



## Learning and Living through Mythology

Curriculum Unit 93.03.02  
by Carolyn Williams

### Introduction

---

I posed the following question to a group of Talented and Gifted Students: “What might be some advantages or disadvantages, if you awoke to find you belong to a different ethnic group than you did when you went to sleep?”

Their collective verbal response was “silence.” Individual facial expressions and body language revealed confusion, embarrassment, caution and perhaps, even fear about relating the stereotypical images that they have come to know of each others cultures. Further exploration through “what if” questions suggested, to me, that they knew so little of each other’s cultures that the question was better left unexplored, within that setting. So begins this unit.

### Objectives

---

Generally, this is an eighteen week unit in drama which proposes to expose fourth grade gifted students to the myths and plays of African and Latin American cultures. Specifically, it aims to promote social acceptance of cultures other than one’s own. I hope that through this enhanced awareness, these Students, are better able to learn from each other in the classroom and live together in the larger communities of this society.

It should be noted that the group for whom this unit is intended is made up of students who regularly attend four to five different elementary schools, but come together one day/per week for TAG resource room programming. These children have been socialized in segregated school and community environments. Many of them are unaware of the beliefs and practices of others who belong to different ethnic or socio-economic groups. Many are unfamiliar with the language of other groups, uninformed, or rather misinformed about values or value systems of particular cultures.

Within a given group of academically successful students, there is open resistance to developing a group cohesiveness that is much needed for effective learning. Coupled with that resistance is an even greater opposition to simply working with members of different ethnic groups. Within a classroom where cooperation is as much a part of the learning process as is individual performance and thinking skills and abilities, ethnic

division is not acceptable social behavior.

Past experiences have shown me that “gifted” children have very little interest in getting to know each other, and a lesser concern for how their self-imposed lines of division affect their learning and living together. In order to help these first year students find levels of comfort within their new group and foster an environment in which they are free to learn from each other, early boundary breaking and socialization activities are necessary.

It is important for any teacher who may wish to use this unit, or any part of it, to know that the planning is based on a team teaching approach, in a self-contained classroom setting, with a physical space that is the equivalent of two rooms. Students are with us for, at least four hours of the day. Also many of the students are highly skilled, independent learners and self-starters.

It is my hope that as students increase their knowledge of the cultural backgrounds of their classmates, they also increase their appreciation for, the similarities, rather than focus solely on the differences that exist among themselves as a multi-cultured group. I would like to help the children understand that it is our differences that make us unique and that these differences cannot be judged on the basis of one’s own culture.

## Strategies

---

I have chosen a number of activities which explore the similarities and differences among people. For example, “Meet someone who” focuses on shared experiences, beliefs and values. “The Me Bag” and “Getting to know you” aim at building respect for differences among people. Other activities will be developed, after I have had some time to work with the children. I have decided to form a multi-cultural Community theater group, which will serve as a common enterprise in which students will be required to work. and live together. The group’s major purpose is to present the myths that were selected for this unit, through role playing and Reader’s Theater, and write an original play or myth which focuses on the lives of the various ethnic groups who make up the classroom community.

I have chosen mythology for the content of this unit in social learning, first because it is the core topic of study for fourth grade TAG students. This unit is merely an extension of the existing curriculum, but it should be kept in mind that the focus is social learning. Secondly, there is a natural fascination for mythology, that is held by nine and ten year old children, which easily lends itself to open communication on personal levels. Lastly and more importantly, the mythology of any group, meaning myths, fables, folktales and fairytales deals with basic concerns of human life. They are stories of a people’s culture .

As a starting point, I recommend “Meet Someone Who.” I am asking each child to find other students who are much like themselves and talk with them before making decisions about one’s capabilities or personality. This oral activity will be followed by an evaluative discussion about what traits, and what likes or dislikes the students have in common or what things are different. Questions will relate to the way they perceive individuals. (See Lesson # 1.)

Before beginning the content portion of this unit, it might be wise to hold an informal discussion about students’ perceptions of the different ethnic groups that make up the American society. Make clear certain

concepts about culture in general. It's important that students enter this study with an understanding that American culture, if there is such a term, is a combination of various cultures. The information which follows may serve as a basis for discussion.

