

Chinese Mythology

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Purpose:

Big Concept:

Mythology of a culture reflects its nature.

Essential Questions:

1. What are the creation myths of China?
2. How do these myths reflect the Chinese culture?
3. How are the Chinese creation myths different from the Greek creation myths?
4. What is the place of myth in the Chinese culture compared to the place of myth in other cultures?

Rationale:

Exposure of students to the mythology of China

Materials:

1. Copies of the Chinese Creation Myths from websites and/or books (see resources below)
2. Art materials to create dramatization props
3. Template for character trading cards (included below)

Activities:

1. Share some Chinese creation myths with the class. Include P'an Ku (PanGu), Nu Wa, Yu and the Great Flood, The Jade Emperor, and The Origin of the Silk Worm.
2. Discuss Chinese mythology using the information below.
3. Compare the Chinese myths with the Greek myths. (Our seventh grade students have already studied Greek mythology and have read the novels The Adventures of Ulysses by Evslin and the Goddess of Yesterday by Cooney.) Several comparisons of Chinese and Greek mythology are included in the information below.
4. Choose one or more of the following activities (depending on time available):
 - a. Dramatize a myth using one of these formats:
 1. Chinese glove puppets
 2. Chinese rod puppets
 3. Chinese shadow puppets (The North American Taiwanese Women's Association does wonderful shadow puppetry)
 4. Skit
 5. Radio or Reader's Theatre script
 6. Kamishibai (Worthington Library owns one to use as a model)
 7. Chinese Opera masksIf possible, perform the small group dramatizations for an audience.
 - b. Write an original myth. Choose from the following uses of mythology:
 1. To explain the creation of the world
 2. To explain natural phenomena
 3. To give story form to ancient religious practices
 4. To teach moral lessons
 5. To explain history
 6. To express, as dreams do, the deepest fears and hopes of the human race

The myth should include evidence of one of the six uses of myth listed above, good development, good mechanics, and a clear beginning, middle and end.

- c. Design four mythological character trading cards. One side is to contain well-written, neat information and the other side is for a full-sized colored illustration. See the templates below.
- d. Create an original poem based on one of the myths.
- e. Create a poem for two voices. Using two characters from a myth, write a dialogue based on the storyline of the myth. Develop this dialogue into a poem for two voices based on the poems of Paul Fleischman's book.
- f. Design Venn diagrams comparing and contrasting two or three of the myths. Each section of the diagram should include five similarities and differences written in complete sentences.
- g. Draw a comic strip of a myth. Do a prewriting by listing the title, the main characters, the reason for the myth and the major events in correct order. Also do an outline sketch before creating the final comic strip. The strip should include good mechanics, complete story elements, high quality, and neatness.
- h. Good readers visualize as they read. Based on a visualization of one scene in a myth, draw an illustration that authentically depicts the scene. The illustration should be neat and attractive and should be in either color or shaded back and white. On the back, attach a one-paragraph description of the picture with good topic and concluding sentences.

Assessment:

1. Evaluate the student's grasp of cultural myths through informal discussion.
2. Assess the activity (activities) chosen from #3 for completeness, effort and understanding. Note that some activities include unique assessment criteria in their description.

Grade Adaptation:

The target grade of this lesson is the 7th grade.

Scaling Up:

1. Compare Chinese creation myths with those of several cultures, not just Greek.
2. Investigate Chinese myths beyond just the creation myths.
3. Students might do a chat (real or simulated) using the idea of the old "Meeting of the Minds" television show. That is, each student would take on an alter ego of one of the mythological beings and they would discuss topics like education, religion, monogamy, slavery, etc. from point-of-view of the character they represent.

Scaling Down:

1. Limit the myth study to one or two myths.
2. Choose one or two of the activities suggested. Don't present them all.
3. Do the activity or activities chosen as a class instead of individually or in small groups.

