

The Impact Of Mythology Across Cultures

Long before the existence of the printing press, personal computers, the Internet and other modes of modern communication, people documented their world through storytelling and the oral tradition. An important part of that process was the creation of mythology, collections of stories that were created to explain a culture's origin, history, deities, and heroes. These myths were passed on through generations to become an integral part of many cultures.

A Brief History Of Mythology

As soon as man was able to talk, he almost certainly began to tell stories about his experience, stories which likely migrated and evolved into the famous myths of Greek, Jewish, Egyptian and other cultures. While some say that myths are simply mistranslated true accounts or mutations of historical references, it is more likely that myths were important tools for societies to preserve their history, their values and their culture.

Myths are unique to the cultures that create them, yet they often have similar themes. While some myths seem outrageous or even impossible, they are almost always rooted in the real values, expectations and attitudes of the society that created them.

Universal Myths

Myths help man to make order out of chaos or explain things in nature that he cannot understand. Often, myths are based on ideas that affect all human beings, regardless of geography or race. Themes like life and death, fear and anxiety, good and evil, and the perennial question of "Why am I here? " make up the heart of mythological tales.

As such, many myths seem to be different versions of the same story, with variations according to the culture of origin. These kinds of myths are called "universal myths, " and include themes such as the creation of the world, punishment of mankind and heroic feats.

Creation Myths

Creation myths are myths that attempt to explain the way that man came to be. In some cultures, the myth involves a single creator summoning a mass of swirling particles, while others describe multiple gods working together to create the world and human life. Either way, creation myths are just one of many myths associated with the beginning of life.

Other creation myths focus on the cycle of life and death that all of nature goes through. The stages of fertility, birth, death and resurrection are depicted as the actions of gods or symbolized in nature with things like agriculture or seasons.

Punishment Myths

In mythology, once the gods create the earth, they may find themselves displeased with the manner in which its inhabitants are spending their lives. Stories that start in this way are often punishment myths. This is where the

common flood myth comes in - to wipe the slate clean. Despite the extreme and unlikely conditions that would lead to a worldwide flood, this myth is prevalent across cultures, forewarning man not to become too entrenched in immoral behavior.

These myths often also tend to depict a gradual breakdown of society from a place of high ideals to one lacking in ethics and values. While punishment myths often caution man on the consequence of immorality, they likely end with a lesson on what man can do to redeem himself from his wrongdoing.

Hero/Heroine Myths

In another attempt to redeem humanity, hero or heroine myths tell of typical human beings accomplishing extraordinary feats. These myths allow man to not only dream of great things, but to pass on lessons of cultural values and morality to future generations.

Many historians and experts also believe that these myths helped man to bring himself closer to the gods. As such, they may have been integral in constructing certain contemporary religious ideals, such as honor and redemption.

Present Day Mythology

While few people today communicate their messages solely through spoken word, folklore or myth, many poets and fiction writers draw on mythology, bringing depth and history to their own works. Mythology is also a common field of academic study, and is often regarded as a reference point for historians and theologians alike.

Even the average person can find value in mythology 's unique stories and diverse characters. Whether nested in poetry or painted on an archaic wall, myths continue to be an illuminating and inspiring means for making a little sense out of a world that is often incomprehensible.