Even today, we have been unable to reach a clear and decisive agreement on a definition of the term culture. However, anthropologists agree on certain essentials of a definition. Broadly perceived, "culture is the way of life of a group of people: the sum total of all the values, customs, mores, habits, institutions and traditions, as well as the sanctioned modes of behavior and appearance that the individual must learn in order to become an acceptable member of his society.(Dorman,1974)

Emphasis should be placed on the idea "his Society". Consider the fact that the American society is made up of various Cultural groups, all of whom brought to this Country—an existing culture; all of whom have had to adjust to new ways of thinking and living.-, none of whom have been able to relinquish their traditional cultural heritage.

According to (Dorman,1974) the anthropologist, Leslie White presents an interesting and persuasive argument in his theory for a kind of cultural determinism, ". . . it is not "we" who control our Culture [;] . . . our Culture controls us." He believes that one's culture begins at birth. From the time a child is born, that infant's Culture will determine how he will think, feel and act. Culture will determine what language he will speak, what clothes he will wear, if any, what gods he will believe in, what he will eat, how he will marry or how he will bury his dead.

While one's culture remains relatively stable, it does grow and develop. It experiences various modifications, as people discover new and different ways of doing things. The changes may occur within the Culture due to technological advances, or relocation of families.

I offer, in example, a family who moves from a small rural town may find an urban city overcrowded, noisy and busy. The adult may find that he has to assume a number of different roles in a variety of social settings. No longer can he rely on the intimacy of small-town life and kinship. His social circle is now likely to become large and impersonal schools or churches, business offices and public transportation. He is now asked to face and solve problems in new settings and under new conditions. This kind of culture change is known as internal change.

Dorman continues, there can also exist external change, which is brought about from without the Culture, either through diffusion, acculturation or assimilation. Diffusion is a kind of Cultural borrowing of selected Culture materials, whereby culture spreads from one group to another on the basis of limited contact.

This is an acceptable kind of change. It can well be thought of as learning about others, while adopting those parts of another's culture that is of use within the structure of your, own. This kind of Culture change is best suited for today's American classroom. For it allows the various ethnic groups to maintain their identities and learn from and about each other.

Acculturation is described as conforming to another culture without destroying the identity of the original culture.(Dorman, 1974) This kind of change, while more disruptive than diffusion, does not require one to completely abandon his culture, only that one understands enough about another's culture to adjust. Consider the position of a child in the family who has relocated from rural to urban America. In addition to adjusting to the new roles that are required of the adult, the child also faces a new neighborhood and a new school, each requiring a new socialization process; each requiring the child to lose a bit more of his individual culture.

Finally, there is assimilation. One culture incorporates another. The second, or the assimilated group completely loses individual identity and becomes part of the dominant group.(Dorman 1974) This appears to be the attitude of the dominant group, here in America. This perhaps, is one of the greatest reasons that we are under-achieving as a society.

From what we know about the stability of cultures, we know that individuals do not readily give up their culture to identify with the traditions of another. Moreover, dominant groups are rarely willing to incorporate foreign cultures or subcultures. The best we can hope for, here in America is diffusion. We can, at least make an attempt at achieving a multi-cultural society.

By way of introduction to the content portion of this unit, myths and culture, it would be most helpful to familiarize students with the work of Joseph Campbell, who spoke of the commonality in world myths, in his book, *The Power of Myth* . “What human beings have in common is revealed in myths. Myths are stories of our search through the ages for truth, for meaning, for significance. We all need to tell our story and to understand our story.” (Campbell, 1988) If we are to live together as a people, we have to understand the stories of all the people.

At this point students will be asked to read the myth which most closely represents his cultural heritage. Students may elect to read individually or within small groups. (Small groups are preferred). They should be told at this time, however that they will be asked to engage in activities that relate to analyzing and evaluating each of the myths. The myths will serve as a springboard to a comparative discussion of the beliefs and practices that are common among these cultures. Other activities will include role playing, research, creative writing and play production.

