Legends and Myths

Enduring Understandings:

- Legends are traditional stories based on historical figures and usually exaggerate or supernaturalize heroic deeds.
- Myths are ancient stories whose authors are unknown that attempt to explain a belief, custom, or force of nature by telling of gods and goddesses and their interventions in the lives of mortals.
- Understanding the legends and myths of a particular society helps one understand and relate to that society’s culture and history.
- Stories that are passed on through the oral tradition illustrate culture while also helping to shape culture.

Essential Questions:

- What are legends and myths?
- In what ways are stories that come from oral tradition different from written stories with a specific author?
- How do the traits of a legendary hero exemplify the values of the culture from which the legend originated?
- In what ways do myths illustrate the belief systems and customs of the cultures that create them?
Unit Title: Legends and Myths
Grade: 10

Critical Content:
- Myth
- Legend
- Legendary hero
- Mythological gods and goddesses
- Oral tradition
- Folklore and Folktales
- Cultural values and beliefs

Critical Skills:
- Differentiate between the style, structure, and purpose of myths and legends.
- Compare legends and myths from diverse cultures.
- Determine the purpose of a particular legend or myth and identify the cultural values or beliefs it is intended to illustrate.
- Evaluate a legendary hero’s qualities and character traits.
- Analyze the beliefs and values of different cultures based on inferences from myths and legends.
# Established Goal:

## Learning Targets

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RL1</th>
<th>Cite Strong and thorough textural evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RL6</td>
<td>Analyze a particular point of view or cultural experience reflected in a work of literature from outside the United States, drawing on a wide reading of world literature.</td>
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<tr>
<td>RI3</td>
<td>Analyze how the author unfolds an analysis or series of ideas or events, including the order in which the points are made, how they are introduced and developed, and the connections that are drawn between them.</td>
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<tr>
<td>RI8</td>
<td>Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, assessing whether the reasoning is valid and the evidence is relevant and sufficient; identify false statements and fallacious reasoning.</td>
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<tr>
<td>W3</td>
<td>Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.</td>
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<tr>
<td>W3a</td>
<td>Engage and orient the reader by setting out a problem, situation, or observation, establishing one or multiple point(s) of view, and introducing a narrator and/or characters; create a smooth progression of experiences or events.</td>
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<tr>
<td>W3b</td>
<td>Use narrative techniques, such as dialogue, pacing, description, reflection, and multiple plot lines, to develop experiences, events, and/or characters.</td>
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<td>W3c</td>
<td>Use a variety of techniques to sequence events so that they build on one another to create a coherent whole.</td>
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<td>W3d</td>
<td>Use precise words and phrases, telling details, and sensory language to convey a vivid picture of the experiences, events, setting, and/or characters.</td>
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<td>W3e</td>
<td>Provide a conclusion that follows from and reflects on what is experienced, observed, or resolved over the course of the narrative.</td>
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<td>W8</td>
<td>Gather relevant information from multiple authoritative print and digital sources, using advanced searches effectively; assess the usefulness of each source in answering the research question; integrate information into the text selectively to maintain the flow of ideas, avoiding plagiarism and following a standard format for citation.</td>
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<tr>
<td>SL4</td>
<td>Present information, findings, and supporting evidence clearly, concisely, and logically such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning and the organization, development, substance, and style are appropriate to purpose, audience, and task.</td>
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<tr>
<td>SL5</td>
<td>Make strategic use of digital media (e.g., textual, graphical, audio,</td>
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visual, and interactive elements) in presentations to enhance understanding of findings, reasoning, and evidence and to add interest.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ELD.CF.10</th>
<th>Students at all levels of English language proficiency APPLY interpersonal and leadership strategies to current issues, e.g., Students role play community leaders negotiating plans for how they would respond to current school or community challenges.</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ELD.CF.10</td>
<td>Students at all levels of English language proficiency will ANALYZE author’s point of view, e.g., Students read a variety of texts (e.g., speech transcripts, websites, editorials) to identify author’s point of view and choose appropriate sources for a research project.</td>
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Performance Tasks

**Option 1: Modern Myth**

A myth is an ancient story that attempts to explain forces of nature, customs, or beliefs by telling about how gods or goddesses intervene in the lives of mortals.

