

# Lesson 1

## What is a Myth?

**Materials Needed:**  
pen or pencil

### Journal

Many cultures had different explanations for natural phenomena (fa-nom-en-a), or happenings. Before science, many cultures used myths to explain why certain things existed. Where do you think the moon came from? Why do you think we have a moon? **Write** at least five (5) sentences in response.

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## ① What is a myth?

A **myth** is a made-up short story that tries to explain how the world works. Also, myths often touch upon how people should treat each other. These stories describe big things that happen to people because of the choices that they make. Myths usually take place in ancient times, before history was recorded. Myths have many themes.

A **theme** is an overall idea that is found in literature. The idea may be about life, society, or human nature. Themes are often timeless (lasting throughout history) and universal (common around the world) ideas. They are implied, or hinted at, rather than stated in the text. Some stories can have more than one theme. *Hint: A good way to remember what a theme is: (The me)ssage*

Some common themes in myths are **triumph (success), tragedy (disaster or heartbreak), honor, bravery, fate, love, death, and foolishness**. For example, in some cases the heroes might be helped by the gods and goddesses to complete a task or to fall in love. In other cases they might be stopped by the gods and goddesses from completing a task or falling in love.



Throughout history, myths have been shared all over the world. Many cultures have passed these myths down from generation to generation by ***word of mouth***. Different cultures have myths that share common stories, but the characters and events might be a little bit different. For example, most cultures have a version of how the world came to be. In early times, myths were believed to be true in many cultures.



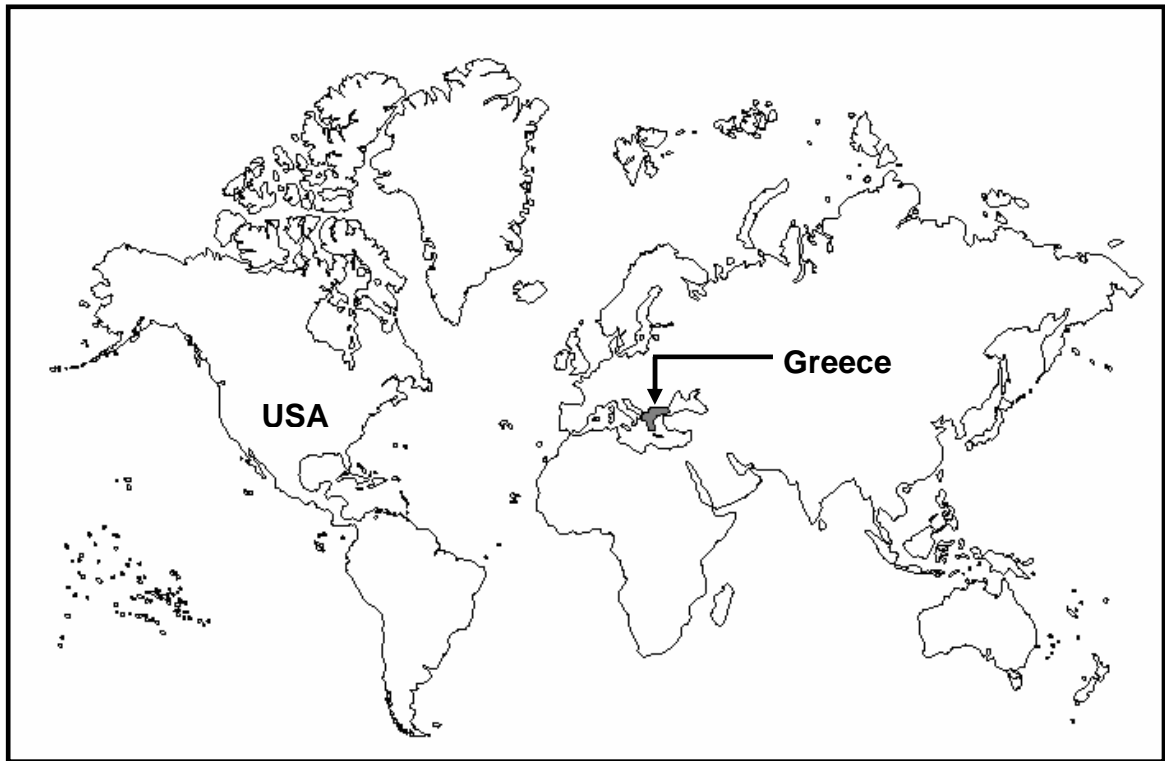
These cultures believed that things happened for the reasons stated in the myths. As the knowledge of science grew, most events in the myths were proven to be impossible, but people all over the world still enjoy reading mythology.