In keeping with Campbell’s idea of commonality in myth and culture, we will examine from each of the chosen cultures, myths which relate the origin of fire. From African mythology, “How Man Got Fire”, as retold by Susan Bennett; Ella E Clark’s “The Origin of Fire, a myth of the Nimipu Indian, and the well known Greek myth, “Prometheus Brings Fire to Man”, as told by Barbara Drake in *Myths, Fables and Folktale* ; and from Mexican culture, “Opossum Steals Fire” by Pablo Guerrono, from *The Mythology of Mexico and Central America*. The story of Prometheus will be further analyzed through a reader’s theater production of Aeschylus’ play , “Prometheus Bound”, as translated by Edwin Dolin and Alfred Sugg in *An Anthology of Greek Tragedy* .

The myths have been summarized, for the purposes of this unit. They appear at the beginning of the activities segment of the unit. The actual classroom readings will be taken from the texts, in order to give the children complete information from which to work.

After having read the selected myth and orally summarizing it for the whole group, students will be asked to discuss the similarities, in theme, character and plot structure that exist among the myths. The group will be responsible for charting their findings, once they have heard each of the summaries.

This is a good point in the lesson where role playing can be introduced. Students will need to become familiar with the process for role playing, as outlined in the book, *Role playing for social value* (Shaftel,1967). I have outlined the Greek myth for this activity, simply because it is the more familiar of the four myths that were selected. (See Lesson #2 in the activity segment.)

As a part of the evaluative discussion, elicit responses from the children with concern to the following. This particular story idea deals with the struggle for human survival and the willingness to sacrifice oneself to help another. In the Greek myth, it was the demi—god, Prometheus. In the African and Indian versions, fire came to

earth by the ingenuity of a child, the son of the village chief and a young, gifted boy. In the Mexican version, fire is brought to the people by an animal. All of these characters were aware that fire belonged to the gods, but thought it was important that fire was shared with the people on earth. For this act, each was punished by the gods.

Their punishments, naturally took different forms, based upon the beliefs of the culture from which the myth was taken. Prometheus was chained to a cliff where he was made to suffer continuously. The son of the African chief was made lame. The young, gifted child was never seen again in the Indian village and the opossum ended up with a bald tail. These sacrifices, they each decided to make in order to help other. With the exception of Prometheus, who Could see into the future, ( as we will find out in the play, Prometheus Bound), these characters could not have known what would happen to them. Each did know that the people of the villages had pleaded with the gods for fire and had not received it. They each had to have believed that there was a very good reason, why man was not given fire, or they would have had to believe that the gods were mean and unjust in all their dealings with mankind.

We can make a very good argument against that belief if we studied the cultures of the groups more closely. We know from popular literature that the Greeks worshipped a number of gods. Each controlled a different aspect of nature. They were thought of as guardians of mortal man and had the power to determine the way in which one's life developed. Naturally, the people wanted to be warmed, to be fed; they asked their guardians for fire. One of their guardians saw to it that they got it. Again, I refer to the play, Prometheus Bound”

. . . But I had nerve, and I contrived a way to rescue mortals from the certainty of death that hovered over them. That's why I'm humbled here by suffering—why pain's my lot, and pity, too, from those who have to look at me. It was from that pity I made my move—for mortals. Yet it seems, I'm not thought worthy of the same myself. Instead, this lesson in obedience, you see—in discipline—was forced on me, a spectacle that should bring shame on Zeus.

Some Africans believed in a single god and that everything possessed a spirit. Their prayers were addressed to the spirits of their ancestors. There were good spirits to make their crops grow or ward off harm to their ancestors. Naturally, they would ask the god(s) or spirits for fire to keep themselves warm. if their existence were improved in this life, so would it be in their afterlife. They too would eventually become ancestral spirits capable of bringing good luck to their, descendants.

