



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
1998 Volume II: Cultures and Their Myths

Universal Myths and Symbols: Animal Creatures and Creation

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Mythology and mythological ideas permeate all languages, cultures and lives. Myths affect us in many ways, from the language we use to how we tell time; mythology is an integral presence. The influence mythology has in our most basic traditions can be observed in the language, customs, rituals, values and morals of every culture, yet the limited extent of our knowledge of mythology is apparent. In general we have today a poor understanding of the significance of myths in our lives. One way of studying a culture is to study the underlying mythological beliefs of that culture, the time period of the origins of the culture's myths, the role of myth in society, the symbols used to represent myths, the commonalities and differences regarding mythology, and the understanding a culture has of its myths. Such an exploration leads to a greater understanding of the essence of a culture.

As an elementary school teacher I explore the role that mythology plays in our lives and the role that human beings play in the world of mythology. My objective is to bring to my students' attention stories that explore the origins of the universe and the origins of human kind, and to encourage them to consider the commonalities and differences in the symbols represented in cross-cultural universal images of the creation of the world.

I begin this account of my unit by clarifying the differences between myth, folklore, and legend, since they have been at times interchangeably and wrongly used. I proceed looking at what a myth is and the role that mythology has played in history. Next I discuss the different approaches of attempting to describe the parallelism among myths from cultures vastly separated by distance. This is followed by a look at different creation myths and a discussion of the commonalities amongst such myths. I propose a renewal of the study of mythology in today's curriculum as a return to the "shared heritage of ancestral memories", as represented and taught through the use of mythology. I continue by looking at how such renewal can take place by studying the use of symbols in mythology and the meaning myths acquire with the passing of time. In my overview of mythology, the examples I will present are those of universally present myths related to the creation of the world, and of mythological creatures. Their origins, their symbolism through the ages, the role they play in teaching myth, the representation of myth in other cultures, in the arts, literature, science, philosophy, and religion will be the areas of study. The Phoenix was chosen for its cross-cultural universality and its parallelism of message across time and space.

I conclude the unit by proposing an outline of study of similar mythological creatures and creation stories which will bring the students to see the presence of myth in our daily lives. This proposed outline could be

used in the study of other myths. Such a study may follow this progression: tracing a real event leading into the mythical interpretation and representation of that event, then exploring the hyperbole of the myth within the culture, then studying the use of the created symbolism within the culture, and finally examining cross-cultural commonalities and the ways in which the myth is reflected in the other areas of the compared cultures. It is here that this unit can be best adapted to meet the needs of older students.

Beginning the focus of mythological study at myths of creation allows for further exploration of types of etiological myths. The purpose of these myths is to tell why things are as they are (i.e. why the ants live underground, why the sun and the moon live in the sky, etc.). Broadening the unit with the representational mythology of animals provides me with a focused and concrete method for introducing broader mythological concepts to young children.

In my unit I will explore the topic of mythology through the use of the above outline. The unit will explore myths that are cross-culturally related. This mythological exploration will look at the reasons why cultures believe things to be the way they are. It is not meant to be an extensive listing or study of all the creation myths, but a sampling of the wide diversity of myths. I think students are able to come up with very ingenious responses to some of the same questions that many of those myths try to answer. I would venture to say that these myths of how or why things are as they are will closely match the reasons children think things happen the way they do.

Myth, Folklore, and Legends

The term myth has been wrongly used to mean folklore and legend. ADDIN ENRef Rosenberg (1997) differentiates among them in the following way. A myth is a sacred story from the past which is concerned with the powers who control the human world and the relationship between those powers and human beings. A folk tale is a story which is pure fiction and which does not have a particular time or space. It is usually a symbolic way of presenting the way human beings cope with the world where they live. A legend is a story from the past about a historical individual. These stories are concerned with people, places, and events in history.

Bierlein (ADDIN ENRef 1994) describes myth as the earliest form of science. The purpose of mythology was to explain how the world was formed and how all came to be. However, myth also explains the essence of why all is, which is philosophy and religion. Both religion and science in partnership provide us with an explanation of the creation of the world. Religion and science promote a cosmic myth which allows an understanding of the universe as well as providing a method for finding meaning in life. Also, a myth is the first written record of the oral tradition based on prehistoric events. This places myth in the realm of history. Bierlein claims that it was and continues to be the basis of morality, governance, and identity. I, however, think this is not the case. My belief is supported by the apparently widely spread ignorance we have of such a rich human heritage of ancestral memories. I feel we have lost touch with their meanings. We have forgotten our human unconscious memory which once was universal in all cultures. Yet mythology is the basis of the understanding of our own existence. Bierlein makes some generalizations of what a myth is. He says that myths are universal among all human beings in all times; deal with events that happened before written history and foresee what is to come; describe realities that go beyond our senses and are what holds us together; are essential in all moral conduct and give meaning to life. As we can see, almost all realms are touched upon in this definition of myth.

Creation Myths

Myths of creation are myths of how the universe began. It is the “how” of the beginning of our solar system, of the making of all creatures and everything that surrounds us. Creation myths can be divided into many different categories according to their explanation of the origins of humans, animals, the universe, etc. Thus, we have myths of creation by Deus Faber (God the maker), by emergence, by sacrifice, by secretion, by thought, by word, from a cosmic egg, from ancestors, from chaos, from clay, from dismemberment of primordial being, from division of primordial unity, from nothing, or as explanation ADDIN ENRef (Leeming). Of these myths some are representative of matriarchal or patriarchal societies. In the myths I have collected we will see the role of animals in the genesis. The myth of creation is emulated and repeated in nature by the yearly seasonal cycles; it is the rebirth of the earth in the spring, or the birth of a baby; it is the work of an artist or the song of a musician. These are all representations of the creation in our everyday lives.

The Greek myth of Eurynome and Ophion is a good point of departure as an example of a matriarchal creationist myth. According to the myth Eurynome rose from the sea as the Great Goddess of all things. Ophion, the great serpent of the water, made love to her and Eurynome turned into a bird and gave birth to the great universal egg of which all creatures were born ADDIN ENRef (Bierlein). At this point in history, when the myth is alive, people describe the beginning of the universe through the eyes of the goddess and her symbols. She is the giver of birth and life.