State Standards:

English Language Arts

7th Grade Reading Applications: Literary Text

5. Identify recurring themes, patterns and symbols found in literature from different eras and cultures.
6. Explain the defining characteristics of literary forms and genres, including poetry, drama, myths, biographies, autobiographies, science fictions, fiction and non-fiction.

English Language Arts

7th Grade Writing Process

9. Use precise language, action verbs, sensory details, colorful modifiers and style as appropriate to audience and purpose.
17. Prepare for publication (e.g., for display or for sharing with others) writing that follows a format appropriate to the purpose, using such techniques as electronic resources, principles of design (e.g., margins, tabs, spacing and columns) and graphics (e.g., drawings, charts and graphs) to enhance the final product.

English Language Arts

7th Grade Writing Applications

1. Write narratives that maintain a clear focus and point of view and use sensory details and dialog to develop plot, character and a specific setting.

English Language Arts

7th Grade Communication: Oral and Visual

6. Adjust volume, phrasing, enunciation, voice modulation and inflection to stress important ideas and impact audience response.
9. Deliver formal and informal descriptive presentations that convey relevant information and descriptive details.

Social Studies

7th Grade People in Societies

Benchmark A: Compare cultural practices, products and perspectives of past civilizations in order to understand commonality and diversity of cultures.

1. Analyze the relationships among cultural practices, products and perspectives of early civilizations.

Benchmark C: Explain how contact between different cultures impacts the diffusion of belief systems, art, science, technology, language and forms of government.

4. Describe the cultural and scientific legacies of African, Greek, Roman, Chinese, Arab and European civilizations.

Resources

Organizations

North American Taiwanese Women's Association
c/o Susan S. Lee
1044 Havendale Dr
Columbus, Oh 43220
457-8649

Websites

1. <http://www.dreamscape.com/morgana/ariel.htm> - Chinese creation myth
2. <http://library.thinkquest.org/03oct/00875/text/ChineseC.htm> - Chinese creation myth
3. http://www.pantheon.org/articles/c/creation_myths.html - discussion of the P'an ku myth
4. http://www.innovationslearning.co.uk/subjects/re/information/creation/chinese_creation.htm - Chinese creation myth with little commentary
5. <http://www.pitt.edu/~dash/chinaflood.html> - Chinese creation and flood myth
6. <http://www.chinavista.com/experience/myth/myth.html> - history and features
7. <http://www.chinavista.com/experience/story/story.html> - actual myths
8. <http://www.crystalinks.com/chinamythology.html> - background information, descriptions of gods and goddesses
9. <http://www.crystalinks.com/chinacreation.html> - several creation myths
10. <http://www.pantheon.org/areas/mythology/asia/chinese/articles.html> - deities and places, Nu-gua as creator
11. <http://www.godchecker.com/pantheon/chinese-mythology.php> - Gods of Chinese mythology and some general information
12. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chinese_mythology - deities, creatures and places
13. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nüwa> - Nuwa as creator
14. <http://chineseculture.about.com/od/aboutchinesemythology/> - good links to myths and related topics
15. <http://www.selinafenech.com/artworks/nuwa.html> - image of Nuwa
16. www.travelchinaguide.com/intro/focus/shadow-puppetry.htm - Chinese shadow puppets
17. www.lotzdollpages.com/lprod.html - Chinese puppets

