

Definition of Myth...

myth *n.*

1.
 - a. A traditional, typically ancient story dealing with supernatural beings, ancestors, or heroes that serves as a fundamental type in the worldview of a people, as by explaining aspects of the natural world or delineating the psychology, customs, or ideals of society: *the myth of Eros and Psyche; a creation myth.*
 - b. Such stories considered as a group: *the realm of myth.*
2. A popular belief or story that has become associated with a person, institution, or occurrence, especially one considered to illustrate a cultural ideal: *a star whose fame turned her into a myth; the pioneer myth of suburbia.*
3. A fiction or half-truth, especially one that forms part of an ideology.
4. A fictitious story, person, or thing: "German artillery superiority on the Western Front was a myth" (Leon Wolff).

"A myth, in its simplest definition, is a story with a meaning attached to it other than it seems to have at first; and the fact that it has such a meaning is generally marked by some of its circumstances being extraordinary, or, in the common use of the word, unnatural." *This definition given by John Ruskin, in 1869, in The Queen of the Air.*

Language: relation to story

At its heart, mythology is a story, and stories are usually told through the medium of words. Words are funny – we all know about them, but when you look at them closely, they're pretty amazing things. Words are symbols. A word, in a few little black marks on a page, captures a whole lot of ideas, feelings and pictures and carries them from writer to reader. When I write the word "Tree," it doesn't look like a tree, but since we both speak English, you understand what I'm talking about. You draw upon your memories of trees and your experiences with trees, and a single word brings all of those memories to life in your imagination – in the image of what a tree means for you. Okay, okay, that's kind of exaggerated, but ultimately that's what words do – they trap meaning and allow it to be shared between two people.

Ultimately, that's what mythology is all about. It's a story, a way of explaining the world and what we see around us. It isn't based on hard logic or science; it's based on feeling and on intuition, and that's what makes it beautiful. Myths are stories that teach us about what it's like to be human, and they use words. Those words are powerful because they allow us as readers to fill in the blanks, to bring our own world and our own experiences to a story that teaches a lesson bigger than who we are as individuals.

Commonality of myth

One of the coolest things about mythology is how much cultures around the world share the same stuff. Why do they do it? No one knows...there are a couple of explanation,s but we'll get back to those later in the class. Among the biggest things that are the same across almost EVERY mythology in the world are symbols...things like basic plots, objects that mean certain things, and elements like colors, directions, and numbers.

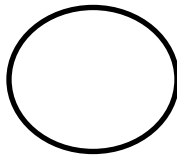
The comparative mythology website at <http://aras.org/> gives a few examples.

The PLOT of most myths can be broken down into a common outline...a hero gets challenged or called away from home into a difficult situation. She or he struggles and goes through difficulty to get something – be it an object, maturity, or just wisdom – and then returns home with this new benefit. The details change, but the central story remains the same.

Commonality

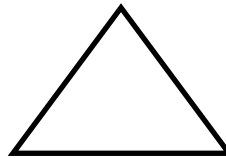
- **Numbers** – numbers have certain basic significance, no matter where in mythology they're found. Here's your basics...

1 – Unity/ The Source
Mono

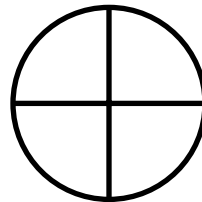


2 – duality
Bi
Good/evil
Light/dark
birth/death

3 – trinity, perfection
tri
Body, soul, spirit
Three fates



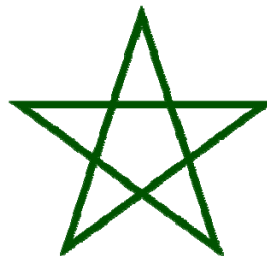
4 – the physical world
Quad
Cardinal directions
East
West
North
South



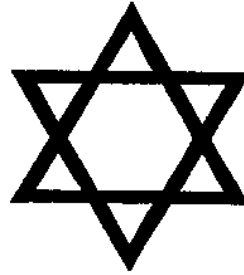
Four humors
Phlegmatic
Sanguine
Choleric
Melancholic

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_four_humours

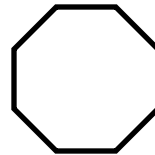
5 – The universe
penta
Earth, air, fire, water, spirit
Stigmata
Man as the universe in miniature



6 – imperfection/ passion/ testing
hex
 2×3 – doubling of the trinity
 $1+2+3$



7 – completion/ time & creation
Sept
Days of the week
Seven metals
Ancient known planets
Seven virtues/ deadly sins
Rainbow



8 – rebirth, beyond the world
oct
Beyond time (7 days)
The square of any odd number, less one, is always a multiple of 8

9 – mystery, difficulty
non
 3×3
A stitch in time saves nine

10 – finality – the perfect number
deca
basis for early number systems
Digits
Tax/tithe
Higher triangle

12 – the heavens
Months
 3×4 – completion on earth

If you want to do some more research on the significance of colors/ numbers/ directions, feel free. I'll go into more detail on the commonality of myth in the next lecture.