Imagine one or more god or goddess that could explain modern phenomena (like video game addiction, texting, rising oil prices, modern wars, etc.). Write a fictional story with yourself as the main character, or the hero. Show how these modern gods and goddesses either interfere with or aide you in accomplishing some heroic task.

You will need:

- “Creating a Modern Myth” handout and brainstorming worksheet (in the Appendix)
- “Mythological Gods of the Modern World” worksheet (in the Appendix)

Core Standard(s): W3a-e, W5

**Option 2: Modern Legend**

A legend is a traditional story based on a historical figure, but the stories usually tend to exaggerate the powers and deeds of the hero and sometimes add supernatural elements.

Write a modern legend story based on a contemporary “historical” figure. You will need to choose an important or influential person as your hero (like a celebrity, sports star, politician, etc.) Tell a story about this person that is based on actual events but that exaggerates the hero’s powers or achievements or attributes some part of the story to supernatural elements. In your story, the hero should complete a quest, accomplish a goal, or defeat an enemy. And the way in which the hero conquers needs to illustrate characteristics that our modern society values.

**Remediation (R) and Extension (E):**

1R: The length of the story could be altered for a struggling writer.

1E: Students could create visuals to go along with their modern myth.

The length of the story could be extended for independently motivated writers.

2R: The length of the story could be altered for a struggling writer.

2E: Students could create visuals to go along with their modern legend.

The length of the story could be extended for independently motivated writers.
You will need:

- “Creating a Modern Legend” handout and brainstorming worksheet (in the Appendix)

Core Standard(s): W3a-e, W5

**Option 3: Cultural Beliefs and Values Presentation**

Legends and myths give us clues about the cultural values and beliefs of the people who originally created them.

Read a myth or legend from the literature textbook (King Arthur; Sir Lancelot; Thor; Theseus; Isis; John Henry; Sundiata, etc.) Then research internet sources and learn about other myths and legends from that culture (ancient Egyptian, Norse, Native American, etc.) Using what you learn from several different sources, create a multimedia presentation that explains your chosen culture’s core beliefs and values as illustrated in the culture’s mythology and legends.

The presentation must include visuals (pictures, video, live action, etc.) You must refer to specific examples from specific myths to support your ideas about the cultures beliefs and values. Internet sources should be cited using MLA format at the end of the presentation.

You will need:

- “Cultural Beliefs and Values Presentation” handout and worksheet (in the Appendix)
- MLA formatting style guide ([http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/1/](http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/1/))

Core Standard(s): RL1, RL6, W8, W9a, SL4, SL5,
## Oral Tradition – How Stories Change Over Time

- Have students write a short story about a mythological hero who is on a quest and deals with supernatural aides and obstacles (keep it short enough that you could tell the whole story in a couple of minutes).
- Have students get into groups of five or six, and sit them in a circle. One student in the group will read her story out loud. When she’s finished, the person next to her will then retell the story from memory. The student should be encouraged to add his own details anytime he can’t remember something. Then the next student retells the story again.
- By the time the story comes back to the original author, the group could discuss how the story had changed.
- Discuss as a group how myths and legends told orally could have developed and changed over time (hundreds or even thousands of years).

**Core Standard(s):** W3, SL1

### Cultural Beliefs and Values Paragraph

- Read one of the following stories (all found in *Glencoe Literature: Course 5*):
  - “Coyote, Iktome, and the Rock” told by Jenny Leading Cloud, recorded by Richard Erdoes
  - “The Tale of Sir Lancelot du Lake” or “The Tale of King Arthur” by Sir Thomas Malory
  - “Sundiata” recorded by D.T. Niane
  - OR others
- Write a paragraph that infers a specific belief or value of a particular culture from this legend or myth story.
- Cite a specific quote from the story to support your inference.

**Core Standard(s):** RL1, RL2, W9a

### Sword in the Stone

- Read “Arthur Becomes King” or “The Tale of King Arthur” from *Glencoe Literature: Course 5*.
- Watch clips from Disney’s *Sword in the Stone*.
- Discuss how and why the different versions emphasize different aspects of the story.
- Write a short comparison piece or fill out a Venn Diagram graphic organizer to compare and contrast (Appendix).