The woman can be representative of the chaos from which the woman creates life by giving birth to herself. She appears in other cultures under different names such as Yemaya, Spider Woman, Ishtar or Astoreth, Demeter, and many others. She is representative of the moon with its cycles while her body is representative of the earth. From her breasts the earth nourishes its creatures and they return back to the earth to die.

Many symbols have been left behind from many different cultures worldwide that attest to the importance of the goddess-creation myth. These symbols have passed now to belong to the human consciousness ADDIN ENRef (Stein). Some of the symbols that have endured associated with the goddess are the egg, the circle and ellipse, the spiral, the triangle pointing down, as well as labyrinths and mazes.

In the beginning all life came from the sea and many cultures used the mermaid and snake with the sea serpent as its symbols. The animals symbolized the goddess of all life. Later in history in the patriarchal myth of creation, the snake symbolizes the downfall of Eve. The goddess of all things turns into a creature and is killed by men. This animal does appear throughout the history of man; however, it takes many forms and most often is associated with the dark forces.

Cecrops, the founder of Athens, was half snake, half-human who taught the first inhabitants how to read, to write, and to work crafts. The great citadel of Athens is named Cecropia after him.

In the Chinese creation myth it is from the hen's egg that the universe is created. The yolk becomes the sun and sky and the white becomes the earth and sea. In the egg born at the same time is Pangu, who grew and grew for 18,000 years. His height at his death is said to be the distance from earth to heaven. His body became the mountains, the sun and the moon, the rivers, and the wind.

In the Cherokee myth of creation the role of the animals is an important one. They viewed the world at creation as being a sea of water being held by four cords at each of the cardinal points ADDIN ENRef (Mooney, p.239). The animals lived crowded above this in Gâl—lati, wanting to know what was below. The water-beetle,

“Beaver’s Grandchild”, offered itself to go down and find out, but not finding anything on the surface dove into the water and brought up some mud which begun growing in all directions forming the earth. Afterwards the birds were sent to see if it was dry, and not finding a place to land they went back. Next, the buzzard was sent and it was when tired from flying that it reached the Cherokee country and began to flap and strike the ground, forming the valleys and the mountains. The other animals, afraid that everything would be mountains, called the buzzard back. The creation of humans in this myth takes place only after the animals and the plants have already been created.

For Native American Indians there were no essential differences between nature and man, as demonstrated in their ability to talk to plants and animals. It is only because of the human aggression and carelessness violating the rights of others that the animals in council join forces against him in the Cherokee myth of “The Origin of Disease and Medicine” (Mooney, p.250). We discover how it is that the animals gathered to talk about what they could do to stop humans from slaughtering them. The social order in which animals live is representative of the way that the Native Americans lived. They lived in tribes, had a chief and townhouses, etc.

Every culture at its foundation had its own interpretation of how the world came about and why things were the way they were. However, many similarities do exist. There are two approaches that attempt to explain the parallels between the myths of vastly separated cultures. The first approach believes the myths were created in a few myth-creating locations and were diffused to other cultures with the passing of time and contact among different cultures. The second approach is a psychological view of mythology that believes myths are products of the human psyche and therefore universal to all human beings.

Mythological animals and creatures

In looking for myths related to mythological creatures there seems to be a pattern as to the roles the animal plays in the myth. This pattern is directly related to the importance given to animals in that culture.

In Greek and Roman mythology most often this role is a secondary or a tertiary one. In the love myth of Cupid and Psyche a direct reference is made as to why ants live underground. According to the story, they fear Venus’ wrath because they helped Psyche to overcome the second of the tasks she needed to perform. The first striking aspect, as I read this and other myths, is how closely they parallel in their trials and tribulations the telling and retelling of folk tales. These myths of why things are motivate the listener to take part and to do comparisons among closely related myths. These stories could be best used at story time or as prompts to the writing of a new myth as the children’s knowledge of myths is developed.

Sometimes it is possible to trace the birth of a myth to a part of the world where it becomes established; other times you can see it migrate from one culture to another; from one time period to the next, modified in different ways and at times with many other added symbolical values that may or may not have been there in their origin. This can be seen with an example such as the origins and myths of the Centaur, the sphinx, Pegasus, etc. The myth is seen in motion. We can study the origins and how it changes, taking other values as it is reinterpreted by other times or other cultures. We can study its influences in other areas of society such as the arts, the sciences, history, religion.

ADDIN ENRef South (1987) assigns mythical and fabulous creatures among five categories based on the use of

physical characteristics or form. The first category is that of birds and beasts, next the human-animal composites, followed by creatures of darkness, and finally the fairies and giants. The evil mythological creatures outnumber those that are good. These creatures represent the full range from the completely good creatures such as the Ki-Lin, or Chinese unicorn, to the most evil one such the Windigo, a human flesh-eating-creature of Algonquin myth. Some myths have different associations in different cultures. Here the dragon is a good example. In the eastern cultures the dragon is seen as beneficial and good, while in the West it is associated with evil.

The first appearance of mythological and fabulous creatures in the arts is dated to 3,000 BC ADDIN ENRef (Mode, 1975). However, the creation of the myths would be dated much earlier. It is in Egypt and Mesopotamia that many of these myths have their origins. In ancient Egyptian art we have many representations of human-animal beings, especially animal deities with human bodies. From Mesopotamia we have depictions of such creatures as the Centaur, the Phoenix, human-fish composites, the dragon, etc. All these myths were passed onto the West, at times being modified (as in the case of the Phoenix by the Greeks) and then passed on again undergoing other changes.

Animals in diverse mythologies

African mythology is as diverse as the collection of cultures that encompass it. As the cradle of civilization, it nursed the Egyptian and Mesopotamian cultures. Prior to this there were indigenous tribesmen, nomadic in nature, who carried their myths from place to place, influencing those cultures surrounding them. Thus, we can see that there are many similarities across the continent in the stories and traditions.

Although the stories in the suggested reading list are not representative of the wide diversity of African mythology, they do present us with samples of animals as primary characters in creating order and reason out of chaos and accident. They are representative of a type of myth that provides the reader with animals playing different roles according to the culture they originate in. In some of the myths, animals are created before humans, and they take an active role in the genesis of the world.

