

“The T’al Story”

This story introduces the idea of the “bogey man”; many of the stories that include the character of T’al are cautionary tales.

Before students read the story, ask them to consider any other stories or movies that they have read or seen where the disobedience of a character results in tragedy.

Once students have read the T’al story, ask them to list all of the ideas that arise from the story. These may include

- the consuming of children.
- vanity leading to one’s downfall.
- children obeying their mother .
- explaining how mosquitoes came to be.
- punishment for disobedience (children not listening to mother)

Other Myths / Literature

Look at another myth / legend that explains how something in nature came to be: “How Rivers First Came to the Earth” from *Mythic Voices* page 43.

Look at some Biblical parables. A list of suitable parables may be found on the internet. One site is <http://www.biblemeanings.info/Parables/Clowes.htm>. Choose one or more for students to read. Discuss what lesson is to be learned from each parable. You could then have the students read Milton's “On His Blindness” which alludes to Matthew 25: 14-30, the parable of the talents. As this is a difficult poem for grade 10 level, it will require some background information, teaching about the sonnet form, as well as a discussion of the parable and its relation to the poem.

Read Genesis, Chapters 2 and 3 (expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden).

Read a fable. Fables may be found at <http://www.pacificnet.net/~johnr/aesop/aesopsel.html>.

Discuss the conventions of a fable. A definition follows:

The purpose of a fable is to teach the moral lesson chosen by the writer by telling a story in which animals talk and act like human beings. The normal narrative structural elements are used: plot, characterization, conflict, setting, theme. The conflict of a fable is directly related to the moral normally given at the end of the story. The setting is less important than the voices of the characters which the writer creates. The audience of the fable may be either young or old, but the tone of the fable has the qualities of children's literature, simple and yet subtle. In a fable the language used is simple and repetitive. The

ideas are predictable and short. Techniques such as suspense and foreshadowing are frequently used. The voice of the writer is that of the neutral narrator, the storyteller, sharing a simple experience with a listening audience. If read to an audience, the voices of the characters may be dramatized, and the emotions experienced dramatized with voice and actions. There often is an underlying voice, the voice of the writer, sardonic, ironic, amused by the foibles of humanity. The intended impact of a fable is to demonstrate and teach the truth of the given moral.

Look at an urban myth.

(Try the following address: <http://www.delta-9.com/net47/myth/>)

Discuss what lesson is being offered.

Classical Mythology

Mythic Voices

“Demeter and Persephone” page 213 - explanation of the cycle of nature.

“Theseus and the Minotaur” page 99 (as background to Dedalus and Icarus myth - brief explanation of which follows) - punishment for flying too high --challenging the gods, disobeying his father

“The War of the Gods and Titans” page 15. (Cronus consuming his children.)

“The Creatures of Prometheus” page 23 (punishment for disobedience)

“Pandora’s Box” page 27 (punishment on man)

Myth

“Daedalus and Icarus” page 70 (punishment)

“Pandora” page 17 (punishment)

“The Kingdom of the Dead” page 128 (punishment - Tantalus and Sisyphus) Students will need some background about Odysseus.

“Psyche” - page 67 (lesson - Love cannot live without trust)

Video Resource: *The Storyteller* 292.1 The “Theseus and the Minotaur” and “Daedalus and Icarus”

Assignments

1. Did your parents create a bogey man for you when you were young? If so, who/what was he/she/it? For what purpose(s) was the bogey man invoked?
 - a. Tell your family’s bogey man story.
 - b. Create your own bogey man to tell your own children. Consider what lesson you wish them to learn.
2. Write your own myth which explains how some aspect of nature came to be. For

example, explain why night exists or why frogs croak.

3. Create an urban myth specifically for Powell River. Be sure to consider the lesson it conveys.
4. In the myth about Psyche, although she makes an error, she earns redemption. Create a story in which someone earns redemption after a wrong-doing.
5. Write an original fable that has one of the following morals:
 - appearances are deceptive
 - try to please all and you end up pleasing none
 - don't count your chickens before they are hatched
 - a hero is brave in deeds as well as wordBe sure to follow the conventions of a traditional fable.
6. After reading "The Kingdom of the Dead" in *Myth*, students could research the following:
Odysseus, Circe, Hades, Persephone, Erebus, Teiresias, Poseidon, Apollo, Achilles, and Zeus. Provide a brief explanation for each.
7. After reading "Daedalus and Icarus" in *Myth*, retell the story in a modern background. Consider how you would show:
 - the killing of the apprentice
 - the building of the labyrinth
 - the flight and fall of Icarus(This could be done either as a written assignment or a dramatic presentation.)