**Core Standard(s):** RL7

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**Suggested Learning Experiences with Ideas for Differentiation**

*R)* Remediation  
**E)** Extension

R) If a student is struggling to remember the details of the oral story, he could be given a copy of the original story and then encouraged to add his own details.

R) Student could be provided with a list of quotes from the story and could choose one.

E) Students could include more than one quote from the story or could turn the paragraph into a five-paragraph essay.

E) As homework, students could watch the full movie version of another of the short stories in the literature textbook and compare the two versions.
Individual Literature Reading
- Students could read a modern work of fiction that either creates its own mythology or uses a traditional mythology as the starting point for its story.
  - Lord of the Rings
  - K. A. Applegate’s Everworld Series
  - Rick Riordan’s Kane Chronicles or Percy Jackson series
  - Philip Kerr’s Children of the Lamp series
  - The Hunger Games by Suzanne Collins (based in part on the myth of Theseus and the Minotaur)
  - Other novels that draw from legends and myths
- Analyze how an author draws on traditional myths to create a story that’s new and different.
- **Core Standard(s):** RL9, RL10

My God is Cooler than Your God
- Use internet sources to research and compare two mythological gods from two different cultures.
- Worksheet organizer can be found in the Appendix.
- **Core Standard(s):** RL6, W7, W8

Mythological Gods of the Modern World
- Create several fictional gods to explain modern beliefs or natural and technological phenomena
- Worksheet and instructions can be found in the Appendix.
- **Core Standard(s):** W3

King Arthur – The History behind the Legend
- Read the BBC history article entitled “King Arthur: Once and Future King” (Appendix)
- Summarize author Michael Wood’s main points and analyze his explanation of the history behind the legend of King Arthur.
- As a class, discuss how historical events could have led to the creation and development of the Arthurian legends.
- As a supplement, students could be encouraged to explore the “King Arthur” page on the website “Britannia.” The website contains a wealth of information about the Arthurian legends, including interesting historical information about Arthur, Merlin, the Round Table, etc.
- [http://www.britannia.com/history/h12.html](http://www.britannia.com/history/h12.html)
- **Core Standard(s):** RI3, RI8

Joseph Campbell’s Monomyth—The Hero with a Thousand Faces
- Read the short article “Joseph Campbell’s The Hero with a Thousand Faces” (Appendix).
- Read “Excerpts from The Power of Myth” with Joseph Campbell and Bill Moyers (Appendix).
- **Core Standard(s):** RI3, RI8

R) A handout could be provided that describes various gods from different cultures’ mythologies.

E) Students could write a short story about a clash between these two gods.

E) Students could be encouraged to create artistic representations of the gods and goddesses they create.

E) Students could choose a topic on the “Britannia” website to explore further. Then they could share their findings with the class.

- Look over “Stages of the Hero’s Journey” (Appendix).
- As a class, discuss Joseph Campbell’s idea that all stories follow the same basic structure.
- Watch the video clip “The Matrix – Joseph Campbell Monomyth” (Appendix) and discuss.
- Have students find another book or movie that follows this same basic story structure. (*Star Wars* is one of the best examples. George Lucas is considered a protégé of Campbell, and he deliberately followed Campbell’s model when he wrote the scripts for the *Star Wars* films.)
- Core Standard(s): RI3, RI8
## Resources

### Novels:

*Lord of the Rings* trilogy by J. R. R. Tolkien  
*Everworld* series by K. A. Applegate’s  
*Kane Chronicles* by Rick Riordan  
*Percy Jackson* series by Rick Riordan  
Children of the Lamp series Philip Kerr’s  
*The Hunger Games* by Suzanne Collins

### Children’s Books:

*Why Mosquitoes Buzz in People’s Ears: A West African Tale* by Verna Aardema and Diane Dillon  
*Anansi the Spider: A Tale from the Ashanti* by Gerald McDermott

### Nonfiction:

*The Power of Myth* by Joseph Campbell  
*The Hero with a Thousand Faces* by Joseph Campbell

### Poetry:

“John Henry” by Zora Neale Hurston

### Audio/Visual:

*Joseph Campbell and the Power of Myth* (PBS documentary; 1988)  
*Star Wars* (film)  
*The Matrix* (film)