Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
1983 Volume II: Greek and Roman Mythology

Greek and Roman Mythology in the Classroom

Curriculum Unit 83.02.11
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The purpose of this study is to supplement the curricula of social and urban studies classes at the secondary level, by introducing Greek and Roman mythology and its influence in contemporary society, as a means to develop or reinforce basic learning skills.

The unit is divided in seven main objectives, namely:

1. to increase the student's vocabulary by introducing readings in Greek and Roman mythology.
2. to reinforce or develop comprehension skills.
3. to encourage students to become more observant and appreciative of the world around them, especially the influence of mythology in the world today.
4. to help students gain further understanding of the process of decision by representation by utilizing an exercise where Greek and Roman mythology is introduced.
5. to encourage the students to make use of library facilities.
6. development and reinforcement of map skill through mythology.
7. to pinpoint the way sex role stereotypes are conceptualized by the Greeks and Romans in mythology.

This study will not involve poetical analysis, but because of the highly motivational content of Greek and Roman mythology, it will be a means to understand how society works and has worked for a very long time, at the same time basic skills are developed or reinforced.

It should be made clear that in mythology, including Greek and Roman mythology, the myths were expressions of the fears, problems, and aspirations that man have had for generations that gradually in

human history took on external reality in the form of myths; and that mouth for a long time, before they were put in written form. At the same time it should be remembered, that these myths were compiled and written by poets who did not hesitate to make changes in the stories whenever it suited their purposes to do so.

No time limitation has been indicated in the objectives or lesson plans of this study, because the emphasis given to it will depend upon the teacher's need.

OBJECTIVES AND STRATEGIES

FIRST OBJECTIVE

One of the main problems in developing or reinforcing reading and writing skills is the students' limited vocabulary. This problem is compounded in social studies classes where the students must read at a faster pace in order to cover the material which is being introduced.

Greek and Roman mythology has special appeal to high school students because in the first place it deals with many fundamental and down to earth concerns that human beings have has about themselves and about the world around them. Concerns such as, violence in man and nature; the forces of love, passion and sex; murder and forms of punishment; treachery and deviousness, and many others. In the second place, the very nature of the development of mythology, lends itself to highly motivational reading materials. In the third place, because many aspects of mythology are manifested in our daily lives and often seem exotic or mysterious.

The first objective of this unit is to increase the students' vocabulary by introducing readings in Greek and Roman mythology. In particular the Labors of Heracles:

As the myths are being introduced, the teacher should have the students do the following:

1. Maintain a list of the vocabulary introduced.
2. Prepare lists of gods and heroes.
3. Prepare list of characteristics and symbols each god or hero listed is associated with.
4. Look up definition of words listed, as well as, those the individual student might need in order to comprehend the material introduced.
5. Translate words. This strategy is geared toward the Spanish dominant student because those are the students the author of this unit works with. Nevertheless, the same strategy can be applied to students dominant in any other language but English.
6. Read narratives of Heracles' Labors or any other myth the teacher may want to introduce. Oral as well as silent reading should be encouraged.
7. Find ways of using new vocabulary in their writing or their speech.
8. Draw, trace or cut out pictures or illustrations that express ideas or actions of the myths being studied.

SECOND OBJECTIVE

One advantage of using myths to improve language comprehension skills is the fact that very often myths have a message to convey or an individual or societal concern to address. When the student comes in contact with myths, his understanding of the content will be more complete, because the information received might very well be within the student's frame of reference or background.

Most of the comprehension skills are developed through constant analytical questioning, but the teacher should place special attention on the timing of the questions. The student should be prepared to delve and explore into the myths when he has acquired familiarity with the vocabulary as well as a general understanding of myths.