Some Indians accept the man-nature relationship. Every living and non-living thing was sacred. Evil, pain and death resulted from the disturbance of the harmony of one with nature. The village people understood that the boy had disappeared, for he had disturbed nature. We all know that the Indians live as one in harmony with the earth. They make use of only what they need for their survival. They needed fire, naturally, they asked the gods for it. All natural—especially—living beings possess supernatural powers. Some tribes believed in a single supreme being. Still there were other tribes, whose faith was placed in rituals, fasting and sacrifices. We know this to be true, also of certain African tribes.

It would be almost impossible to create an adequate picture of the commonality among cultures, without requiring the students, themselves to make a cursory examination of the cultures. Of Course, it is not necessary to ask each student to research all of the cultures, or all aspects of any culture. Since we are researching ethnic/Americans, it would be a good idea to include some historical background information of the cultures before emigrating to America. I have decided to handle this as a class project.

The project will be billed as “Culture Trek”. This is a non-threatening way in which students can research history, language and customs of a Culture. I have outlined a sample project idea based on the African Culture. It is important to give the children some information with which to work. However, keep in mind that it is always useful to allow students to make their own discoveries and their own choices in directing their learning. (See sample project study in the activity segment—Lesson #3.)

Once the research is underway, students are ready to begin writing their original scripts or myths, that will become plays. Discussions and activities about culture, about the myths about relations among ethnic groups in America, should continue.

Throughout the course of the discussion and activities, students should have an opportunity to talk about themselves, as it relates to any one of the theme ideas that is being Studied. I intend to incorporate the social activities into the academics.

Shortly after, the myths have been read and initially discussed, the play, “Prometheus Bound should be casted and rehearsals begun. At about the same time, the “Culture Trek” project should also begin. (The structure of the program allows for this kind of planning. All students don’t work an the same activities, at the same time. We are not restricted to forty two minute periods, and there are two teachers, at all times.)

With regard to the play, “Prometheus Bound”, it will be performed as a reader’s theater production and will require a minimal amount of work on the production side, i.e. props, costuming, scenery. Understanding and delivering the meaning should be the thrust of the focus, in preparing for the play.

With regard to the discussion of the play, emphasis will be placed on the fact that it follows the myth about fire and relates Prometheus’ punishment for giving fire to man. Also, we will discuss how that punishment fits into the cultural beliefs and practices of the Greeks.

The unit culminates with the a small-scaled cultural festival. (We’ll have the second half of the year to work on that.) Suffice to say now, it will include the results of the “Culture Trek” project, the production of “Prometheus Bound” and the original play of the community theater group.

I offer this quote in closing “We are charged with the moral challenge of creating a humane world community in which all human beings can realize themselves. The anthropologist, Rhoda Metreaux, poses for us the challenge of whether we can, consciously recognizing that cultures are man-made, take the responsibility of directing our social evolution.” (Shaftel,1967)

For myself, I see that our greatest challenge in directing social evolution lies in having the ability to place oneself in another’s position to sense a movement from one’s own cultural environment into that of a subculture. What would be the cultural outlook if one approached events from a culture other than one’s own?

## Lesson plans and Activities

---

### Myth Summaries

*How Man Got Fire by Susan Bennett*

Obassi Osaw made all things on Earth, but he did not give fire to man. The people on earth huddled together for warmth and complained that Obassi Osaw was cruel to put them on the earth and not give them a means of keeping themselves warm.

The village chief went to the god and pleaded with him for fire, but was denied. The chief then sent his youngest son, but Obassi Osaw refused him too. The boy, determined to get fire for the people and to please his father made a third journey to the compound of Obassi Osaw, this time he would steal it, if necessary.

That night when Obassi Osaw called to his wife to bring him the lamp, she was busy with something else and asked the boy to light the lamp and take it in to her husband. The boy used a long, slender stick to light the lamp which he wrapped in leaves so that it wouldn't burn out, and hid it in the folds of his clothes. He was able to hide the stick outside of the compound until it was time for him to leave.

When all was quiet, the boy crept outside, took the stick from the brush where he had hidden it and ran until he reached earth. He pulled the leaves from the burning stick and showed the people how to use fire.

Obassi awoke to find smoke coming from the earth. Immediately, he sent his eldest son, Akpan to earth to find if the boy had stolen fire. The boy confessed.

