What is Mythology?

…and what does it have to do with us?
What is a myth?

- A myth is a story. Myths were told or written to answer some of the biggest questions a person could ask -- Who are we? Where did we come from? Why do these things happen?

- In ancient times, myths sometimes explained things that we now understand through science, like the movement of the stars and planets and the changing of the seasons.
Purpose of Myths

• To explain the world
• Religion
• Entertainment
Who wrote these Myths?

- Ancient Greek myths evolved over hundreds of years.
- Oral tradition
- Eventually, some of the myths were written down. Many of the Greek myths that we know today were first recorded by the poets Homer and Hesiod in the 8th or 7th century BC.
What were the gods like?

• The most powerful Greek gods lived high atop Mt. Olympus.
• They looked and acted much like humans, but they were more powerful, beautiful, and far more gifted.
• The gods also had human feelings and emotions, like love, anger, and jealousy.
• They married, had children, fought with each other, and generally acted like the Greek people they ruled.
The Olympians

- **Aphrodite** - Goddess of love, romance, and beauty.
- **Apollo** - Beautiful god of the sun, light, medicine, and music.
- **Ares** - Dark god of war who loves Aphrodite.
- **Artemis** - Independent goddess of the hunt, the forest, wildlife, childbirth, and the moon. Sister to Apollo.
- **Athena** - Daughter of Zeus and goddess of wisdom, war, and crafts. Sometimes spelled Athene.
- **Demeter** - Goddess of agriculture and mother of Persephone.
- **Hephaestus** - Lame god of fire and the forge. Sometimes spelled Hephaistos.
- **Hera** - Wife of Zeus, protector of marriage, familiar with magic.
- **Hermes** - The speedy messenger of the gods, god of business.
- **Hestia** - Calm goddess of home and homelife, symbolized by the hearth which holds the continually-burning flame.
- **Poseidon** - God of the sea, horses, and of earthquakes.
- **Zeus** - Supreme lord of gods, god of the sky, symbolized by the thunderbolt.
Where do we see Mythology today?
Amazon

- **Amazon** - Race of warrior women; amazon.com - huge online bookstore.
Nike

- The Greek goddess Nike was the personification of victory in mythology; she could run and fly at great speeds.
Titanic

- In Greek mythology, the Titans are a race of godlike giants.
- Race of gods preceding the Olympians
- *Titanic* was the largest passenger steamship in the world at the time of her sinking.
Odyssey

• The 10-year sea voyage endured by the Trojan War hero, Odysseus, as he sought to return home to Ithaca.

• Odyssey Travel is a well-known travel agency; Odyssey Cruise Lines is a cruise company; Odyssey Records is a record company; there's even an Odyssey Golf Club company!
Tantalize

- **Tantalus**
  - It's because of a mythological sinner named Tantalus that to tantalize entails holding something desirable just out of reach.
  - Tantalus was sent to the Underworld's region of eternal punishment, where he stood in a pool of water under boughs laden with fruit yet unreachable.
Trust the Midas Touch

Midas

• The Midas touch, or the gift of profiting from whatever one undertakes, is named for a legendary king of Phrygia.

• Midas was granted the power to transmute whatever he touched into gold.
Atlas

• A book of maps gets its name from Atlas, the Titan who supported the heavens on his shoulders.
Achilles Heel

- A point of vulnerability is an Achilles heel because the mythological warrior Achilles had been magically protected in all but that part of his body.
Rhapsodes

- Homer was a model for a class of storytellers called rhapsodes.

- Known as “singers of tales,” they were the historians and entertainers as well as myth-makers.

- They did not memorize the story word for word but knew the basic story and improvised on the spot, following a basic rhythm of the words.

- There is a great deal of repetition in the stories, which makes it a bit simpler to tell.
Epics and Values

• Epics: a long narrative poem that tells of the adventures of heroes across great spans of time and place.
  – The epic contains the ideas, morals, themes, and values of a culture from which it is created.

• *Iliad*:
  – An archetype of the war epic.
  – Contains the morals and values of the Greek society in war.

• *Odyssey*:
  – An archetype of the adventure epic.
  – Seen as a metaphor for living one’s life
  – Contains the morals, themes, and values of the Greek society about adventure, hardship, hospitality, and life.
Characteristics of an Epic

• Epic plot
  – Strange creatures
  – Divine intervention
  – Large-scale events
  – Treacherous weather

• Epic Hero: A physically impressive hero of national or historical importance

• Epic Setting: A vast setting involving not only of the known world but also the underworld
Characteristics of an Epic, cont.

- Action such as a quest or journey requiring superhuman ability and courage
- Evidence of supernatural forces
- The poet attempts to glorify an age— a past that is already remote and idealized.
- Archetypes- characters, situations, and images that are recognizable in many times and cultures
  - Temptress
  - Sea monster
  - Buried treasure
  - Suitors’ contest
  - Epic hero
  - Loyal servant
- Epic themes
  - Courage
  - Homecoming
  - Beauty
  - Loyalty
  - Life and death
  - Fate of a nation
Epic Conventions

- Opens *in medias res* - in the middle of things - with the necessary exposition in later portions of the epic
- Begins with invocation to a Muse
- Epithets
- Catalogues (lists) of warriors, ships, armies, etc.
- Main characters giving formal speeches
- Epic/Homeric similes
- Allusions
- Personification
The Muses

- The Muses preside over the arts and sciences, inspire all artists, especially poets, philosophers, and musicians.
- Their name denotes “memory” or “a reminder” since the poets relied on their memories when telling these stories.
- The nine Muses are the daughters of the Zeus and of Mnemosyne (ni-mos-a-nē), the goddess of memory.
Project Topics

- *The Iliad*: The origins of the Trojan War (Judgment of Paris), the fall of Troy, and Odysseus and the Trojan Horse
- The House of Atreus - the cursed family
- Major gods and goddesses – what they symbolize and other pertinent information
- The Royal House of Thebes - Oedipus and his family
- Creation stories in Greek Mythology- story of the five ages and the story of Prometheus and Epimetheus
- The Underworld - realms, Hades and Persephone, sinners