Thus, the second objective is to reinforce or develop comprehension skills through the introduction of Greek and Roman mythology readings (Although this study emphasizes the Labors of Heracles, the reader has been provided with bibliographical references that will introduce him or her to a wealth of information.). To achieve this purpose the students will have to do the following:

1. Read and discuss myths.

2. Rewrite myths in their own words.

3. Explain the message of the myth being discussed.

4. Interpret symbols or expressions in myths.

5. Read different versions of the same myth.

In the lesson plans there are sections dedicated to questions to test the understanding of the various myths. However, it is important to note that sometimes the answers do not have to be the same, precisely because of the various versions and interpretations of the myths. The teacher should not discourage the reading of various versions, but the student should be prepared to support his answer.

For the Spanish dominant student the availability of Greek and Roman mythology in Spanish is very limited at the school or city libraries. Nevertheless, the writer has contacted the Department of Education, as well as, the University of Puerto Rico for suitable translations. This information will be available through the Institute, as soon as it is received. In the meantime, the teacher can do her own translation of the myths or request Studying's translation from the Wilbur Cross High School library.

In addition to reading, the interpretation of paintings, illustrations,sculptures, music and other audiovisual materials can encourage the development and reinforcement of comprehension skills.

THIRD OBJECTIVE

As students become familiar with myths, they will be able to recognize words, objects, situations, and places where the influence of mythology is present.

In our rapidly changing world, the realization of some kind of continuity in the human race is very comforting and perhaps essential. This continuity may be achieved by acquiring enough knowledge or information to be able to recognize many objects full of symbolisms.

The third objective is to encourage students to become more observant and appreciative of the world around them, especially the influence of mythology in the world today.

In order to achieve this objective the teacher should;

1. Have students recognize words and expressions where the influence of mythology is present.
2. Have students use words and expressions of mythological background in their speech as well as their writing.
3. Plan trips
    a. to museums
    b. around the city to designated areas where mythological symbols are present.
4. Help students identify characters of mythology.
5. Help student link relationship between the mythological symbol and the operation of a building or place, as well as to things.
6. Pinpoint symbolisms that can be traced back to Greek and Roman mythology on the flags, emblems and seals of countries, states, and cities.
7. Have the student prepare his own dictionary by:
    a. Putting in alphabetical order the names of gods and heroes of Greek and Roman mythology.
    b. Categorizing those listed by sex.
    c. Finding out what each of those listed represent.
    d. Looking up definitions in Spanish.
    e. Cutting out, drawing or tracing illustrations of characters or events connected with Greek and Roman mythology.
    f. Cutting out, drawing or tracing illustrations showing the influence of Greek and Roman mythology today.
The idea is to have immediate accessibility to information pertaining to Greek and Roman mythology.

FOURTH OBJECTIVE

In the social studies classes special emphasis is given t the use of different processes to make a decision. In government, for example concepts as direct democracy (citizens themselves run the government directly.), and representative democracy, where the people make decisions indirectly through their elected representatives, are discussed.

The fourth objective is to help students gain further understanding of the process of decision by representation by utilizing a series of works that the students have already prepared. Those works that the students have already prepared. Those works include the characteristics, symbols, and illustrations of the gods and heroes they have studied and prepared.

The teacher should divide the class in small groups and have the students do the following:

> 1. Select from the work each student has prepared the best representation of characteristics, symbols and illustrations of the gods and heroes.
> 2. Select from their individual groups a student to present and support individual group selections.
> 3. The class as a whole will then vote on the best presentation or selection.

The teacher may want to vary the last process by allowing the students who have been selected to represent each group make the final selection, or by using both processes and comparing end results.

This exercise is also very good to introduce rules of behavior that are expected in committee work.The respect of their peers' is of utmost importance. In order to achieve or motivate proper student conduct the teacher should emphasize that the process of selection will be as important as or more important than the ultimate selection of the best representation of the works.

In order to encourage students to participate and do good work, the teacher, in addition to grading, may add other forms of recognition, such as the following:

> 1. Have the work printed. In schools where the students have access to printing facilities, the printing can be done without much problem.
> 2. Place selection of the individual groups in exhibition.
> 3. Prepare posters.