In the mythology of the Fon, or Dahomean, located in what is nowadays the country of Benin, a bird by the name of Wututu acts as the messenger of Sogbo, who is the chief of thunder pantheon. We can see the important role that the animals play by studying the following two myths: "The Rule of Sky and Earth Delimited" (ADDIN ENRef Courlander, p.161) where in the search for water Sagbata sends the eagle, the vulture, the cat, and the chameleon to his brother Mevioso to ask for water telling us what they endure, and "Sogbo Becomes Master of the Universe"" (Courlander, p.163) where it is Wututu, Sogbo's messenger who brings relief to the draught. (If the Wututu bird is killed by accident, a big ceremony must be held in reparation).

Some animals such as the praying mantis are widely regarded as sacred. The praying mantis was credited by the San (Bushmen) with bringing fire to the people after having stolen it from the ostrich. The Pale Fox, from the Dogon tradition, was said to have invented agriculture after stealing seeds from the creator god. After going into refuge in the wilderness he is given credit for being the leader in the expansion of the human civilization. For the Bambara people, located in Mali, the originator of agriculture was an antelope sent from heaven to teach the skills of farming ADDIN ENRef (Willis).

There are also representations of animals which are part of the prime force of creation. As representative of these animals we have one of the most widespread creatures used in African mythology, the serpent (Willis, p.277). Under the names of Chinaweji or Chinawezi in Central and Southern Africa, and Nkongolo in Zaire, the serpent plays a pivotal role.

One of the most popular representations of animals in African mythology is the trickster (please refer to other units in this volume). At times represented by a spider in West and Central Africa and as a hare in southern Africa, it also appears in the form of a tortoise or even that of a jackal.

In the creation myth of the Yoruba tradition, "The Descent from the Sky" ADDIN ENRef (Courlander, p.189), Agemo the chameleon plays an integral part in the power struggle between Olorun, the supreme orisha, ruler over the sky and the earth beneath the sky, and Olokun, female deity of the sea and the marshes, in his quest to make earth where only water and marshes exist. The chameleon outwits Olokun in a match paralleling the Greek tale of Arachne challenging Athena to a weaving competition. In the end, Athena saves Arachne's life as she turns into a spider.

The roles of animals in American Indian mythology are extensive, and integral to the faith of humans in nature. Thus, we can see the hero in the shape of an animal, or that of a human with animal form changing shape as it wills. Among the legends and myths of such heroes we have Old Man Coyote, Bear Man, Spider Woman, or even the Man-Eagle. There is a blurred alliance between people and animals which is most prevalent with the North Pacific Coast tribes and the Plains Indians.

In the Altaie tradition, located in the mountains of Mongolia, it is two geese that fly over the primordial waters ADDIN ENRef (Leeming, p.7). One of them represents God, and the other the devil.

The Phoenix

The following outline will be used in discussing the Phoenix; it can be modified to study any other mythical or fabulous creature.

- 1- Origins of the myth.
- 2- History of the myth from different cultures.
- 3- Symbolism of the myth around the world and across time.
- 4- Myth viewed from the arts, science, etc.

The Phoenix is the best known of the fabulous birds. It is the mythical bird of Heliopolis, Egypt, the city of the sun. It is a sacred bird with gold and red feathers at time represented by a heron-like or eagle-like bird. It is said to have been born in the sun and to reincarnate itself from its own ashes. It is said to live for 500 years and goes to die to Heriopolis, the temple of the sun, after which it reincarnates itself from its ashes.

The origins of the Phoenix are placed in Arabia though it is later considered the bird of Egypt. Later it was borrowed by the Greeks, Romans, Christian Europe and eventually the rest of the modern world. The western depiction of the Phoenix is sometimes associated with other bird myths of oriental origin such as the anka or the roc from Arabia, the semery of Persia, or the garuda of India. They might have been all related to one another, and to a solar myth or real bird such as an eagle or a heron. It may also be related to the Chinese “feng-huang”. This bird with feathers blending the five colors and call of harmony of the five notes is said to have originated in the sun ADDIN ENRef (Ferguson). The Phoenix also resembles the Japanese Ho-o, a Phoenix-like bird that came to earth with the purpose of doing good deeds.

Over the ages the Phoenix has been called many names. Among them are “bird of the sun”, “bird of incense”, “bird of fire”, “bird of the second birth”, “the Egyptian bird” ADDIN ENRef (South, p.60). These names are significant in that they are descriptive of a mythical aspect of the fabulous creature.

Some of the explanations of its origins include the possibility of being an astrological symbol for the sun setting and rising. It may also be a representation of a human spirit of immortality. These myths may have originated on the “anting” behavior that some bird species exhibit ADDIN ENRef (Burton). Through the behavior of “anting” the bird controls parasites by allowing ants to walk over its body or for smoke to rise through its feathers. Another scientific explanation of its origins may be in the molting process that some of these birds endure, giving the appearance that the bird is reborn.

All of these explanations are no more than hypotheses and any of them or a combination of them may be the origins of the Phoenix. However, what it is certain is the broad influence and universality that the Phoenix has had on the peoples of the world.

It was first mentioned by Hesiod in the eighth century BC. By his account the myth was well known and had lived for a long time ADDIN ENRef (Broek). A more extensive account of the Phoenix comes to us centuries later via Herodotus in the Fifth century BC. It is in the account of the Phoenix by the Roman senator Monilius that we learn about its genesis. According to his account, the Phoenix lives in Arabia and dies every 540 years on a sweet-smelling nest. From the bones and marrow of the dead Phoenix a worm is born and it becomes the new Phoenix. It is from this myth that the Christian church makes use of sweet-smelling incense and myrrh during burial ceremonies. The smoke may symbolize the raising from the dead and the resurrection of the spirit.

Although we can see some differences in the accounts of each of these Phoenix-like birds, there are prevailing permanent elements that are necessary: the bird lives for a long time (540, 1,000, 1,461, or even 12,994 years according to each of the retellings); reappears soon after its death; through death lives again, and is the bird of the sun ADDIN ENRef (Broek).

The myth of the Phoenix is taken as an influential one in the account by Ovid in the *Metamorphoses* (43 BC - AD 17). This representation of the Phoenix closely resembles the classical Egyptian benu or purple heron. In the book of the death we learn that the benu symbolized the worship of the sun god of Heliopolis.

According to the Li-Ki (*Book of Rituals*) there are four animals the Chinese consider to be mystical. Among them we encounter the Phoenix, the tortoise, the dragon and the unicorn. The Chinese Phoenix, Phen-huang, has its origins in the sun and is representative of nature. The Phen-Huang is believed to bring prosperity when it appears and calamity on its departure. The Japanese Phoenix, the Ho-o, is said to be the sun descending to earth as a messenger of goodness.