## Guided Reading

Guided Reading gives you some information related to the topic of the story you will be reading. This information helps you to build a background of knowledge so you will be able to better understand what you are reading.

The most commonly known myths come from Greece. The word “**myth**” comes from the Greek word “**mythos**” which means “**word of mouth**”. This means that these stories were not written down at first, but they were told from person to person.

The first myth you will read is from Greek mythology. **Mythology** means the study of myths. In Greek mythology, there were many gods and goddesses. The king of the gods and goddesses was Zeus, who lived on Mount Olympus. Some say that the Olympics started as a celebration after Zeus beat his father, Kronos, in a wrestling match. Most Greek myths are about the gods and goddesses.



Here are some vocabulary words that you will find in the following myth.

| <b>Vocabulary word</b> | <b>Definition</b>   |
|------------------------|---|
| <b>nymphs</b>          | beautiful young women that lived in the seas, woods, etc. |
| <b>cheerful</b>        | happy or joyful   |
| <b>permission</b>      | to allow something to happen                              |
| <b>consent</b>         | to approve  |
| <b>meadow</b>          | large grassy area of land                                 |
| <b>chariot</b>         | two-wheeled carriage pulled by horses                     |
| <b>terrified</b>       | very scared   |
| <b>depressed</b>       | sad   |
| <b>refused</b>         | not allowing something to happen                          |
| <b>immediately</b>     | without delay in time                                     |
| <b>pale</b>            | lack of color   |

**Directions:** Read the following Greek myth and answer the *Reading Comprehension* questions that follow.

### Persephone and the Seasons

Demeter was the goddess of all growing things: grasses in the field, red apples on the trees, lovely flowers by the quiet streams. She loved to look at all that she had created. But it was her daughter, Persephone (per-seh'-fone-e), who gave her the most joy of all! She loved to watch her run through the fields, laughing as she played with her friends, the **nymphs**.

However, one day Hades, the god of the Underworld (where people go when they die) and brother of Zeus (king of gods), heard Persephone's **cheerful** laughter, and



He decided that he would marry her and make her queen of the Underworld. When he asked Zeus for **permission**, the king gave his **consent** because he liked his brother. Neither god thought about how Demeter or Persephone would feel about this agreement.

That day, as Persephone played with her friends in the **meadow**, Hades came down in his

black **chariot** and snatched her. He held on to her tightly as the earth opened up. Hades, Persephone, and the chariot went down into the Underworld.

Demeter soon learned that her daughter was missing. She was **terrified** that something bad had happened to her. She started to search all over the world for her. She asked everybody if they had seen her. Nobody had. As the days went by, Demeter became more and more **depressed**. Finally she went to Apollo, the god who drives the sun chariot across the sky each day. She knew that he could see everything from his chariot in the sky. He told her that he had seen Hades kidnap Persephone and that now she was in the Land of the Dead.



Demeter was very sad. She became an old woman, and cried everyday. She no longer made the growing things on earth. Soon the grass all became brown. Trees lost their leaves, fruit was ruined, and cows died because they had nothing to eat.



Zeus looked down from Mount Olympus and saw that the earth was in trouble. People and animals searched for fruits and vegetables and grains to eat, but they found none. So he sent Iris, the goddess of the rainbow, to talk to Demeter and ask her to make things grow again.

When Iris saw Demeter, she begged her to return to her job, and even offered her some beautiful gifts and powers. Demeter **refused**. She said, "Tell Zeus that as long as my lovely daughter Persephone is in the Underworld, I will never again let things grow on earth."

Upon hearing this message, Zeus realized he had been wrong to allow Hades to marry Persephone. **Immediately**, he sent his messenger, Hermes, to bring Persephone back to her mother.