Because he had walked to heaven, took the fire and walked back to earth, the boy would always walk as one who was burned, not straight and proud but lame. And so it has been, lame boy cannot walk.

#### *The Origin of Fire by Ella E Clark*

Fire belonged to the Great Power and was kept in great black bags in the sky. The Nimipu Indian could see fire in the sky, but they had none with which they could cook their foods or warm themselves. The people longed for fire. The medicine men beat their drums, but fire did not come down from the sky.

A young boy noticed that each time the two great black bags came together, there was a crashing and tearing sound and fire sparkled in the sky. He decided that he would get fire for his people. The medicine men laughed, but the boy did get fire. With his best bow and arrow, he hit the great black bag and brought fire down from the clouds.

When the burning arrow fell to the earth, it struck his favorite shell, which he had placed on the ground and there started a small flame. The people quickly lit fires in the center of their tipis and there it remained as a blessing to every home.

When the excitement died down, the people noticed that the boy was nowhere to be found, but on the ground lay his shell, burned so that it showed the colors of fire. The boy was never seen again.

#### *Prometheus Brings Fire to Man by Barbara Drake*

The men of the silver age had been destroyed in the great flood that was sent by the god, Zeus. The new race of men that had been created by Prometheus suffered greatly from the cold. They complained that someone would create them and leave them to lead such miserable lives.

Zeus declared that these men were more disagreeable than the race of men that had been destroyed in the flood. Prometheus knew that Zeus would destroy these men too, if something were not done to make their lives better. He thought of giving them the gift of fire. This would allow them to warm themselves, cook their,



food and forge metal for tools and weapons. They could make light at night, so that their world would not seem so dreary and dark. Prometheus made his plans secretly, since he knew that Zeus would never agree to give man fire. It had been decreed that only the gods should have fire.

Prometheus gave one last look at his home, Mount Olympus, for he knew that he would never be allowed to return, once Zeus learned of what he had done. He broke from the sun, a fragment of glowing coal, and hiding it in the hollow of a giant fennel's stalk, Prometheus carried it down to earth and showed man how to use it

Zeus was very angry. He ordered Prometheus seized and chained to a cliff where a vulture was sent to pick at his liver all day long. Each night Prometheus' liver grew back, and there was no end to his suffering.

### *Opossum Steals Fire by Pablo Guerrero*

An old, but fearless Mexican Woman managed to get fire when it scarcely had become separated from the stars. She went to where it had fallen, got it and kept it for a long time. The people of the village thought that fire should be for everyone and begged the woman to share with them. She would not share.

Much time had passed. Since they had suffered so badly from the cold and from eating raw meats, Opossum made a promise to the people to get fire for them, if they in turn promised never to eat him. Everyone made fun of him, but that evening, Opossum brought fire to the village just as he had promised.

Opossum was able to convince Lady Fire that he was very cold. Fire thought that he would die unless he could warm himself by her fire. He got close enough to the fire so that his tail caught fire and he ran into the village sharing fire with the people along the way.

That is why Opossums today have bald tails.

## **Lesson #1**

---

### **Meet Someone Who**

#### **Objective:**

To discover and evaluate ways in which students are unique and what things they may have in common .

#### **Preparation:**

Hand out teacher-made sheet on which students may record their findings. Directions should be given, verbally, so that the students are clear about the assignment and so that they don't think of it as "another" ditto.

#### **Procedure:**

(Part 1) Student selects partners. Teacher directs both students to talk with each other about any subject(s) they choose, for three minutes. Next they should begin to discuss attributes and interests each one has. One student will be responsible for writing. Various suggestions should be given, a: things they own, skills they have, places they have visited, likes and dislikes, and others.



(Part 2) After 15-20 minutes, give students a list of items and ask them to move freely about the room to locate other classmates who share common interests or traits and write their names beside the items listed. The list may consist of any combination of ideas.

(Part 3) Ask students to write about themselves and allow others to read it. Students might list some accomplishments, weird behaviors, talents, etc. The child is sharing information about what he, feels makes him unique.