St. Clement of Rome (ca. AD 90-99) is the first Christian to use the Phoenix as part of the Christian teachings. The Phoenix represents the resurrection of those who serve Christ. It is an image of Christ who after his death rises ADDIN ENRef (South).

It is through these accounts that the first Arabian Phoenix myth is hellenized, romanized and christianized and has come to survive and be part of western culture and extensively depicted by authors and artists.

In its origin in Egyptian culture the Phoenix was a divine being. In Greek and Roman cultures it loses its sacredness and becomes more of a supernatural creature. It became also a symbol of political perfection. In the Christian era the Phoenix became the symbol for the resurrection of the body and of the immortal soul. It appears on funeral stones and sarcophagi, in paintings, churches, stonework, etc. It is seen as a sign of the eastern and western sun, the morning and evening sun, or as the sun of spring and fall. It is also a symbol for resurrection, immortality, eternal youth, justice, and self-suffering among others.

In the arts there are many representations of the Phoenix. One of the most extensive ones is the collection of fifty-five black-and-white plates depicting the Phoenix from a mural of paintings in the Tomb of Irenifer. In the Christian tradition it is also depicted in cathedrals, as well as in innumerable coins, sculptures, seals, etc. In literature, the Renaissance is one of the more prolific eras that representative uses of the Phoenix are made.

The symbolism of the Phoenix is diverse in its origins and in its meanings. The basic association is with the sun and it so appears in most of the interpretations. Its capacity of renewal is also universal. Clearly it stands for the human desire for renewal.

Methods

One of the main goals and objectives in writing this unit is the integration of the district's content standards in the areas of language arts, social studies, science, and social development through the study of mythology. The literary connections in the curriculum between the subject of mythology and language arts are obvious. This unit's attempt to integrate the social studies, science, and social development curriculum may not be as clear, yet an important focus of the unit that I hope to get across to the reader.

I focus on four content standards in my aim to create an integrated unit of study on mythology. Though it may be too broad as a goal, many other standards that are not here listed will be required, introduced, used, or touched upon. I have chosen at least one of the standards on reading, writing, social studies and library media, and technology as the core of the unit.

Although the unit can be adapted to meet the needs of diverse learners, I write it with the content standards in mind for social studies and language arts specific in the second grade. The following is a list of the content standards that this unit aims to cover in its duration and the tasks the child should be able to perform.

Social studies performance standards

use a computer to access information compare traits found in family and neighborhoods from another time or place with those of the students identify mountains, lakes, and rivers on a map or a globe locate the seven continents and four oceans

Language arts performance standards for grades K-4

read at least 5 books on the topic of mythology

listen to stories about many different topics and cultures

retell stories in order and in detail

make a special project requiring oral both and written presentation through the use of the writing process (first draft, conference, revision, edit, and final draft)

participate in technology for reading and writing

Social development performance standards for grades K-4

Because the main topic is mythology, what was and continues to be the basis of morality, governance and identity ADDIN ENRef (Bierlein, p.5), the social development standards are at the heart of the unit.

Performance standards:

acquire good listening skills

learn about people's similarities and differences

learn to define and look ahead at consequences.

practice good decision-making skills

suggest laws and the consequences of not obeying them.

Science

Identify different properties that can be used for classification.

Explore living things of long ago

Classify the animal kingdom

Mathematics

Use different representations of the same number.(the children could learn how to write and draw the numbers in the Aztec calendar using the animal symbol associated with each number)

Library Media and Technology

retell materials heard

create a product related to the material heard, viewed and/or read

use a self-assessment tool prepared by the teacher/student

Through the unit there will be many opportunities to hear telling and retelling of myths with a morality lesson where the focus of the story can be used as the focus of that particular telling. At other times listening as well

as oral skills will be specially targeted as a precursor to improved writing skills. The children will learn about people's similarities and differences, and they will practice through role playing good decision-making skills.

Even though I have not included listening standards, they are at the very core of the unit for they will represent the continuum from beginning to end of the unit. The children will do retellings based on their reactions to the stories. Later, they will read selections and will develop their own presentations.

With the selection of these content standards I intend to inform and teach children about the universal theme of mythology. The question we seek to answer is, what role do animals play in the mythical stories read and told at story time?

In the Shangaan tradition, located in what is now called Mozambique, the story teller is the grandmother or elder woman of the family who is the respected transmitter of the old stories. The old woman, called Garingani, or narrator, begins her storytelling by declaiming "Garingani, n'wana wa Garingani!" - "I am Narrator, daughter of Narrator!" after which the crowd cheers "Garingani". The crowd chants her name after each line of the story (Courlander, p. 404). I would like to incorporate this formula to start each of the storytelling sessions that are part of the unit.

Students will create representations (visual, written, technological, musical, artistic, etc.) that reflect upon selections read, tell a story, provide information, have a point of view, or demonstrate an appreciation and understanding of our multicultural heritage (content standard 1.6e).

The work habits that the unit will focus on will be attending to details and accuracy . This will be accomplished through questioning techniques, retellings, reports, games. The thinking skills that will be focused on the area of initial understanding will be to sequence, and list different mythical stories. As a way of developing an interpretation, and making connections, the children will contrast and compare certain elements of diverse myths appropriate to their age level.

The children will be provided with many opportunities to hear many different stories with opportunities to take a critical stance in judging orally, through writing, by making special projects, movement, etc.

As the unit progresses, broadening the scope of the questions and making connections among the different stories will be the focus. These stories will be introduced during story time and there will be a period to respond to them. At times it will be done individually, in pairs or small groups. The overall objective is to bring alive some of those mythological stories that are part of the human race consciousness to begin to have a better understanding of all that surrounds us.

Sample lessons and guidelines

The topic "animal roles in mythology" is a broad one due to the immense wealth of stories handed down in the many cultures that form the human kind. Some of the stories are passed to us via the oral tradition, others through written and pictorial accounts. Yet they are representative of some of the basic concepts involved in mythology. They are reflections of long thought-out questions that have moved the human race to where it now stands. They are born from the need to explain the universe around us, to bring order and meaning to our existence. In no way is this unit to grapple with all these issues; it is a small beginning in the process that our ancestors walked before us.