FIFTH OBJECTIVE

Many times the high school student knows that a school library exists because he has been taken there with

his class, but makes very little use of the facilities it provides. However, for many students the use of the library facilities could be the key for obtaining or achieving academic success. By making use of the library the student can obtain the knowledge or information needed without economic burden in a motivational environment. This means that in addition to the normal library setting, the student does not have to compete or be disturbed by siblings or any other household activity, which seems to be a major problem among most of the students the writer of this study has worked with.

Thus the fifth objective is to encourage the students to make use of library facilities by assigning projects on

Greek and Roman mythology that will require the use of the library for their completion.

In order to accomplish this objective the following strategies can be used:

1. Take the students to the library and ask the librarian to explain the following:
    a. The filing system used in the library.
    b. The checking out or book withdrawal system.
    c. Audiovisual facilities.
2. Plan a trip to the New Haven Library (main) where the students will:
    a. Obtain a library identification card.
    b. Receive a tour of the library with special emphasis on the areas the students will be working on.
3. Reserve the books that will be used the most.
4. Request new material if necessary.
5. Order films and filmstrips on Greek and Roman mythology. (Each library has a catalogue of films and other materials that are accessible to school teachers that has already been categorized by grade levels.)
6. Provide reading suggestions on Greek and Roman mythology that the student can also read for pleasure.
7. Assign book reviews and reports on particular topics that relate to Greek and Roman mythology concerns or expressions.
8. Take the class to the library and do research for the projects right there. The teacher should consult with the librarian first.

SIXTH OBJECTIVE

With the advent of television and later on satellite communications, in addition to rapid means of transportation, places and things that seemed very far and perhaps not very important, have become very real and very close.

This leads us to the sixth objective. the development and reinforcement of map skills through mythology. In this area the students will do the following:

   a. Draw or trace maps of Ancient Greece.
   b. Trace trips of Heracles' Labors.
        1. Killing the Nemine lion - Nemine
        2. Killing the hydra - Argon
        3. Capturing the Erymanthian boar - Arcadian
        4. Capturing the Arcadian stag - Mount Magnolias
        5. Soaring and destroying the birds of Stympahalus - Arcadian
        6. Cleaning the Aegean stables - Elks
        7. Capturing the Creta bull - Crete
        8. Capturing the horses of Diomede - Trace
        9. Retrieving Hippolyte's girdle - Themiscyra
        10. Capturing the cattle of Geryon - Erythia
        11. Plucking the golden apples of the Hesperides - Mount Atlas.
        12. Bringing Cerberus up from the underworld -
   c. Trace important places in the birth of Heracles.
        1. Thebas
        2. Argyles
   d. Find oracles as well as dwellings of the gods.
        1. Dodona
        2. Delhi
        3. Mount Olympus
   e. Trace maps indicating:
        1. Adriatic Sea
        2. Atlantic Ocean
        3. Black Sea
        4. Mediterranean Sea
        5. Red Sea
   f. Write the corresponding names of places in modern times.

SEVENTH OBJECTIVE

An important and often controversial concern in contemporary society, especially American society, is the importance of sex stereotypes in determining the level of participation in decision making roles.

Further insight into this problem can be gained by placing the problem in a historical context, and having the student realize that the concept of sex stereotypes can be traced back to some of the earliest times in western civilization.

The society and mythology of Ancient Greece provide a framework in which this conflict can be identified and analyzed, even in its more extreme manifestations, where the feminine role in society is interpreted exclusively from a masculine perspective.

Thus, the seventh objective is to pin point the way sex role stereotypes are manifested in Greek an Roman mythology.