Questions for Discussion or Written Work:

Mythic Voices

"Demeter and Persephone" page 213

1. Why do you think Hades wanted Persephone to be his queen?

"Theseus and the Minotaur" page 99

1. What do you infer when the princess turns her face away from Theseus? Why do you think she indicates he is to go into the labyrinth first?
2. Theseus is loved by both Aegeus and Ariadne. Do these characters have anything else in common?
3. Discuss the significance of the two occasions on which Theseus is washed.
4. Why is Dedalus prevented from leaving the island?

"The War of the Gods and Titans" page 15

1. Do you feel sorry for Cronus? Why or why not?
2. Often myths employ the ugly, the grotesque, the violent while exploring the cruellest traits of human nature. Do you think the story of Cronus is too grotesque? Give reasons for your answer.
3. What might this myth say about conflicts/relationships between generations?

"The Creatures of Prometheus" page 23

1. Write a character sketch of Prometheus as though he were an ordinary man. Note how he lives, what he likes to do.
2. As he sends the first people out, Prometheus refers to our "inheritance". What was that? What had he hoped to achieve by creating human beings?
3. Would you like to be one of the humans Prometheus created, who knew him as their god? Why or why not? Would it be pleasant being a human under Zeus? Explain.
4. Down through the ages Prometheus has represented the spirit of revolution, of defiance of authority. What choice did Zeus have but to punish his rash behaviour?

"Pandora's Box" page 27

1. Does our society expect women to be "all giving"?
2. If Pandora were made so that she would be unable to resist doing what she had been told not to do, then she had no free will. Is it fair to blame her for her actions?

Myth

"Daedalus and Icarus" page 70

1. What were Daedalus' faults?
2. What services did Daedalus perform for Minos? Why was he banished?
3. What happened to Icarus? Why?

"Pandora" page 17

1. Explain the meaning of Pandora's name.
2. Show how her one weakness brought disaster.
3. What modern tales do you know of heroes who are persecuted because of their deeds of kindness?

"Psyche" - page 67

1. Why does Psyche lack suitors?
2. How did she betray her gentle husband?
3. Why did she set out to perform impossible tasks?

4. How were the tasks accomplished?
5. What details of the story make Psyche likeable?
6. What is the theme of the story? (Psyche means soul.)
7. Why do you feel the ending is satisfactory (or unsatisfactory)?

The Flood

Inform students that many different cultures and religions have similar stories. For instance, many different cultures have stories that explain the creation of man. Ask them to reflect on the myth of Prometheus if this one was studied with the T'ah story. Ask them if they can think of any other versions of the creation story. Inform them that the same is true for flood stories. They will read four different versions: Siammon, Biblical, Greek, and Sumerian.

Perhaps the presence of so many flood stories in different cultures can be accounted for by an actual flood that occurred in the fifteenth century B.C. in the Mediterranean area. However, what is more significant is the fact that the flood was seen by ancient man as god's punishment for man's evil doing.

Read the Siammon myth of "The Flood" as told by Ambrose Wilson.

Read the Biblical version of the flood, "Genesis" 6-8.

Read the Greek version of the flood, "Deucalion and Pyrrha" (attached), and "The Flood" page 19 in *Myth*.

Read the Sumerian version of the flood. This is an excerpt from the epic of Gilgamesh. The epic of Gilgamesh is contained on twelve large tablets which date back to 650 B.C. They are probably not the original as fragments of the flood story have been found on tablets dating back to 2000 B.C. Linguistic experts believe that the story was composed well before 2000 B.C.

The main figure in the epic is Gilgamesh, who may have been based on an actual Sumerian king. The story begins by outlining the deeds of the hero Gilgamesh who had great knowledge and wisdom. Gilgamesh is determined to find immortality because he

fears death. It is during his search for immortality that he meets Utnapishtum, the character who relates the flood story to him.

Questions on "**The Flood**" from *Myth*.

1. Why did Zeus send a flood to cover the earth?
2. Why were Deucalion and Pyrrha saved?
3. How was the earth repopulated?

Assignments:

1. Have students locate a flood story from another culture. Students could tell the story to the class or give a dramatic presentation of the story. (Try this address: <http://www.talkorigins.org/faqs/flood-myths.html>.)
2. Have students compare the flood myths that they have read. Create a chart in which they compare the following points: extent of flood (how long it lasted), extent of flood (how much of the earth was covered), cause of the flood, the "hero" in the story. Students should include one other point of their own choosing -- find something that exists in all, or most, of the stories. Inform the students that not all of their squares on their chart may be filled.

Before the students begin the assignment, discuss the qualities that a good chart should have. Use these ideas to create the marking rubric.