I intend to start by checking for background knowledge regarding the children's own interpretation of the world around them. These lessons play a very important role in the implementation of the unit since it will act as the foundation from which the children will build knowledge regarding mythology. Most of the tasks will be performed in pairs and as a whole class, providing the students with opportunities to share the work with the rest of the class. The teacher logs each of the comments after each whole class sharing session, followed with the next question for the children to work in pairs. A similar lesson regarding the creation of the universe will follow.

I want to emphasize that these discussion of what the children think about the origin of the world and the place of animals in it will be completed before they hear any mythological story. My hope is that these discussions will put the children in a position to understand the stories better and they will also give a context into which to place their reaction to the story.

The children will use index cards to write and name some of the animal characters that are the focus of the stories. It will provide the student with a visual representation of the animal and a name to which to refer in listening to or reading the stories. It will provide the student with the "comprehensible input" with which to make sense in participating in the stories. The back of the index card will later be used to write the name of the mythical stories in which the animal appears. By the time the children finish their index card collection they could have ten or twenty cards with pictures, drawings, and their names.

These cards will also be used in performing each of the tasks that follow. The lesson plans have been broken down into tasks so as to allow focus on the performance and content standards on which this unit focuses. They have been written with the student in mind. The descriptions give the student a clear understanding of what they are expected to do, how they have to do it, and how they are going to be assessed. The students will receive copies of the assessment by which they will evaluate their work. Some of the tasks (see Task 3), once introduced, can be used throughout the school year and with other type of stories.

I suggest you make tapes of some of the myths so as to provide the student with many opportunities to listen to the same story. These could be used at the listening center after they have been introduced to the class. In each retelling, as an extension of the story, the teacher can reinforce or focus on a different content standard (i.e. the teacher can do a mini lesson on note-taking, writing, character study, etc.). The following is a list of suggested strategies to meet the goals and objectives of this unit.

Language arts: Introduce the story as a read-aloud, focusing on listening skills, doing a share-reading lesson, whole class, in guided-reading with smaller groups of students (make a copy of any of the stories in book format). As a listening center (Task 3). As a writing prompt changing one of the main characters.

Art : Making graphic representations (Task 1). Making geographic models (mountains, lakes, volcano).

Making pictures of Ashanti proverbs and sayings like the ones cast in brass (Courlander, p.129).

Science: Classification. Animal characteristics.

Social Studies. Maps, models, find traits found in families among the characters in own lives.

Games: Make a set of cards with fantastic and animal creatures to pair by name or myth (Blythe).

It is important to note that the performance tasks are to be given to the students prior to the beginning of the task. It is the road map that the student, will use to be able to perform what we are asking them to do. As part

of the process the students will also be able to preview the assessment tool by which they will be evaluated. Please look at appendix A for a list of the rubrics.

Performance Task 1

Title: Creatures in the world

Background: There are many creatures and animals with whom we share this planet. You already know many domestic and wild animals. Many stories have been told about these animals in the different cultures that form the human race. We are going to read and listen to many of these stories; but let us first find out how much we already know about animals.

Task: You will work with another partner in making, taping, and writing a list of all the animals you can think of. Afterwards you will classify them according to whichever rule you choose. You need to tape and write your answers to some questions.

Purpose: To describe all the creatures we know into categories and give reasons how and why they came about.

Procedure:

List all the animals you can think of.

Make groups of animals.

Read each question and write down the answers.

Why are there so many different types of animals and living creatures?

Where do animals come from?

Why do we need animals?

Who made the animals and the different creatures?

Were there animals before there were humans?

Why are they different?

How do animals communicate?

Can animals talk to people? What about the other way around?

Can you think of an animal that does not exist?

Audience: Classmates and teacher

Assessment:

Please see Performance Task pre-writing - APPENDIX A.

Extension: Have children draw animals in the back of an index card. Write the name and a major characteristic of that animal.

Give the students categories by which to make the classification. i.e. Animals that live in the water, that fly (air), underground, etc.

A unit of science studying animal characteristics and classification could also originate through this activity, paralleling this one on mythology. Thus, at the same time we learn about different animals, we discover stories associated with them and vice versa.

Performance Task 2

Title: The making of the universe

Background: There are many creatures and animals with whom we share this planet. It is in this earth that we are able to breathe and live. Have you ever thought about how it came about?

Task: You will work with another partner in reporting to the class answers to the following questions. You need to record your answers to present to the class.

Where does the earth come from?

Why is it here?

Who created it? Why?

Audience: Classmates and teacher

Purpose: To describe reasons on how the earth came about.

Procedure: Think about where you live.

List everything you can think about what you have to have in order to be alive. Write them down.

Read and answer with a drawing and a sentence to each of the questions in a separate index card.

Assessment: Please see Performance Task pre-writing - APPENDIX A .p.38 and a modified version for fiction p.45

Extensions: A unit on the planets. Making models of the earth, lakes, rivers, air, fire.

Performance Task 3

Title: Animal and creation myths 1.

Background: There are many stories about the creatures and animals with whom we share this planet. Through reading and listening to these stories we have a better understanding of ourselves and the world around us.

Many of these stories were passed along from person to person until they were written down.

Task: You will listen to and read stories about animals and the creation of the world. Afterwards you will create an outline or other organizer and will retell the story to your partner. You need to write down the important parts in the order they happen so you can retell the story to someone else.

Audience: Partner

Purpose: To retell the story heard or read to a partner with as much detail as possible with the use of 5 drawings or sentences that you are going to draw or write.

Procedure: Make an organizer by writing the name of the story in the middle of a blank page and, as you listen to the story, writing the most important parts (who, what, where, why, how) in the rest of the space.

Now you can listen to the story.

Draw 5 pictures or write 5 sentences (beginning, middle, middle, middle, end), using your organizer.

On the back of each picture write the names of the main characters.

Write where the story takes place. Retell the stories to another classmate with the help of the pictures you drew, the map, and the index card.

Assessment: Please see Performance Task pre-writing - APPENDIX A.

Extensions: Students tape another version of the same story.

Performance Task 4

Title: Animal and creation myths 2.

Background: There are many different places on this earth. In each of those locations many myths have been written about the creatures and animals with whom we share this planet. Through reading and listening to these stories we learn about the world.

Task: You will listen to and read stories about animals and the creation of the world. You will locate the country of origin of the myth in a world map and will retell the story to your partner.