In order to achieve this objective, the teacher should have the students do the following:

1. Classify gods by sex.
2. Classify gods by roles.
3. Compare both classifications.
4. Read a narrative of the myth of Athena's birth.
    a. Explain why the process of her birth is important.
    b. Could Athena be considered an exception to the roles attributed to other goddesses?
    c. Explain her roles.
5. Read a narrative about Her.
    a. How is she related to Zeus?
    b. Does she get more power and respect for being Zeus' wife than Zeus' sister?
6. Check how much this concept of male roles in decision making positions has changed by doing the following:
    a. Prepare a questionnaire indicating the following questions:
1. Is the principal of your school male or female?
2. Is the mayor of the city male or female?
3. Is the governor of the state male or female?
4. Is the president of the United States male or female?

Lesson Plan I

1. Introduce various definitions of the word myth.
2. Provide a list of now vocabulary depending upon the narrative of the myth to be introduced.
3. Selecting the myth of the birth of Heracles for the first lesson plan the teacher may introduce the following vocabulary:

  a. curse   a. maldicio«n

  b. enchantment b. encantamiento

  c. fate   c. destino

  d. immortal   d. immortal

  e. chariot   e. carriage

  f. linger   f. prolonged

  g. oath   g. juramenta

4. Have the students read the narrative and identify the characters and their individual characteristics. (sample chart)

CHARACTER	CHARACTERISTICS	SYMBOLS
Heracles	strong, mortal	nothing yet
Zeus	powerful, immortal	thunderbolt
Alcmene	beautiful, noble, mortal	
Amphitryon	understanding, mortal	
Hera	powerful, vengative, immortal	scepter

5. After the students have prepared a preliminary assessment of the characters, assign them individual research on each of the characters.
6. Using a map have students identify places where important events take place as shown in following example.

    a. Themes

    b. Argyles

7. Have the students prepare a genealogy of Heracles.
8. Have the students answer the following questions:

    1. What particular act did Heracles perform when he was ten months old?

    2. Explain the events that led to that happening.

    3. Explain the fact that Zeus appears more than once in Heracles' genealogy.

Lesson Plan II

1. Prepare a list of words and expressions whose origin can be traced back to Greek and Roman mythology.

a. to win laurels	gainer laurel	Apollo and Daphne
b. hygiene	hygiene	Hyegia
c. fatal	fatal	the Fates
d. jovial	jovial	Jupiter (Zeus)
e. By Jove	por Jove«	Jupiter (Zeus)
f. January	enero	Janus
g. February	febrero	Febo (Apollo)
h. March	marzo	Mars
i. Thursday	jueves	Jupiter (Zeus)
j. Saturday	sabado	Saturn
k. atlas	atlas	Atlas
l. Atlantic Ocean	Oceano Atla«ntico	Atlas
m. herculean	herculeo	Heracles and the
		stables of
n. Augean task	obra Augiana	King Augeas.

2. The teacher should have the student trace the origin of the words or expressions as shown, and/or request that the students prepare their own list.

3. Using the encyclopedias available in the library, the teacher should have the students find:

   a. Symbolisms that can be traced to Greek and Roman mythology on flags, seals, emblems, and currency of countries.

   1. Flags

Albania	eagle	supreme power	royal bird of
Ecuador	eagle	supreme power	Jupiter (Zeus)

   2.Seals

United States	eagle	supreme power	Jupiter
Greece	Heracles	strength	Heracles

   b. The same idea applies to states, cities and other organizations like schools, and local corporations.

4. Once the student is familiarized with the ideas represented by each design, he will become more observant of the things he sees. Now, if the student looks at an owl on a medal, he will associate the design with wisdom and high achievement. The owl was the bird of Athena in the same way the eagle was the bird of Zeus. To reinforce this new association, have the student look at magazines, posters, and advertisements.

5. Have the student look at different brand names in order to identify designs of Greek and Roman mythology origin and explain why that particular symbol was chosen.

Good Year Tire and Rubber Co. Hermes foot speed

Mobilegas	Pegasus	speed and power	
Atlas Moving Co.	Atlas	strength and	knowledge of the world.

