

Greek Mythology - Outline #1

Definitions/History/Beliefs

I. Definition of myth – an ancient anonymous story usually involving the gods and heroes and would explain some aspect of nature.

A. Elements of a myth –

1. Supernatural forces exist – myths involve a god or supernatural power
2. Interprets or explain natural events such as an earthquake
3. Details human qualities or flaws such as the weakness of too much pride
4. Expresses a culture's view of the universe –myths commonly would attempt to explain that which was otherwise; unexplainable.
5. Other common elements used include a metamorphosis, monsters, invisibility, trials and tests, trickery, and god's interference

II. History of Greek Myths –

A. Greek Civilization – 1200 B.C.E. – Greece and Asia Minor

1. Oral versions – as early as 800 B.C.E. (the tradition of the storyteller and the importance of divine inspiration by the Muses)
2. Written versions – 700 B.C.E. Around 700 B.C.E., the poet Hesiod's *Theogony* offered the first written cosmogony, or origin story, of Greek mythology.

B. Main Sources – Homer and Hesiod

C. Beliefs – cultural understanding

1. Earth – was flat and circular with Greece in the middle and the highest point to be Olympus
2. Mt. Olympus – the home of the Olympian gods in the realm above Mt. Olympus
3. Underworld – underneath the earth and the realm of the dead
4. Oceanus – a river encircling the earth (keep in mind that Greece is mostly coastal and sailors who ventured too far would fall off the earth)

5. Mediterranean (*Middle of the Lands* in Latin) – divided their world

6. **In the north** lived the Hyperboreans — an extremely happy people for whom life was sweet. When the old people became tired of living, they threw themselves into the sea. This was a land of constant vacation where people were said to live for 1,000 years.

7. **In the south** lived the Ethiopians. In Greek drama, mention is often made of various gods being in Ethiopia, meaning really far away. So, if I say I parked in Ethiopia this morning, would that mean I'm close to my office or far away? The Ethiopians were said to be on good terms with the gods and liked to entertain them.

8. **To the west** were the Elysian Fields. This was the closest the Greeks got to the idea of heaven; only the best and brightest of the dead people got to go there.