Audience: Partner

Purpose: To locate the country where the story originates and to retell the story heard or read to a partner with as much detail as possible through the use of 5 drawings or sentences that you are going to draw or write.

Procedure:

Write the name of the book or the story in an index card.

Write who wrote it and the country where it was written.

Write the name of the continent.

Now you can begin to listen to the story

Draw 5 pictures or write 5 sentences (beginning, middle, middle, middle, end)

On the back of the index card write the names of the main characters.

Write where the story takes place.

Locate in the map the continent where the story originates.

With a piece of yarn draw a line from the country to the index card.

Retell the stories to another classmate with the help of the pictures you drew, the map, and the index card.

Assessment: Please see Performance Task Assessment List - Listening. APPENDIX A.

Performance Task 5

Title: Fantastic Creatures - The Phoenix

Background: There are many fantastic creatures and animals that don't exist anywhere else but in books and people's imagination. One of those fantastic creatures is a bird by the name of Phoenix.

Task: You will work making a drawing of the fantastic creature and coloring it after listening to a description of its appearance (what it looked like).

Purpose: To describe the Phoenix with a picture and retell it to another student.

Procedure:

Write the word " Phoenix" in the front of an index card.

Listen to or read to what a Phoenix looks like.

Make a drawing on the back of the index card.

Suggested resources and technologies:

Look at electronic resources: Elfwood Fantasy Art Gallery

Blythe (1977). Dragons and other fabulous creatures.

Assessment: Please see Performance Task Assessment List - Listening. APPENDIX A.

Extensions: Note taking. Tell a version of the story of the Phoenix. Do Task 2 with the telling by writing the name of the story and where it originates in the index card. Also any other information that is important about that version.

Performance Task 6

Title: The Chimaera

Curriculum social studies content standards:

Locate the seven continents and four oceans

Identify mountains, lakes and rivers

Library media and technology: Use a computer to access information

Purpose: Teach to a student from another classroom.

Question connecting content to purpose: How did the mountains and the rivers form? Are there rivers and mountains in every continent?

Work Habits: Working cooperatively

Thinking skills: List and locate.

Format of products and/or performance(s): Note cards

Audience: Another student in the school.

Role of learner in task: Biographer.

Instructional arrangement. Small group

Technology or resources suggested: What's a biographer? What do they do?.

Background: There are many fantastic creatures and animals that don't exist but in books and people's imaginations. One of those fantastic creatures is an animal by the name of Chimaera.

Task: You will listen to a very long story about animals and the creation of the world. After you will create an outline or other organizer and will retell the story to your partner. You need to write down the important parts in the order they happen so you can retell the story to someone else.

Audience: Partner

Purpose: To retell the story heard or read to a partner with as much detail as possible.

Procedure: Listen to the story

Extensions: This lesson would be done as in the first lesson of the Phoenix, by making a graphic representation of the mythical creatures of Pegasus and the Chimaera.

list of recommended stories

Native American

"Silver Fox and Coyote Create Earth" ADDIN ENRef (Bruchac, 1992) p.3

"How Grandmother Spider named the Clans" ADDIN ENRef (Bruchac, 1992) p.11

"Eagle Boy" ADDIN ENRef (Bruchac, 1992) p.27

"Turtle Races with Beaver" ADDIN ENRef (Bruchac, 1992) p.35

"How the Butterflies Came to Be". ADDIN ENRef (Bruchac, 1992) p. 45

"Thunderbird" ADDIN ENRef (Chafetz) p.3

"The Tale of Bat" ADDIN ENRef (Chafetz) p.15

The Heavenly Zoo ADDIN ENRef (Lurie)

"Iyadola's Babies" ADDIN ENRef (Pilling) p.10

"Naming the Winds" ADDIN ENRef (Pilling) p.15

"The Unicorn" ADDIN ENRef (Pilling) p.51

"How Perseus Killed the Gorgon" ADDIN ENRef (Pilling) p.85

"The Creation of the Land" ADDIN ENRef (Seton) p.9

"How the Seasons Came to the World" ADDIN ENRef (Seton) p.25

"How the Tanager Got Her Colors" ADDIN ENRef (Seton) p.103

"Hen and Frog" ADDIN ENRef (Bryan) p. 3

"Why Frog and Snake Never Play Together" ADDIN ENRef (Bryan) p.41

"How Animals Got Their Tales" ADDIN ENRef (Bryan) p.53

"The Creation" ADDIN ENRef (Bruchac, 1985) p.15

"Turtle's Race With Beaver" ADDIN ENRef (Bruchac, 1985) p.47

Electronic resources

Elfwood Fantasy Art Gallery:

<http://www.elfwood.com/elfwood.html>

This site includes a searchable engine by keyword of thousands of fantasy and mythological creatures.

Gods, Goddesses and Myths: The Bestiary

<http://www.eliki.com/ancient/myth/bestiary/content.htm>

Provides a history of mythological creatures such as the centaur, Pegasus, phoenix, mermaids, etc. It has great pictures of the

creatures as represented in the arts.

Myth and Legends. From ancient Times to the age of Space

<http://pibweb.it.nwu.edu/~pib/myth.htm>

Great list of resources.

A Wonder-Book for Boys and Girls, by Nathaniel Hawthorne.

<http://eldred.ne.mediaone.net/nh/wbpf.html><http://eldred.ne.mediaone.net/nh/wbpf.html>

A collection of classical myths written for children. The myths have been compiled into this wonderful collection. Each story has an introduction which ties all the stories from beginning to end.

<http://www.elfwood.com/lothlorien/artists/marie/phoenix.gif>

http://www.elfwood.com/lothlorien/artists/bing/dragon_and_phoenix.jpg

American Indian Animal Brides and Bridegrooms

<http://www.pitt.edu/~dash/animalindian.html#tsimshianbear>

A collection of Native American Indians stories with the theme of intermarriage among animals and human beings.

Bulfinch's Mythology. The Age of Fable or Stories of Gods and Heroes.

<http://www.showgate.com/medea/bulfinch/welcome.html>

An extensive collection of classical, Norse, eastern and related mythical stories. Includes all the text with pictures and links to many other related sites.

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Bierlein, J.F. Parallel Myths. New York, Ballantine Books, 1994.

Bruchac, Joseph. Iroquois Stories: Heroes and Heroines Monsters and Magic. Trumansburg, New York, The Crossing Press, 1985.

