to the Romans. They made it a shrine and founded a settlement on the Palatine Hill. In the legend, Romulus later killed Remus in a struggle about who was the leader of the new city built on that site. According to the Romans, Romulus became king on April 21, 753 BCE and named the city after himself.

“*Romulus and Remus*” may be one of the most famous foundation myths in world history. Many variations of it exist and historians debate whether Romulus and Remus were real men, just myth, or a combination of the two. Early Romans kept no written records, so their history is mixed with myths that historians have difficulty distinguishing from fact.

Prior Knowledge

[]

Recommended Prior Activities

- None

Vocabulary

Term	Part of Speech	Definition
ancient Rome	<i>noun</i>	civilization founded on the Mediterranean Sea, lasting from the 8th century BCE to about 476 CE.
culture	<i>noun</i>	learned behavior of people, including their languages, belief systems, social structures, institutions, and material goods.
foundation myth	<i>noun</i>	story or legend that accounts for the foundation of a city.
myth	<i>noun</i>	legend or traditional story.

For Further Exploration

Video

- [National Geographic Channel: Killing Jesus](#)

Partner



© 1996–2016 National Geographic Society. All rights reserved.