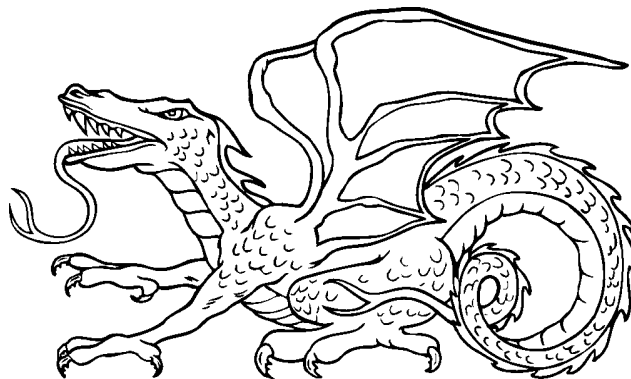


Myths and
Magic

**Activities for 10 - 12 year olds
based on myths from a range
of cultures.**



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Myths and Magic

A **fable** is a legend or short story, especially one with a moral based on customs or traditions. Did you know that the word "fabulous" (meaning legendary, incredible or wonderful) comes from "fable"?

A **myth** is a special sort of story, based on the religion of a group of people. It often tells where people came from and is usually about famous heroes and villains, gods or nature.

Myths and fables were told by storytellers before most people could read or write, and they were passed on from generation to generation.

Greek myths are often about the love of beauty. Roman myths are often about wars and law and order. Hindu (including Indian and Balinese) myths are often about the good and evil forces of nature. Scandinavian myths are often about Arctic gods and animals in human form.

Australian Aboriginal myths are often about nature, creation and the great deeds of ancestors in Alcheringa or the Dreaming.

Some of these myths and fables are explored in this workbook.

Internet References

All websites referred to in this book are linked from the Ready-Ed website listed below:

www.readyed.com.au/urls/myths

This saves the teacher and/or student from typing in the website addresses each time. The page above is periodically updated and checked for broken links, should websites disappear or modify their address after publication. It is suggested that teachers bookmark this page for ease of use. Broken links can also be reported to **fixlink@readyed.com.au**.

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Fables



The term “fable” comes from the Latin word “fabula”, which means “a telling”. It refers to a story in which animals and inanimate objects behave like humans in order to illustrate a moral point. The earliest fables came from Sanskrit culture. The famous Aesop’s *Fables* were based on these tales. Aesop was not an author, but a skilled storyteller, repeating tales from various sources. Aesop’s *Fables* were not collected in a written form until 200 years after Aesop’s death.

The simplicity of fables was a major factor in their continuing popularity. Writers in the Middle Ages wanted to deliver moral messages in a simple and entertaining form, and found fables to be an admirable medium. The fables of Reynard the Fox, a character similar in many ways to our modern Bugs Bunny, originated in this era. These tales were written in verse and used various animals, especially Reynard and his arch-enemy, Isengrim the wolf, to comment on social conflict. Concurrently, fables were gaining popularity as a form of creative expression. Jean de la Fontaine, a 17th century fabulist, is considered one of the masters of fables. His moralistic tales used animals in natural settings to satirise French society and human folly.

La Fontaine was criticised in later years for relying too heavily on the charm of the tale itself, rather than writing fables for the primary purpose of communicating a moral. In the 1800s fables returned to concentrating on moral messages. It is in this era that fables began being accompanied with an “application” – a one line summary drawing attention to the moral the fable holds.

In contemporary times fables are again becoming a form of entertainment, rather than a medium for preaching. Fables are now often expanded into the size of a novel, and the moral lessons take second place to the fiction itself – the style and “charm” of the work. One of the most well-known of the modern “fable novels” is George Orwell’s *Animal Farm*. The substitution of animals for humans is emphasised in the ending, where the animals become physically and behaviourally indistinguishable from the humans that they usurped. Cartoons are another example of the modern fable. The focus in these fables is not the “moral”, but the style through which the moral is transmitted – the actions of Bugs et al. For example, in a cartoon where Elmer Fudd is hunting Bugs Bunny, the emphasis is on the slapstick actions of Bugs and Elmer, rather than on a message that hunting is wrong. ■

Internet Resources:

- ▶ www.umass.edu/aesop/fables.php
- ▶ en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aesop's_Fables

Fables



A **fable** is a legend or short story, especially one with a moral.