When Hermes reached the Underworld, he saw that Persephone was sitting on the throne next to Hades, but she looked very **pale** and unhappy. She had not eaten anything since being kidnapped. When Hermes told her that she was going home, she was so happy that she wanted to eat again. She grabbed a pomegranate and munched on seven seeds. That was a mistake, because it was a rule that anyone who ate anything in the Kingdom of the Dead could never leave that place and return to the earth. However, Hermes did as he had been told and took Persephone back up to earth, where she was reunited with her mother.




Demeter was filled with joy. She and her daughter were so thankful that they cried with happiness. All of a sudden, a loud voice came from Mount Olympus. It was Zeus. He said, “I cannot change the rule. Persephone ate the seeds of the pomegranate. She must not stay on the earth but return to the Underworld.”

Demeter begged Zeus, “Please, do not make her go! She only ate seven seeds! That doesn’t count as eating!” Zeus thought about this fact for a minute. He knew he couldn’t change any rules, but he could bend them a little. He said that Persephone still had to go back to the Underworld, but only for seven months. The other five months of the year she could be on the earth with her mother.

So that is how it happens that for seven months out of the year, all of nature dies. Trees lose their leaves, grass turns brown, and the plants die. Everything is cold and dark as Persephone rules with Hades in the Underworld. Then, after that time is up, she returns and so does the life of the earth. Crops grow and trees give their fruit. Birds sing and baby animals are born. All are happy again as Demeter shares her joy.

 **Reading Comprehension**

 **Directions:** Use the myth to answer the questions. Circle the correct answer.

1. What is the relationship between Demeter and Persephone?
  - a. They were really good friends.
  - b. They were mother and daughter.
  - c. They were sisters.
  - d. They were enemies.
  
2. Why did Hades kidnap Persephone?
  - a. He wanted her to be his servant.
  - b. He wanted all living things on earth to die.
  - c. He wanted her to be his queen.
  - d. She was a gift from his brother Zeus.
  
3. What happened when Demeter realized what had happened to Persephone?
  - a. Demeter let all living things on earth start to die.
  - b. Demeter tried to go to the Underworld to rescue her daughter.
  - c. Demeter hired Apollo to go to the Underworld and rescue Persephone.
  - d. Demeter and Zeus had a violent battle on their chariots.
  
4. Who did Zeus send to rescue Persephone from Hades?
  - a. Apollo
  - b. Demeter
  - c. A nymph
  - d. Hermes

5. What did Persephone do that made her have to go back to the Underworld?
  - a. She ate seven pomegranate seeds.
  - b. She stole seven pomegranates.
  - c. She refused to eat anything Hades offered her.
  - d. She ate everything Hades offered her.
  
6. What happened as a result of the events in this story?
  - a. Demeter and Zeus were enemies.
  - b. Persephone disliked pomegranate seeds, so Demeter allowed all pomegranate trees to die.
  - c. Demeter caused the seasons to change while her daughter was in the Underworld.
  - d. Persephone fell in love with Hades and decides to stay in the Underworld forever.
  
7. What do you think is the theme of this myth? How do you think it explains a natural happening?

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**① Parts of a story: Characters**



**Characters** play an important role in literature. Characters are people, animals, or other beings that are in a story. In some tales or myths, the sun or wind have thoughts and become characters in the story.

The **main character** plays a major role in the story. There can be more than one main character in a story.

The **minor character** is one who is part of the story but doesn't play a main role. There can be many minor characters in a story.

The **protagonist** (pro-tag-on-ist) is the main character or characters of a story. This comes from the Greek word, *protagonistes*, which means "one who plays the first part."

The **antagonist** (an-tag-on-ist) is a character or group of characters that go against the protagonist. This comes from the Greek word, *antagonistes*, which means "opponent or rival."

