

MYTHOLOGY

Myths are tales that are told in order to give poetic voice to our deepest insights about what it is to be human, and to explain the nature of the world into which we are born, live, and die. Myths are traditionally considered to be both true and sacred, and their central characters take the form of gods or other deities. It is their connection to religion that distinguishes myths from legends—whose stories can be secular and revolve around human characters—as well as folk or fairy tales, which are considered both fictional and secular. All cultures have a body of myths, which are frequently classified in geographical terms.

CLASSICAL MYTHOLOGY includes the traditional stories concerning the gods, heroes, and polytheistic rituals of the ancient Greeks and Romans.

The collective stories of the Scandinavian peoples are called **NORSE OR VIKING MYTHOLOGY**. The written sources for Norse mythology were Icelandic poems, although the mythology was shaped in Germanic Europe and includes elements of ancient Scandinavian myths.

CELTIC MYTHOLOGY includes the religious beliefs and practices of the Celts, an ancient Indo-European people whose influence and territories once covered the length of Europe, from Britain to Asia Minor.

NATIVE AMERICAN MYTHOLOGY is made up of mythical beasts, heroic humans, and nurturing spirits. Myths vary between tribes and tribal boundaries, geography, or language, and this category usually includes Eskimo and Inuit, Meso-American, South American, and West Indian myth.

While there is no single set of myths or legends that defines **AFRICAN MYTHOLOGY**, there are common themes that run throughout regions and cultures in both North and sub-Saharan Africa.

Other geographic areas studied by mythology scholars include **ASIA**, the **MIDDLE EAST**, and **OCEANIA**.



ESSENTIAL NON-FICTION

DALY, Kathleen and Marian Rengel. (2003). *Greek and Roman Mythology A to Z*. Facts on File.
ISBN 0-8160-5155-0.

—. (2003). *Norse Mythology A to Z*. ISBN 0-8160-5156-9.

LYNCH, Patricia Ann. (2004). *African Mythology A to Z*. ISBN 0-8160-4892-4.

—. (2004). *Native American Mythology A to Z*. ISBN 0-9160-4891-6.

MATSON, Gienna. (2004). *Celtic Mythology A to Z*. ISBN 0-8160-4890-8.

ROBERTS, Jeremy. (2003). *Japanese Mythology A to Z*. ISBN 0-8160-4871-7.

—. (2004). *Chinese Mythology A to Z*. ISBN 0-8160-4870-3.

Grades 9 to 12.

Facts on File has updated this *Mythology A to Z* series and is expanding it to include South and Meso-American mythologies. Favourably reviewed by *Booklist*, each volume contains an introductory essay describing the social history of these civilizations, followed by over 500 dictionary-type entries on their major mythological figures, stories, themes, and sacred sites, objects and place names. Black-and-white illustrations, bibliographies, maps, charts, pronunciation guides, indexes, and extensive cross-referencing make this a solid series for high school readers.

HAMBY, Zachary. (2009). *Mythology for Teens: Classic Myths for Today's World*. Prufrock Press.
ISBN 1-5936-3363-7. Grades 8 and up.

Hamby uses teen-friendly movie scripts to retell classic myths. Following a short chapter explaining the function of myths, the book is structured around the "big ideas," such as "The Hero," "Beauty: Eye of the Beholder," and "War: *The Illiad* and the Trojan War."

LEEMING, David. (2006). *The Oxford Companion to World Mythology*. Oxford University Press.
ISBN 0-1951-5669-2. Grades 10 and up.

This comprehensive volume, given the thumbs-up by *VOYA*, covers a wide territory of belief systems, examining the role of mythology from prehistoric times through the twenty-first century. A-Z entries include brief overviews as well as in-depth essays on mythological traditions, motifs, and figures. Other topics covered include the ways in which mythological traditions influence contemporary life, from language patterns and religion to politics and gender attitudes. A fine bibliography, charts, illustrations and maps add to the usefulness and appeal of this title.