Fables are often about animals.

The events are usually not possible in the real world (e.g. talking animals). Many of our current cartoon characters are based on this idea (e.g. Mickey Mouse, Bugs Bunny).

Fables often point to bad behaviour or attitudes (such as selfishness, greed or laziness) that the stronger character has. The smaller or weaker character wins by cunning, hard work or honesty.

► Write the names of some of these fables and characteristics.

► Using library books or the Internet, read two of Aesop's fables and then retell them in your own words below. Include the moral for each one.

Title: _____

Moral: _____



Title: _____

Moral: _____

Aesop's Fables



Aesop was an ancient Greek folk hero. His fame was won through his gift of story telling, a gift which apparently gained him his freedom from slavery when the king rewarded him for his entertaining tales. It is not possible to know what of Aesop's life is myth, and what reality, but one recorded version places Aesop as living in the 6th century BC. He was apparently born in Thrace, and lived as a slave on the island of Samos before his dramatic promotion to freedom. As a free man, he enjoyed travelling, and finally met his death in Delphi, an ancient Greek city on the south slopes of Mount Parnassus.

Aesop is often accorded authorship of a number of fables. Fables are tales where animals or inanimate objects act in the manner of humans to illustrate a moral point. Fables have existed since early time, and Aesop was not the author of those attributed to him, but merely the medium through which they were transmitted. The fables which Aesop told were derived from Sanskrit tales. These fables were not recorded until the 4th century B.C., and the earliest surviving collection dates from 1 AD – a Latin transcription of *Aesop's Fables* by Phadreuus. Aesop's Fables have maintained their popularity until the present day. Their simplicity and length made them ideal for reading exercises in schools, and their moral messages have passed into the realm of cliché, e.g. "look before you leap", "all that glitters is not gold", "slow and steady wins the race", etc. ■

Aesop's Fables

The most famous collection of fables comes from an ancient Greek man called Aesop who lived in the 6th century BC. He is thought to have been a slave who gained his freedom by telling his fables to the king.

Aesop's and other fables always have a moral. A moral is the point of the story and directs us to the right way rather than the wrong way to behave. Some examples of morals are shown below.



► Write what you think each saying means.

- Look before you leap.

- Slow and steady wins the race.

- Don't put all your eggs in one basket.

► Read this fable:

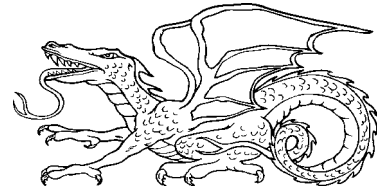
It was a glorious summer. All the animals wanted to play in the sunshine. The ant wanted to play too but knew he must work and store food to prepare for the long winter months. He warned the other animals but they called him a spoilsport and continued to laugh and play all summer long. When the winter came, there was no food to be found. The ant, who had worked hard, had plenty to survive the winter but the other animals had nothing. They were sorry they had not listened to the ant.

► Draw a scene from the fable and write a moral for it.

Moral: _____



Myths



Myths were used by preliterate society to explain natural and social phenomena. They followed the family trees, lives and deeds of superhuman beings who had created, and now watched over, society.

Hercules is the Roman name for a fairly well-known Greek mythological hero, Heracles. His claim to fame is his incredible courage and strength, which was first demonstrated at his birth when he strangled two snakes placed into his crib in an assassination attempt. Hercules began life as a mortal, the illegitimate son of Zeus. He was the only man in the Greek myth structure to make the full transition to immortality. Greek and Roman philosophers considered Zeus a hero-saint, as he apparently chose virtue over pleasure during a lifetime of labour. Hercules' labours were assigned to him by Eurystheus, the Mycenaean king, as punishment. Hercules had killed his own children in a fit of insanity caused by the witchcraft of Hera, the wife of Zeus, who was jealous of Zeus's infidelity.