**Directions:** Use the story to help identify each character. Then



**Demeter:** Goddess of \_\_\_\_\_.

**Persephone:** Daughter of \_\_\_\_\_.



**Hades:** God of \_\_\_\_\_; Brother of \_\_\_\_\_.

**Zeus:** King of \_\_\_\_\_; Brother of \_\_\_\_\_.



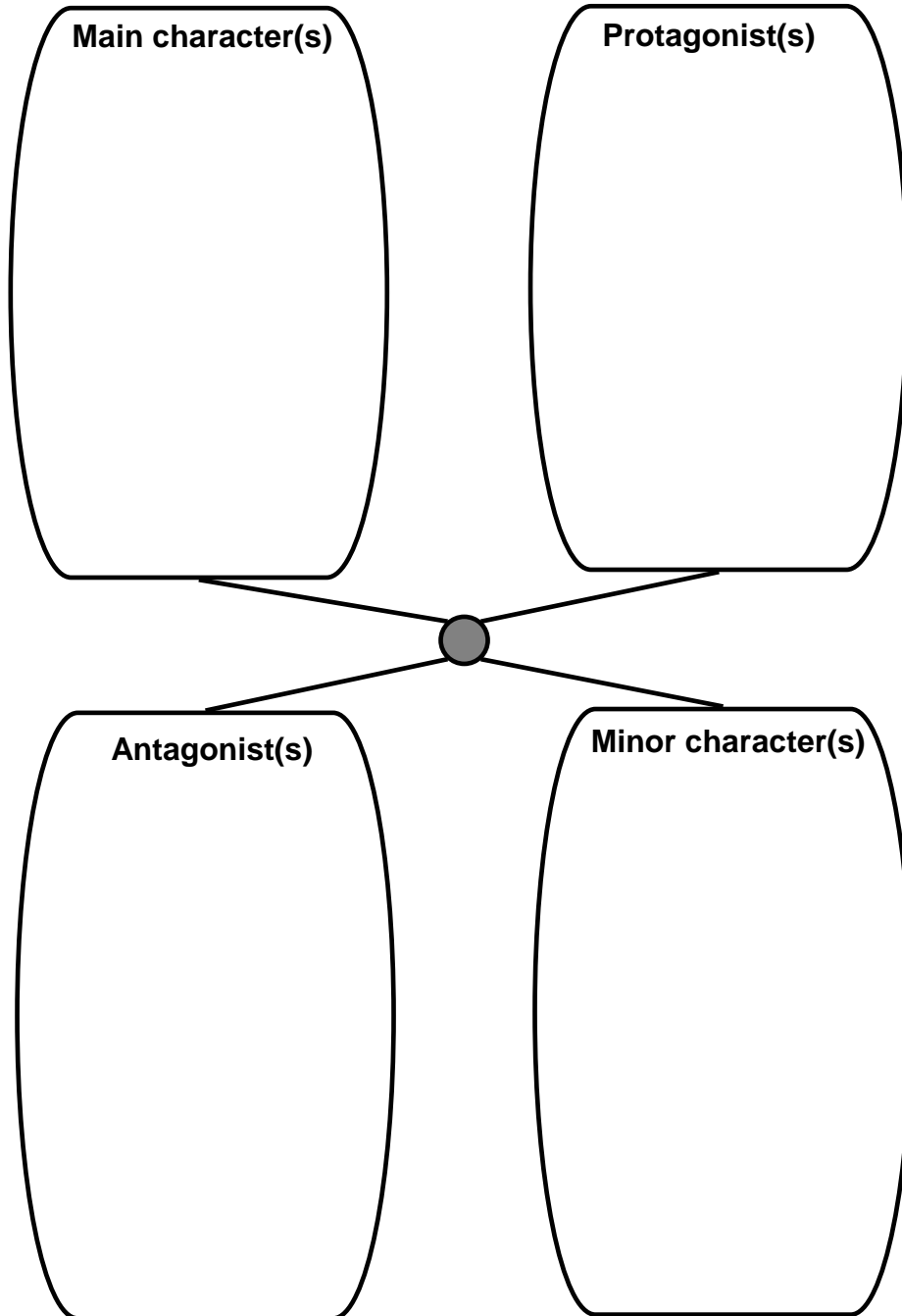
**Apollo:** The god who \_\_\_\_\_.

**Iris:** Goddess of \_\_\_\_\_.



**Hermes:** Messenger of \_\_\_\_\_.

**Directions:** Using the character list you just made, **write** each character in the box where they belong.



 **Reader's Response**

Which character do you think you are most like? Why?

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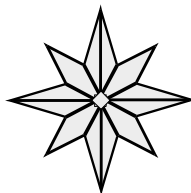
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**End of Lesson 1**