Books

1. An Introduction to Oriental Mythology. Secaucus, NJ: Chartwell Books, 1989.
Pgs. 13-50
Pangu – pg. 20-21
Nugua – pg. 22-24
2. Ancient Cultures: Chinese Gods and Myths. London: Quantum Book, 1998.
Creation myths – pp. 17-32
3. Ardagh, Philip. Chinese Myths & Legends. Chicago: World Book, 2001.
4. Asimov, Isaac. Library of the Universe: Mythology and the Universe. Milwaukee: Gareth Stevens Publishing, 1990.
Sun picture – pg. 4
Planet names – pg. 8
Zodiac – pg. 19
Pole stars – pg. 25
5. Bini, Renata. A World Treasury of Myths, Legends, and Folktales: Stories From Six Continents. New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2000.
The Shepard and the Weaver – pgs 60-63
6. Birrell, Anne. Chinese Mythology: an Introduction. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993.
7. Birrell, Anne, ed. Chinese myths. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2000.
8. Birrell, Anne. "Myth." The Columbia History of Chinese Literature. NY: Columbia UP, 2001, 58-69.
9. Christie, Anthony. Chinese Mythology. New York: P. Bedrick Books, 1985, 1983.
10. Collier, Irene Dea. Chinese Mythology. Berkeley Heights, NJ: Enslow Pub., 2001.
Myths with questions/answers and "expert commentary"
11. Cruse, Amy. The Book of Myths. Lexington, Mass.: Schoolhouse Press, c1986.
12. Davis, Kenneth C. Don't Know Much About World Myths. New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2005.
Origin of Chinese mythology – pgs 65-66
Creation of the Universe – pgs 67-68
Nu Wa – pgs 68-70
Great Flood – pg. 70
Origin of the silk worm – pg. 72
13. Fisher, Leonard Everett. The Gods and Goddesses of Ancient China. New York: Holiday House, 2003.
14. Goddesses Heroes and Shamans, The Young People's Guide to World Mythology. New York: Kingfisher, 1994.
Pgs. 110 – 115
15. Green, Jen. Myths of China and Japan. Austin: Raintree Steck-Vaughn Publishers, 2002

16. Hamilton, Virginia. In the Beginning: Creation Stories from Around the World. San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Publishers, 1988.
Phan Ku – pgs 20-23
17. January, Brendan. The New York Public Library Amazing Mythology: A Book of Answers for Kids. New York: Wiley, 2000.
Creation myth, pgs 69-70, 71, 130
Flood myth: pg. 2, 71-72
Mythology origins: pgs 68-69
Silk worm's creation: pg. 74
18. Keenan, Sheila. Gods, Goddesses, and Monsters: An Encyclopedia of World Mythology. New York: Scholastic, 2000.
Pgs. 16 – 21, introduction and an alphabet of articles
19. Philip, Neil. Mythology. New York: A.A. Knopf, 1999.
Creation (Pan Gu) – pg. 12
People (Nu Wa) – pg. 16
Supreme beings (Jade Emperor) – pg.19
Elements – pg. 22
Ancestor Worship - pg. 30
Super Heros (Yi) – pg. 35
Gods of war – pg. 39
Fortune and happiness – pgs 42-43
Death (Yen-lo, etc.) – pgs 54-55
20. Pickering, Fran. The Element Illustrated Encyclopedia of Animals in Nature, Myth and Spirit. Shaftesbury, Dorset: Element Children's Books, 1999.
Pandas – pg. 23
Dragons – pgs 124-5
Magical horses – pg. 126
Water creatures – pg. 130-131
Serpent – pg. 133
21. Roberts, Jeremy. Chinese Mythology A to Z. New York: Facts on File, 2004.
22. Roberts, Timothy R., Morgan J. Roberts, Brian P Katz. Mythology Tales of Ancient Civilizations. New York: Michael Friedman Publishing Group, 1997.
Pgs. 397-429
P'an Ku – pg. 405-406
Nu Kua – pg. 406 - 407
23. Ross, Stewart. The Best Tales Ever Told Dragons and Demons, Myths and Legends from Asia Brought to Life With a Wild Text and Awesome Facts. Brookfield: Copper Beech Books, 1998.
Monkey King – pg. 4
Chang Lung the Dragon – pg. 6
The Ugly Scholar – pg. 8
24. Sanders, Tao Liu. Dragons, Gods & Spirits From Chinese Mythology. New York: P. Bedrick Books, 1994.
25. Storm, Rachel. Asian Mythology, Myths and Legends of China, Japan, Thailand, Malaysia, and Indonesia. New York: Lorenz Books, 2000.
Creation – pg. 34
Dragons – pg. 58