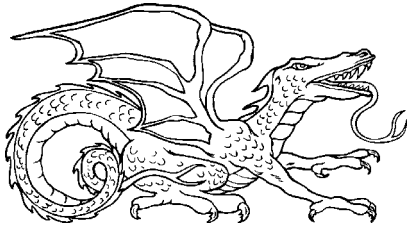
The labours assigned to Hercules were to:

- 1) Kill the Nemean lion, which was invulnerable to metal or stone weapons. Hercules strangled the lion, and flayed it with its own claws.
- 2) Kill the multi-headed Hydra of Lerna, which grew two new heads for each head struck off. He was assisted in this labour by his nephew Iolaus, who burnt the stump of each severed head to stop new ones from growing.
- 3) Capture the golden-horned hind of Ceryneia, who was sacred to Artemis. Hercules tracked the hind for one year until it became exhausted, then pinned its forelegs together with an arrow so skilfully shot that it passed between sinew and bone, drawing no blood.
- 4) Capture the Erymanthian boar, a vicious creature living on Mount Erymanthus. Hercules drove it into a deep snow drift, and then sprang upon its back and chained it.
- 5) Clean the stables of King Augeias. King Augeias owned the most livestock of any mortal. In one day Hercules diverted two rivers to sweep through the cattleyards and fields.
- 6) Drive out the iron-feathered Stymphalian birds, who ate people, and who killed crops with their poisonous excrement. Hercules frightened them away by shaking a brazen rattle given to him by Athene.
- 7) Capture the Cretan bull, which had sired the Minotaur, and which was currently ravaging Crete. Hercules caught the bull single-handedly, even though it belched fire.
- 8) Capture the man-eating mares of the Thracian king, Diomedes.
- 9) Obtain the golden girdle of Hippolyte, the queen of the Amazons. She offered it to Hercules as a love gift, but Hera spread a rumour Hercules meant to abduct Hippolyte, and in the following battle, Hippolyte was killed.
- 10) Drive the cattle of Geryon from far west to Greece. Hercules killed Geryon, who had three bodies joined at the waist, with a single arrow.
- 11) Obtain the golden apples guarded over by the Hesperides (the daughters of Atlas) and the dragon Ladon. Hercules shot Ladon with an arrow, and asked Atlas to pick the apples for him, in return for which he would take on Atlas's burden of supporting the Earth for an hour.
- 12) Capture Cerberus, the watchdog of the underworld. Hades told Hercules that he could take Cerberus if he could master him without clubs or arrows. Hercules throttled Cerberus, who had three heads maned with serpents, and a barbed tail. Hercules was protected by his cloak, and Cerberus, choking, was forced to yield.

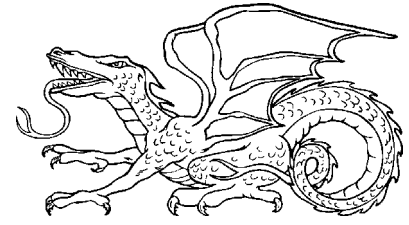
Hercules was assisted in his tasks by magic weapons he gathered during his adventures. From the Nemean lion's body he made himself a cloak and club, and from the blood of the Hydra he made a poison which could kill from a scratch, with which he coated his arrows. This poison eventually caused the death of Hercules, when he used it to shoot down a centaur who was abducting his wife, Deianeira. The centaur gave Deianeira a vial of his poisoned blood, telling her it would ensure Hercules' eternal love for her. Deianeira sent Hercules a shirt dipped in the blood, which consequently poisoned him. Feeling himself to be dying, Hercules chose a hero's death, leaping onto a nearby funeral pyre. As the pyre burned, he was carried up to Mt. Olympus, where he became a god. ■

Internet Resources:

- ▶ www.historyforkids.org/learn/greeks/religion/gods.htm
- ▶ www.ancientgreece.com/html/mythology_frame.htm



Myths



Hercules



This is the outline of a famous Greek myth.

1. Hercules was incredibly strong.
2. The wife of the king of the gods was jealous and put a spell on him.
3. He killed his own children, mistaking them for enemies.
4. As punishment, the king of Greece gave him 12 deadly tasks including destroying dragons and monsters.
5. Hercules completed the tasks and was pardoned.

► Using another sheet of paper, draw Hercules either:

- a. killing the giant lion;
- b. collecting three golden apples which were protected by a dragon;
- c. capturing the three-headed guard dog of Hell.

A **myth** is a special story based on the religion of a group of people. It often tells where people came from and is usually about heroes and villains, gods or nature.

► Library Research

Using library resources or the Internet, write some information about the gods and goddesses listed below.

Zeus - _____

Artemis - _____

Aphrodite - _____

Athena - _____