( Part 4) A quick oral evaluation of how the children felt about meeting other students, what they learned about each other or about themselves could be done within this class setting or at another time. Specific questions might be raised. “ What are some of the differences that exist among you?” “Which of these differences are sufficient enough to keep you separated in your classrooms or communities? What are some common traits among you?” “Knowing what you do about an individual, how would you use that information to work with that student, here in the classroom?”

Note the evaluation stage could take on a rather philosophical tone. It should be remembered that the children will relax if the teacher relaxes.

## Lesson # 2

---

### Role Playing

#### **Objective:**

To use the process of role playing to evaluate a myth.

#### **Note:**

This outline is based on the Greek myth.

#### **The process:**

1. “Warming up” the group (problem confrontation)
2. Selecting the participants (role players)
3. Preparing the audience to participate as observers
4. Setting the stage
5. Role playing (enactments)
6. Discussing and evaluating
7. Further enactments (replaying revised roles, exploring alternative possibilities)
8. Further discussion
9. Sharing experiences and generalizing.

*The Problem* (step 1) You are Zeus. You have concluded that Prometheus has purposely committed this act of defiance. You are not so angry that mankind now has fire, but that Prometheus aided mankind without your permission. What would you do? *Discussion and evaluation* (Step 6) will depend largely upon the enactment. This is the point, however, at which specific questions will be raised concerning Zeus' actions and why one feels that he behaved in such a way. "Was Zeus cruel and unjust to punish Prometheus so severely?" "Was he within his rights because he was supreme ruler?" "Could Zeus have been jealous of Prometheus because Prometheus had created a race of men who were superior to earlier races of men?" "How would this situation differ if Zeus were considered the humanitarian who brought fire to man?" "Would Prometheus become upset because Zeus had interfered with Prometheus' divine creation?" This kind of question sets up *Further enactments* (Step 7). Finally *Sharing experiences and generalizations* (Step 8) would solely depend upon those things which have come out of the total role playing experience.

The process can be used with any one of the myths. I have outlined these four steps because they are most crucial to the evaluation of the myth. Other steps in the role-playing process are equally important and should be performed in sequence.

## Lesson #3

---

### Culture Trek

#### **Objective:**

Students will research and prepare a seminar presentation about the heritage of a culture. The presentation should include visual aides, traditional dress, music , art , artifacts (where possible) and the retelling of the fire myth. (Additional Suggestions from the students are welcome.)

#### **Preparation:**

Whet the appetites of the students, by providing bits and pieces of background information with which they may begin their research. Where possible, provide opportunities for them to familiarize themselves with print and nonprint materials about cultures. May I suggest this as an independent activity?

#### **(Background Information)**

Scientists believe that the original home of black people was in the grasslands or Savanna lands between the Sahara Desert and the equatorial rainforest area around the Congo River.

The greatest number of Africans are blacks of mixed blood. The most important groupings in Africa, are cultural and linguistic. These groups who live in different ways and speak more than one thousand different non-European languages are called tribes.

More and greater differences grew among groups as they traveled across the land. The few languages grew into many. As various tribal groups moved across the Savannas in southern, eastern and northern Africa, new groups emerged and new ways of living came about.

African civilizations grew and flourished through the rise and fall of great and powerful kingdoms like Ghana, Mali and Songhay (These are not the modern nations of West Africa as we know them). Perhaps, more than the influence of any conquering nation, the culture dynamics of the great Atlantic slave trade to the New

World, which lasted nearly four hundred years, changed the basic cultural orientation of the individual African experience to produce a new product, the Afro-American.

### ***(Current Issues)***

The newcomer, the Afro-American not only had to adjust to his new environment and his new circumstances, but also had to shed considerable cultural experiences which he brought with him from Africa.

The fairest and perhaps easiest culture change for the new-world African or Afro-American would have been diffusion. Instead there was enslavement without relative cultural consideration. Diffusion required limited contact between cultures. Such was highly unlikely, when slaves were responsible for running the households, raising the children and laboring the plantations of their masters. That brings us to acculturation.