6. Have the students create their own company and choose a design.

Lesson Plan III

The third lesson is a follow up after the student has read the Labors of Heracles.

1. Who is the main character in the Labors of Heracles?
2. Why did Heracles have to spend his whole life in the midst of danger and confusion?
3. Where do the myths take place? (Have the student trace maps.)
4. Name instances where Heracles demonstrated a good sense of values. (When he met the maidens of virtue and vice, and chose virtue. - Saving Prometheus.)
5. What incident motivated the Labors of Heracles? (Murder of wife and children.)
6. Would Heracles have been prosecuted in our system of justice?
7. What possible reason could he have used to plead not guilty?
8. How did Heracles bear away the Nemean lion's skin? (Since no other weapon could penetrate it, he used the lion's claws.)
9. Why did he wear the skin as his mantle for the rest of his life? (Because it was weapon-proof.)
10. How did Heracles manage to kill the Hydra? (By searing the necks with fire.)
11. What would it mean to say that cities have hydra-headed problems? (Fix one problem on one side and get two new ones on the other.)
12. What did King Euristheus do when he saw the wild boar? (Hide in a vase.) What quality does this act demonstrated? (cowardice).
13. Why was it difficult to catch the doe of Cerynes (Arcadian stag)? (Because it could run

continuously without fatigue.)

14. In the myth of the Cretan Bull, why is Poseidon angry with King Minos? (Because King Minos did not sacrifice the bull to him ass he had promised.)

15. From the reaction of Poseidon in this myth, what qualities could be said this god possesses? (gullibility, need of praise).

16. From the reaction of King Minos? (avarice).

17. When Heracles was commanded to capture the cattle of Geryon, what other quality besides strength did he show? (Wit-by using the lion's skin as a sail.)

18. In his search for the golden apples of the Hesperides, Heracles encountered a giant named Antaeus. In this myth, why did the giant regain strength everytime he touched the ground? (Because the giant mother was Gaea, and she renewed his strength everytime he touched her.)

19. How did Heracles manage to kill Antaeus? (By keeping him off the ground.)

20. What did Heracles do to Prometheus? (Liberated him.)

21. What did Prometheus give to mankind? (Fire; symbolizing learning and civilization.)

22. Whose aid did Heracles secure in order to obtain the golden apples of the Hesperides? (Atlas).

23. Have the students narrate the myth of how Heracles managed to give the globe back to Atlas.

24. If the students visit the British Art Center they will see among other things, a bust of Heracles by John Michael Rysbrack, a bust of Omphale with the Nemean lion's skin on her head by Joseph Wilton, and a painting "The Education of Achilles" by James Barry, that depicts Heracles with the two serpents on Achilles' shield. The first question would be, why did the artist place the lion's skin on Omphale's head? (Probably, because she had gained control over Heracles.) The Second question is, why is Heracles' symbol on Achilles' shield? (Because Heracles was Achilles' hero.)

25. Above the entrance door of the Telephone Company on Church street the reader will see a sculpture with Mercury. Why would the telephone company use Mercury as a symbol?

Resources:

1. Audiovisual Center, 59 High Street, New Haven - Library and catalogue of materials.
2. Congressional Library, Washington, D. C.
3. Film Study Center, 305 Crown Street, New Haven, Tel. 432-4644—Advise only
4. Metropolitan Museum of Art, Fifth Avenue at 82nd Stree, New York City.

Service Bureau for Classical Teachers, American Classical League, Miami Request catalog University, Oxford, Ohio

Classroom materials:

1. Slide and overhead projectors.

2. Blackboard

3. Maps

4. Records

5. Magazines

Other resources:

Yale Art Gallery

British Art Center

Other activities:
1. Invite guest speakers.
2. Decorate room with mythological posters and illustrations.
3. As a research activity, draw a parallel between heroes in Greek and Roman Mythology and more contemporary cultural heroes.

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