Bruchac, Joseph. Native American Animal Stories. Golden, Colorado, Fulcrum Publishing, 1992.

Bryan, Ashley. Beat the Story-Drum, Pum-Pum. New York, Atheneum, 1980.

Burton, Richard F. Phoenix Re-Born. London, Hutchinson, 1962.

Chafetz, Henry. Thunderbird and Other Stories. New York, Pantheon Books, 1964.

Courlander, Harold. A Treasury of African Folklore. New York, Marlowe and Company, 1998.

David A. Leeming, Margareth A. Leeming. A Dictionary of Creation Myths. New York, Oxford University Press, 1995.

Ferguson, John C. Chinese Mythology. Boston, Archeological Institute, 1932.

Lurie, Alison. The Heavenly Zoo. New York, Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1979.

Mode, Heinz. Fabulous Beasts and Demons. New York, McGraw-Hill, 1975.

Mooney, James. Cosmogonic Myths. Myths of the Cherokee. New York, Dover Publications. 1995.

Pilling, Ann. Realms of Gold Myths and Legends From Around the World. New York, Kingfisher books, 1993.

Rosenberg, Donna. Folklore, Myth and Legends: A World Perspective. Lincolnwood, Ill., NTC Pub. Group, 1997.

Seton, Julia M. Indian Creation Stories. Santa Fe, New Mexico, Seton Village Press, 1952.

South, Malcolm. Mythical and Fabulous Creatures. Westport, CT, Greenwood Press, 1987.

Stein, Diane. Creation and Creation Goddesses. The Women's Spirituality Book. St. Paul, Minnesota, Llewellyn Publications. 1995.

Van Den Broek R. . The Myth of the Phoenix According to Classical and Early Christian Traditions. Leiden, Brill, 1972

Willis, Roy, Ed. World Mythology. New York, Henry Holt and Company, 1993.

TEacher and student resources

Berenstain, Michael. The Creature Catalog. A Monster Watcher's Guide. New York, Random House Inc., 1982.

Offers brief descriptions on the origins of monsters, and animal creatures from mythology, legends and folklore. It has very brief definitions accompanied by a picture of each of the monsters and creatures.

Bierlein, J.F. Parallel Myths. New York, Ballantine Books, 1994.

A great resource for the new reader to mythology. Bierlein elaborates on the universality and importance of myth in human history and culture.

Blythe, Richard. Dragons and Other Fabulous Creatures. New York, Grosset and Dunlap, 1977.

The book is divided into chapters by the names of dreadful dragons, fabulous birds, fabulous horses, men or monsters?, monsters of the deep, spiders and serpents, and curious creatures. A wonderful book that will grab anyone's attention by the illustrations and captivating stories. Among other myths, includes the Phoenix and the Chimaera.

Bruchac, Joseph. Iroquois Stories: Heroes and Heroines Monsters and Magic. Trumansburg, New York, The Crossing Press, 1985.

An anthology of Bruchac's own versions based on Iroquois legends. Contains a list of references with an introduction on storytelling. Many of the stories, following the Native American tradition, explain the how and why of the creation of the world with all its diversity in fauna and vegetation. They have been written with children in mind and would be appropriate for storytelling or individual reading.

Bruchac, Joseph. Native American Animal Stories. Golden, Colorado, Fulcrum Publishing, 1992.

With a foreword by Vine Deloria, this book focuses on the relationships among Native American people and animals. Includes a map of Native North America with the location of many different stories exploring the role of animals. It is a great source of stories with animals playing the most important role. Under the categories of creation, celebration, vision, feathers and fur, and survival.

Bryan, Ashley. *Beat the Story-Drum, Pum-Pum*. New York, Atheneum, 1980.

A very good collection of short stories with a moral lesson. Among the best stories in this collection are “Hen and Frog”, “Why Frog and Snake Never Play Together”, and “How Animals Got their Tales”. The animals in the story reflect human characteristics, exploring a problem we all have in one way or another.

Chafetz, Henry. *Thunderbird and Other Stories*. New York, Pantheon Books, 1964.

A collection of three Native American stories. “Thunderbird”, the first of the stories, tells how the Great Spirit, converts Nasan, the greatest of the giants, into a thunderbird after having stolen the Evening Star Lady. The next tale, “The Tale of Bat”, takes place at the beginning of time and explains how bats came about. The last of the stories, “The Peace Pipe”, gives an account of the perils of war and how they arrived to peace.

Courlander, Harold. *A Treasury of African Folklore*. New York, Marlowe and Company, 1998.

A collection of the oral literature, traditions, myths, legends, epics, tales, recollections, wisdom, sayings, and humors of Africa. Includes a bibliography and an index.

Dewey, Ariane. *The Thunder God’s Son*. New York, Greenwillow Books, 1981.

Based on a Peruvian folktale retells how the young Acury, son of the thunder god, is sent to earth by his father to learn the human ways.

Erdos, Richard and Alfonso Ortiz. *American Indian Myths and Legends*. New York, Pantheon, 1984.

A diverse collection of stories from all over the Native American tradition. Includes a bibliography and an index of tales.

Garaí, Jana. *The Book of Symbols*. London, Lorrimer Publishing, 1973.

A wonderful collection of all sort of symbols by theme. Defines a symbol as an art of thinking in images and as a reference to something mysterious and unknown which has been created by the part of the man that is god.

Goble, Paul. *Buffalo Woman*. Scarsdale, New York, Bradbury Press Inc., 1984.

This story teaches us how buffalo and the people of the Great Plains are related. In its origins the story was not meant solely to entertain but to bring change within each of us. It has beautiful illustrations.

Kanawa, Kiri Te. *Land of the Long White Cloud. Maori Myths, Tales and Legends*. New York, Arcade Publishing, 1989.

A personal selection of stories from the Maori tradition. It begins with the birth of Maui, the trickster god, and continues with a series of adventures including a creation story, legends, adventures in the underworld, and even romantic stories. It has very colorful illustrations. Recommended for read-aloud or for an advance reader.

Klyse, Thomas S. *Intro to Greek/Roman Myth*. Arch Publishers Group. 1998.

Inter-active presentation in four parts with educational games. The program includes a glossary and a collection of the most

important myths.

Leeming, David, Margareth A. Leeming. *A Dictionary of Creation Myths*. New York, Oxford University Press, 1995.