The acculturating group (Afro-Americans) did not have sufficient knowledge of and experience with the way of life of the dominant group. Contact was permitted only to a degree and the degree was determined by the dominant group—in this case the masters of slaves. That left only assimilation as an avenue of cultural change. That is the problem of today; that is the subject for another research project. Should we then conclude that a people neither diffused, acculturated or assimilated into another culture is without culture?

The African American is not without culture. He has had to develop a counter-culture as a survival technique in his new and often, hostile environment. This counter-culture however, maintains strong traces of traditional African Culture.

### ***(Cultural Ties)***

Survival techniques were built around organized religion. Perhaps, one of the most powerful forces among the culture, religion has provided a structured social life for blacks in America, today . From the medicine man, Islam, Christianity, and Hinduism comes the power of the African church, as we know it today. The church might best be described as a place where one could give expression to his deepest anguish and agony and at the same time, give meaning to his existence. (Goldstein, 1971)

Religious beliefs are strong in most Africans. Although much of African religious practices were regarded by Europeans as witchcraft and voodoo, for the believer, it was his tribal religion and a powerful form of worship. The medicine man was highly respected. He was both doctor and priest.

Some Africans believe that everything in the world possesses a spirit. Others believe that many objects had magical powers to do good or evil. Tribal religions have certain elements in common: the world was created by a single god and spirits are worshipped. The belief that there is one god exists today for many people of African descent, as does that of spirit worship.

Mobility might be considered as another technique of survival. One form of oppression was traded for another as African Americans moved from one place to another, but the fact remains that escape from one's present conditions was and is the motivating force. This takes the present day American back to his African roots.

African people moved across the continent on foot, following trails and water courses, even through the Sahara Desert. Some people wandered constantly, others settled and built their lives in one place. Africans designed their homes or huts so that they were easily built and easily left behind. Whether they were round huts made of leaves and branches, or stick-frame Compounds made to house the animals, they were meant only to give shelter, not to be lived in constantly.

This ideology might explain the migratory patterns of today's African American, for instance the great migration from the South to the North to escape oppression. It could explain the movement of inner city residents from one rented apartment to another. Of course, there are a number of political and economic factors at work here, but the fact remains that the mobility technique is in place. The cultural heritage is intact.

**\*(Did you know)**

Afro-Americans have inherited a tradition that is very much alive in the way of speech and thought; a tradition that is clearly evident in the language and mythology of black folk; a tradition that has a common root in the linguistic and mythological structures of Africa. (Boldstein,1971)

Many misconceptions about the patterns of English that black people speak have been accepted as truth. What many refer to as Black English is simply an inheritance from African tongues coupled with a need to communicate with Africans of various tribal origins both in the homelands and on American plantations.

Black English originated in Africa rather than in the new world, and has undergone many changes. However, despite the changes, several African features are still present. Almost all of the languages of Africa can be placed into three families: Sudanic, Bantu, and Hamitic. Afro-Americans come mainly from the lower Congo, which is Bantu speaking.

**\*(Find out)**

- about customs of marriage, child birth, family
- education
- ritual and drama, art, music, dance and rhythm
- other

**Procedure:**

As students complete any part of their research it would be a good idea to have them display some artistic creation or informational piece, in order that others may learn at the same time.

## **TEACHER BIBLIOGRAPHY**

---

### *Mythology*

Baade, Eric C. *Myths and Their Meaning* (Teacher's Guide). Massachusetts: Allyn and Bacon, 1985. This guide provides background information for class discussion and special projects in Greek and Roman mythology.

Baker, Charles F. and Baker, Rosalie. *The Classical Companion*. New Hampshire: Cobblestone, 1988. A source book for teachers and

students describing historical events, leaders and the people of five ancient civilizations. It also includes stories, puzzles, projects and an original play, "The Druids and the fall Of Gaul.

Campbell, Joseph. *The Power of Myth* . New York: Doubleday, 1988. A companion book to the television series of conversations with Bill Moyers. Campbell speaks of mythology as the religion of our souls. The information is based on a lifetime of living with myths from around the world . The book speaks to the commonality in world myth and the commonality among cultures.