3. Perhaps the presence of so many flood stories in different cultures can be accounted for by an actual flood that occurred in the fifteenth century B.C. in the Mediterranean area. However, what is more significant is the fact that the flood was seen by ancient man as god's punishment for man's evil doing. Is the idea still with us today that terrible disasters are a form of god's punishment for not observing the proper forms of religious behaviour?

Write a story set in modern day which includes a disaster inflicted on mankind as a punishment for man's evil doing.

Deucalion and Pyrrha -- Greek Flood Myth

After Zeus had been in control on Olympus for some time, he looked down to earth and saw that man had become lawless and evil, neglecting even sacrifices to the gods. According to some accounts, Zeus actually disguised himself as a man and wandered the earth seeking the hospitality of the people. It had always been a custom in Greece that one must always honour a guest, but Zeus was treated cruelly wherever he went, except in one house. When he came to the house of a poor old man, Deucalion, and his wife Pyrrha, he was immediately welcomed and given what little they had. Since Deucalion had never neglected to sacrifice and to pray to the gods, Zeus determined that he would destroy all men on the earth and spare only this pious couple.

As a result of this decision, a terrible flood was sent. Deucalion and his wife were saved because Zeus had previously instructed them to build a raft. After the terrible flood had abated, Deucalion and his wife found themselves alone in the world. They were very old and so the problem of repopulating the earth with a new race of people had to be solved by the gods. As Pyrrha and Deucalion were praying to them, Zeus said, "Veil your heads and cast behind you the bones of your mother." They considered for some time what this message meant. Finally Pyrrha arrived at the solution. She realized that by "mother", Zeus had meant Gaea, the earth mother. Surely the bones of the mother were rocks. Therefore both Pyrrha and Deucalion gathered stones and threw them over their shoulders. All of Pyrrha's stones became women and all of Deucalion's stones became men. Thus, the earth was repopulated by a newer, and hopefully more pious, race of men and women.

from Head, Jim. *Man and Myth*. Toronto: Metheun, 1974.

"Thens Travels to the Upper World"

Many myths involve characters travelling to other worlds: either the upper world or the lower world. After students have read the story about Thens, ask them to consider the following aspects of the story:

- travel to another realm
- the triumph of the underdog
- possession of special powers
- three women
- beautiful, but dangerous, women
- performing tasks to reach a goal

The following stories connect with the above ideas that are introduced in the Thens story.

Travel to another realm:

"The Voyage of Odysseus" *Mythic Voices* page 194

"Orpheus" *Myth* page 57

"The White Stone Canoe" *Mythic Voices* page 233

Video Resource: "Orpheus and Euydice" (292.1 The)

"A Tour of the Greek Underworld" (attached)

Triumph of the underdog:

The story of David versus Goliath. "I Samuel" 17: 1-58

Possession of special powers:

Achilles (modern day: Superman, Spiderman)

Three Women:

Stories of the Graces, Fates, Furies, Gorgons, Graiae

Video Resource: The Storyteller "Perseus and the Gorgon" (292.1 The)

Beautiful but dangerous women:

Andromeda, Aphrodite, Artemis, Circe, Sirens

Performing tasks to reach a goal:

Psyche

Students could be asked to locate stories regarding the characters listed above. Students could use print resources available in the library or do an internet search.

Assignments:

1. Create a board game based on a journey to the underworld.
2. Two people who went to the Elysium Fields were Heracles and Achilles. Look up accounts of their lives to determine why they were numbered among the lucky mortals. Create a story of a hero who achieved a deed worthy enough for him/her to go to this part of the underworld upon his or her death.
3. Create a comic strip which centers around a hero who possesses special powers.
4. For what purpose could a trio of women exist in today's world? Create a group of three women who have jurisdiction over a part of life. What will they look like? What will their power be? What purpose do they serve? What are their names? Present your information in one of the following formats:
 - an illustrated storybook
 - a poster
 - a cartoon with a single panel
5. Create a new Brooks code of conduct. Consider the following misbehaviours:
 - late to class more than three times
 - skipping class
 - not completing homework

Create a list of tasks that any student committing these infractions would have to perform in order to redeem him or her self. Present them in the appropriate format. Check the style in the student agenda.

6. Dante Alighieri was an Italian author who, around 1300, wrote *The Divine Comedy*. In *The Divine Comedy*, Dante divided the afterlife into three sections -- Heaven, Purgatory, and Hell. Dante's Hell lies inside the earth. The upper regions lie close to the earth's surface while the deepest part is the exact centre of the earth. There are nine circles; each circle is smaller than the one above and contains a different class of sinner. Lesser sins are punished in the top circles of the cone while the sins become greater and the punishment harsher as the circles narrow. Lucifer himself is in the center of the lowest circle which is a frozen lake.
While Dante was writing from a Christian tradition, he nevertheless included many ideas from Greek mythology. The five rivers of the Greek underworld appear -- four in *The Inferno* and the fifth, Lethe, as the transition from Purgatory to Paradise. Here, too, Charon acts as ferry operator, arguing against accepting Dante because he is not dead. Minos, transformed into a bull monster, coils his long tail around each sinner to fling him into whatever circle or category the sinner belongs. Read the following descriptions of each of the circles described by Dante. Then, create your own version of hell. There is an outline attached that may help you get started.