Each entry in the dictionary refers and identifies the culture that the myths originate in. Each myth is retold in prose with extensive cross-referencing to guide readers to other entries.

Lurie, Allison. *The Heavenly Zoo*. New York, Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1979.

A collection of tales explaining how each of the creatures that our ancestors saw up in the sky got to where they are. These tales are short and have an illustration depicting the figures of legend and myth and show them against the stars of the night sky that indicate their position. Included are: the eagle, bear, dog, lion, water-serpent, dragon, scorpion, crab, ram, swan, whale, fish, bull, wolf, sea-goat, and dove.

Manbazo, Ladysmith Black Gift of the Tortoise. Redway, California, Music for little people. 1994.

This is a wonderful CD recording retelling through storytelling and music of some of the traditions of the Zulu people. Using Fudugazi, the tortoise, as the narrator of the stories, Ladysmith Black Mambazo's music makes this recording a great source of Zulu traditions. Stories and songs such as "Rain Chant", or "The Boy Who Turned into a Cat" will delight the young as well as the old.

McDermott, Gerald. *Sun Flight*. New York, Four Wind Press, 1980.

Retells the story of Daedalus from his imprisonment by King Minos of Crete. It has beautiful illustrations and it would be appropriate for the beginner or intermediate reader.

Nesbit, Edith. *The Phoenix and the Carpet*. London, Octopus, 1979.

An entertaining book for children relating the story of a Phoenix still in the egg and wrapped in a magic carpet.

Pilling, Ann. *Realms of Gold Myths and Legends From Around the World*. New York, Kingfisher books, 1993.

The stories in this anthology fall into three parts: myths in which people try to explain the wonders they see around them; stories that explain the great themes of love; and tales of fools and heroes. Written with children in mind, the stories are easy and entertaining to be read independently or as a read-aloud.

Rosenberg, Donna. *Folklore, Myth and Legends: A World Perspective*. Lincolnwood, Ill., NTC Pub. Group, 1997.

A great source of myths, legends, and folklore with an extensive bibliography and index.

Seton, Julia M. *Indian Creation Stories*. Santa Fe, New Mexico, Seton Village Press, 1952.

A collection of stories based on diverse American Indian tribes. Written for children its main drawback is the lack of background (where do they originate?). However, the stories are very entertaining and appropriate for young children. Even though the stories can be read independently of each other, there is a continuous thread in the stories from one to the next.

South, Malcolm. *Mythical and Fabulous Creatures*. Westport, CT, Greenwood Press, 1987.

An extensive source book and research guide of mythical and fabulous creatures. Each chapter describes in detail each mythical and fabulous creature. Includes a bibliography.

Stein, Diane. Creation and Creation Goddesses. The Women's Spirituality Book. St. Paul, Minnesota, Llewellyn Publications. 1995.

A feminist collection of stories on the historical views of creation and creation goddesses.

Willis, Roy, Ed. World Mythology. New York, Henry Holt and Company, 1993.

A Henry Holt reference book. Divided into sections by country and region, it offers an extensive bibliographical list. It provides the reader with a great source of pictures and illustrations depicting mythological representations in the arts.

appendix A

CLASSROOM ASSESSMENT LIST

LISTING / CATEGORIZING - ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

1. List

T: I have written the name of all the animals I could think of.

O: I have written the name of some animals I could think of.

W: I haven't write the names of any animals.

2. Groups

T: I have made many different groups of animals and I have written why they are in the groups.

O: I have made some groups of animals and I have written why they are in the groups.

W: I have not made any groups of animals and I have not written why they are in the groups.

3. Questions

T: I have answered all the questions and I have written them down.

O: I have answered some of the questions and I have written them down.

W: I have answered some of the questions but I have not written them down.

Did I do my best work?

Terrific OK Needs Work

CLASSROOM ASSESSMENT LIST

LISTING / CATEGORIZING - ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

1. List

T: I have made a list of everything I need to live.

O: I have made a partial list of everything I need to live.

W: I haven't made a list.

2. Questions

T: I have answered all the questions and I have written them down.

I have
answered
some of
the
O: questions
and I
have
written
them
down.

W: I have answered some of the questions but I have not written them down.

Did I do my best work?

Terrific OK Needs Work

CLASSROOM ASSESSMENT LIST

RETELLING - ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

1. Drawings

T: I have drawn 5 pictures.

O: I have drawn 3 pictures.

W: I have not drawn any pictures.

2. Plan Labels and Details

T: My drawings are labeled and detailed and show all the parts.

O: My drawings are partly labeled and detailed and show some of the parts.

W: My drawings aren't labeled or detailed.

3. Characters

T: I have made a complete list of all the characters in the story.

O: I have made a partial list of the characters.

W: I have not make a list of the characters.

4. Setting

T: I have written all the settings where the story takes place.

O: I have written some of the settings where the story takes place.

W: I have not written any of the settings where the story takes place.

5. Retelling

T: I have retold the story using all the pictures, and naming all the characters and settings where it takes place.

O: I have retold the story using some of the pictures, and naming some of the characters and settings where it took place.

W: I have told some parts of the story using the pictures, and naming some of the characters and settings where it took place.

Did I do my best work?

Terrific OK Needs Work

CLASSROOM ASSESSMENT LIST

RETELLING - ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

1. Drawings

T: I have drawn 5 pictures.

O: I have drawn 3 pictures

W: I have not drawn any pictures.

2. Plan Labels and Details

T: My drawings are labeled and detailed and show all the parts.

O: My drawings are partly labeled and detailed and show some of the parts.

W: My drawings aren't labeled or detailed.

3. Characters

T: I have made a complete list of all the characters in the story.

O: I have made a partial list of the characters

W: I have not make a list of the characters.

4. Setting

T: I have written all the settings where the story takes place.

O: I have written some of the settings where the story takes place

W: I have not written any of the settings where the story takes place.

5. Location in map

T: I have located in the map the continent and country where the story originated.

O: I have located in the map only the continent where the story originated.

W: I have not located in the map where the story originated.

6. Retelling

T: I have retold the story using all the pictures, and naming all the characters and settings where it takes place.

O: I have retold the story using some of the pictures, and naming some of the characters and settings where

it took place.

W: I have told some parts of the story using the pictures, and naming some of the characters and settings where

it took place.

Did I do my best work?

Terrific OK Needs Work

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