Creator – pg. 82

26. World Explorer: Medieval Times to Today. Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2003.
Textbook used in 7th grade, Worthington Schools
Pgs. 82-88

27. World Explorer: the Ancient World. Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2003.
Textbook used in 7th grade, Worthington Schools
Pgs. 143-144

Information to Share About Chinese Mythology

- The Chinese trace their history from the creation of the world straight through the earliest emperors and the building of the Chinese empire with no significant distinction between the historical and the mythical. It is hard to find where history begins and myth ends. Historical figures are made into gods and myths are recounted as history. Even in modern times, leaders like Chairman Mao have been viewed as if they were gods and seen as responsible for all good things that happen.
- What we know of the time before recorded history in China is partly based on legend interwoven with mythology. Such ancient heroes and leaders as Fuxi, Shennong, Huangdi (the Yellow Emperor) and Yu are both historical figures according to legend and important characters in mythical stories. In fact, the distinction between legend and history has only been made in modern times.
- The acceptance the Chinese have of the intertwining of fact and fantasy indicates the power and importance of “mythology” in the Chinese tradition according to [An Introduction to Oriental Mythology](#).
- According to Dr. Denton, professor at Ohio State University, “There was no category of ‘myth’ traditionally in China. ... The stories that came to be referred to as “myth” (shenhua) in the twentieth century were originally part of works of history or philosophy. There has been much discussion in Chinese literary studies about the relative (compared to the west) absence of myth in China, in particular the absence of any ‘epics.’ This likely has something to do with the importance Chinese place on ‘history’ and ‘historiography’.”
- Early Chinese worshiped hundreds of gods including those of the sun, earth, rain, mountains, rivers, and clouds. People also worshiped their ancestors.
- Taoism, Confucianism and Buddhism were combined with ancestor and nature worship to create a sort of Chinese popular religion. Chinese mythology with its large pantheon of gods grew out of this common belief system.
- Chinese myths, which originally came from different regions, spread by means of a pictographic script that was understood even though regions spoke different languages. The evolution of the myths was not entirely oral.
- The actual writing of mythological tales began in the Wei and Jin Dynasties (220-420). Yet, recorded Chinese mythology dates back almost three thousand years.
- Chinese Myths include several characteristics:
 - They extol perseverance and self-sacrifice.
The story of Gun and Yu trying to tame the floods illustrates perseverance and self-sacrifice. Gun steals the "growing earth" from the Heavenly God to stop the floods, but the god has him killed. Yu is born out of Gun's belly and he continues Gun's cause. Yu goes through countless hardships, remains unmarried until he is thirty, and leaves his wife only four days after their wedding to fight the floods. Yu finally brings the floods under control.
 - They praise rebellion against oppression.
There is a story about a boy whose eyebrows are one foot apart. It begins with the king of Chu killing Ganjiang, who is good at making swords. Ganjiang's son, Chibi, is

determined to take revenge. To get revenge, he kills himself so that a friend may take his unusual head to see the king and then kill him. They eulogize the yearning for true love.

"The Cowherd and the Girl Weaver" is one of China's earliest love stories. Many of the mythical stories written by intellectuals tell stories of how men and goddesses, foxes, fairies or ghost women love each other passionately and sincerely. Such stories reflect, in an indirect way, the yearning for true love when it was stifled by feudal ethical codes.