Hackin, J. et.al. *Asiatic Mythology*. New York Crescent (Copyright secured under Berne Convention). The book offers a detailed description and explanation of the mythologies at the great nations of Asia. Illustrations included.

Herzberg, Max J. *Myths and their Meaning* . Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1978. The book contains myths of the Greeks and Romans. It is intended to appeal to the man on the street, the average reader, students of literature, and to the teacher of the classics, both English and Latin. It contains myths, myth references in literature and music, ideas for oral and written composition, project ideas and chapter quizzes.

Kitzhaber, Albert. ed. *Myths, Fables and Folktales* . New York: Holt Rinehart and Winston Inc. 1974. Think of this book as a wonderful collection a fables, parables, proverbs, myths, folktales, fairytales and discussion questions with project ideas.

### *History and Anthropology*

Chu, Daniel and Skinner, Elliot. *A Glorious Age in Africa* . Trenton: Africa World Press, 1992. This book celebrates the history of three great empires of Africa. It takes its readers on a journey through the ancient kingdoms of Ghana, Mali and Songhay while providing information on the cultures of these ancient civilizations.

Bastide, Robert. *African Civilizations in the New World* .. New York: Harper and Row, 1974. This work could well serve as an introduction to the story of blacks in America. It scientifically sketches the facts of immigration through the slave trade and the early years of Africans in the new world.

de la Garza, Rudolph and Kruszewski, Anthony. *Chicanos and Native Americans* . Englewood Cliffs Prentice-Hall, 1974. The book is a powerful statement on the social and political strategies that have been used, here in America to undermine the rights of Chicanos and Native Americans, with brief comparative notes on the treatment of Africans, in this democratic society.

Dorman, James and Jones, Robert. *The Afro-American Experience: cultural history through Emancipation* . New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1974 Here the authors move the reader through the African background with considerations of culture and race, through the Black experience in early America the institutional dimensions and psychocultural dynamics of plantation slavery into abolition and emancipation.

Goldstein, Rhoda. ed. *Black Life and Culture in the United States* . New York: Thomas Crowell company, 1971 The author offers this book as one more attempt in covering the Black experience in America. However this one captures the richness, complexity, beauty and pain of the African American life.

Gumpez, John. ed. *Language and Social Identity* . Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982 This is a series of case studies exploring situations of communication and its effect on people's lives in the modern society.

Greely, Andrew. *Why Can't They be Like Us?* New York: E.P. Dutton and Co. 1971. This book is about the diversity in American society. It discusses American society as a nation of immigrants.

## CHILDREN'S BIBLIOGRAPHY

---

Baker Charles and Rosalie. *Myths and Legends of Mount Olympus* . Petersburg: Cobblestone, 1992. Students will find this an easy to read and inviting source of Greek Mythology with clearly written questions for discussion and ideas for project studies.

Bierhorst, John. *The Mythology of Mexico and Central America*. New York: Quill, 1990. These short myths are packed with interesting characters, magic and animals.

Clifford, Eth and Fay, Leo. *The Magnificent Myth of Man* . New York: Globe, 1972. This book could be your answer to budgetary problems, hi-lo interest reading and a source for myths that aren't included in the classics. Truly, there is no way that a child could not love these short tales that explain the why of everything from turtles to death and dying.

Yolen .Jane. ed . *Favorite Folktales from Around the World* . New York: Pantheon, 1986. These are enjoyable tales about history, about people, and about life around the world.

## Resource books for classroom activities

---

Bourman, Ann. *61 Cooperative Learning Activities* . Portland: J Weston Walch, 1989.

Castele, J. Doyle. *Learning to Think and Choose: Decision making Episodes for Middle Grades* . Santa Monica: Goodyear, 1978.

Lipson, Greta. ed. *Ethnic Pride*. Carthage: Good Apple, 1983.

Stark, Rebecea. *Mythology* . Hawthorne: Educational Impressions , 1986.

---

<https://teachersinstitute.yale.edu>

©2019 by the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute, Yale University

For terms of use visit <https://teachersinstitute.yale.edu/terms>