- They encourage good deeds and warn against wrong doings.
This is an important theme of the mythical stories produced after the Wei and Jin. Their writers may have been motivated by Confucian teachings about humanity and righteousness, and the Buddhist belief that good will be rewarded with good and evil repaid with evil.
- All these characteristics come together to form one prevailing characteristic: China's mythical stories, both those created by the primitive people and those written by later scholars, are full of human feelings. Most everything is given human qualities and emotions.
- There are also mythical stories that try to illustrate fatalism, reincarnation, and all sorts of ethical principles. This is only natural, because literary works inevitably reflect the beliefs of the age in which they are produced.
- Classical Chinese myths are very concise and well written. A myth that includes both dialogue and behavioral and psychological descriptions is told in just a few hundred words.
- There is no epic tradition in Chinese mythology. (Of course, Greek mythology includes several epics.)
- Most systems of myths have an explanation for the origin of the universe and its components. These myths are known as creation myths. An explanation of the origin of the universe is known as a Cosmogony.
- In Chinese mythology, PanGu is credited with creating the earth. There are written texts of this myth going back to the sixth century CE and there are parts of Southern China where the cult of P'an Ku still persists. Retellings of this myth are available at websites <http://www.dreamscape.com/morgana/ariel.htm> and <http://library.thinkquest.org/03oct/00875/text/ChineseC.htm> and in several of the books in the bibliography.
- The formless chaotic egg, which was the birthplace of P'an Ku, is an example of the idea of a primitive chaos: a featureless, undifferentiated universe. The Greeks referred to this initial formless state of the universe as "chaos" and this is the origin of the term.
- Myths of a 'cosmic egg' are common to many cultures, signifying the origins of conscious life.
- The creation myth of P'an-ku is a good example of a single stage creation myth. The universe was created at once. On the other hand, the creation myth of classical Greek mythology is a good example of a multi stage creation of the universe. In multi stage creation, a primordial god typically creates part of the universe and has offspring who then further differentiate the primitive universe. They too have offspring who do further things. Often there is conflict between different generations of gods for mastery of the universe. Also at some stage, human beings and the world as we know it come into being.

- Another mythological idea that appears in the P'an Ku creation myth is the idea that the earth, world or universe is the bodily remains of a primordial being or deity. When P'an Ku died after eighteen thousand years, the parts of his body became the parts of the world.
- Taoism, Confucianism and Buddhism speak of the yin and yang, the dark and the light, as being the creative power that sustains all life and being. Yin and yang are not to be seen as gods or deities in any sense. They are the natural forces behind nature. P'an Ku separated the yin (cold earth and dark moon) from the yang (bright sky and warm heaven) for eighteen thousand years as he grew ten feet a day.
- The belief in the balancing forces of yin and yang lies at the heart of the Chinese philosophy and influences the way the Chinese people treat their environment. They see the earth as a living being which must be cared for properly, kept in order, so that the powerful forces of yin and yang are kept in balance.
- Dr. Denton, professor at Ohio State University, shared that the Chinese view of creation begins with a fluid state of chaos which evolves into a universal force [Dao], then to the yin and yang balanced interaction followed by the five elements and finally to a "myriad of things". Creation evolved in an organic way; there was not an outside force.
- Chinese have five elements: wood, fire, earth, metal and water. Western tradition has four: fire, air, earth and water.
- The myth of Pangu also reflects an animistic view of the world in which everything is seen as alive, even rocks and soil. It is a view of creation that conveys a respect, a willingness to work with a living earth rather than to subdue it.
- The myth of Pangu helps to give meaning to each individual life, and may be a way of processing the idea that the world existed long before we did and will continue long after death.
- Human beings in the myths have a fairly lowly position. Rather than standing at the centre of the cosmos, they are fairly insignificant, taking their place in the natural order. This perspective is seen in Chinese paintings, where tiny figures are dwarfed by the sweeping vistas of natural features, mountains and waterfalls on varying levels. The development of a spiritual consciousness results in humility and balance.
- In Chinese mythology, a connection is established between the everyday world of human beings and the supernatural world of the god or gods who created the universe. The place of human beings in the hierarchy of life inhabiting the universe is established. Man is placed below gods and other supernatural beings but above animals and plants
- Nuwa is the original ancestor of the Chinese nation. According to legend, Nuwa was also the younger sister of Emperor Fuxi (said to have lived during the third millennium BC) and she herself was an empress.
- It is said that Nüwa existed in the beginning of the world. She was the first Chinese goddess. Nüwa had the face of a girl but the body of a snake. She felt lonely as there were no other beings, so she began the creation of animals and humans. She created the first humans from yellow earth, after Heaven and Earth had separated.
- The supreme god in Greek and Chinese mythologies is similar but different.

Chinese gods form a large bureaucracy headed by the supreme emperor of Heaven, the Jade Emperor. He rules over many government departments and courts that are run by lesser gods. The Jade Emperor's wife is Xi Wang Mu, the queen mother of the west and the guardian of peaches and immortality. It is said that the Chinese emperor on earth had a direct contact with the Jade Emperor.

Zeus is the supreme deity in Greek mythology. He is a god of the sky like Jade Emperor. However, he gained his authority by overthrowing his father, Cronus. Also Zeus fathered several of the other gods.

- Greek and Chinese mythologies have gods of love, fortune and happiness.

The Chinese lucky Ho-Ho twins are often shown attending Tsai Shen, the god of wealth. They bring prosperity as well as harmonious union between couples because the word "ho" means harmony. The twins are depicted with a lotus on their heads, standing on a bed of lotus flowers and carrying jars of a lotus of purity and perfection. Another common Chinese threesome is Fu Shen, the god of happiness, Lu Shen the god of good luck and Shou Shen, the god of longevity.

Eros is the mischievous Greek god of love. Some of his arrows had gold tips and caused people to fall in love. Others were tipped with lead and had the opposite effect. The Greek goddess of love and desire, Aphrodite was born from the foam of the sea. She devoted herself to pleasure and prided herself on never doing any work. Eros often assisted her.

- Chinese and Greek mythologies have unique ways of looking at judges and death.

Yen-lo (also know as Yanwang or Yama) is the terrifying ruler and judge of the dead in China. First the souls are weighed: the virtuous are light and the sinful are heavy. Then the souls must pass a number of tests and challenges. They are assaulted by demons, attacked by dogs, and then allowed one last glimpse of home and family before being given a drink that wipes away all memories. Finally, each soul is reincarnated.

The Chinese also celebrate a day of the dead known as the "Feast of Hungry Ghosts". In China, the head of a family must make regular sacrifices of food at the graves of his ancestors; if not, the "hungry ghosts" may cause trouble. Wooden tablets are inscribed with the names of ancestors and are kept in a household shrine.

The Greeks devised ingenious fates for those who offended the gods. Sisyphus (who told tales on Zeus) was forced to spend eternity rolling a stone uphill, only to see it roll back to the ground just as he was reaching the top. Tantalus (who served the gods his won son at a banquet) was condemned to stand neck-high in water, with ripe fruit dangling over his head, never able to eat or drink.

- War gods also appear in both the Greek and Chinese mythologies.

Guan Di is the Chinese god of war. He was originally a humble seller of bean curd who devoted himself to study and became a patron of literature. He became a soldier, one of the three famous Brothers of the Peach Orchard, and in 1594 AD was elevated to the status of god of war.

The Greeks had two war gods. Ares was the god of fighting and Athena was the goddess of

strategy and wisdom. She sprang from the head of her father Zeus fully armed and ready for battle.

Mythology Trading Cards

(Include an image of the God or Goddess on the other side)

Name _____

God/Goddess of _____

Physical Description _____

Personality _____

Powers _____

Interesting Information _____

Name _____

God/Goddess of _____

Physical Description _____

Personality _____

Powers _____

Interesting Information _____

Name _____

God/Goddess of _____

Physical Description _____

Personality _____

Powers _____

Name _____

God/Goddess of _____

Physical Description _____

Personality _____

Powers _____