Questions:

"The Voyage of Odysseus"

1. What is so dangerous about the land of the lotus eaters? Why does Odysseus insist on driving his men back on board?
2. Odysseus expects hospitality from the Cyclops. From this, describe the value placed by the Greeks on generous hospitality. Where else has this occurred in myths?
3. Describe how Odysseus tricks the Cyclops.
4. What evidence in the story is there that Odysseus is a good leader?
5. Why do the men stay with Circe for a year?
6. What advice does Circe give Odysseus about how to get past the Sirens? What advice does she give him on how to get past Scylla and Charybdis?
7. What act costs the last of Odysseus' crew their lives?
8. Penelope rules the kingdom of Ithaca and waited for twenty years, while Odysseus led a life of adventure. What does this say about the different lives of men and women at the time?

9. Outline the voyage of Odysseus in point form, detailing each episode, the danger encountered, and the losses suffered in surmounting the danger.
10. Pretending that you are Odysseus, write a log or diary of your journey from the end of the Trojan War to your final return to Ithaca. End your diary by stating whether your return was worth all the suffering endured, or whether you should have just stayed in one of the lands you encountered along the way.
11. Create a pictorial map of the journey of Odysseus.

"Orpheus and Eurydice"

1. Tell how Orpheus twice lost Eurydice.
2. Describe the fate of Orpheus. What immortality did he receive?
3. What is the theme of the story?
4. Why have some authors changed the story of Orpheus and Eurydice so that it has a happy ending? Give reasons for and against the probability of a happy ending.

A Tour of the Greek Underworld

Entrance into the underworld, Hades, was often difficult. The traveller had to discover the cavern or underground river, and follow the winding path down, down into the earth. Originally the Greeks believed that the underworld was across the river Ocean, but when travel to far islands put that to disrepute, the underworld changed to under the world, in the centre of the earth.

Travellers first met a river, the river of woe, sadness, or affliction--Acheron; Acheron was originally a son of Gaea but was said to have quenched the thirst of the Titans during the Titan/Olympian war, and Zeus threw him into the underworld to become its first river.

Charon, the ferry operator of the underworld, plied his trade on the river Acheron (some said on the river Styx). Greeks were insistent on proper burial rights for the dead. If the burial rites were not carried out perfectly, the soul would forever wander on the banks of the river Acheron, unable

to get into the next world. An obolus, or coin of payment, was placed in the dead person's mouth. Charon took this coin of payment, and ferried the soul across the river: no money, no passage.

To the Greeks, the soul was a pale reflection of its former personality, in other words, a shade of itself. Physically, morally, and in all ways, it was a shadow of its original self. Only a few privileged persons lived the same in the underworld as on earth. Minos, a judge of the underworld, was one of these three souls.

Hades consisted of three sections: Erebus, Tartarus, and the Elysium Fields. The entrance way or vestibule - Erebus - was a place through which all of the dead had to pass (perhaps a type of limbo). Since the Greek underworld or Hades was for all the dead, whether good or bad, judgment followed.

The three judges in Hades were Aeacus (son of Zeus and Aegina) who judged the Europeans, Rhadamanthus (son of Zeus and Europa) who judged the Asiatics, and Minos (also the son of Zeus and Europa) who judged the difficult cases. This tribunal sat awaiting the various shades and prepared to send them to either Tartarus (a place of punishment) or Elysium Fields (a place of eternal happiness).

The next step was to cross the river of lamentation or wailing -- Cocytus. In journeying to either Tartarus or Elysium Fields, the shades might run into the Fates, the ones who spun, measured, and cut the thread of life. As a matter of fact, the fates were the ones responsible for the soul getting to this point. If the thread of life had not been cut, then the individual would not have died. Also in the realm of darkness could be found the Furies and Nemesis. The Furies, with serpents in their hair and blood dripping from their eyes, pursued sinners on earth, but lived in the underworld. Nemesis, the spirit of just punishment and the goddess of retribution, was a sister to the Fates and was known as the divine arbiter of justice, concerned not only with punishment but also with just rewards.

Travellers were also likely to meet Hecate, Queen of the Dead and goddess of magic charms and enchantments. As the goddess of witchcraft and sorcery, she was said to haunt the tombs of the dead and scenes of crimes while on earth. Hecate was also connected with Artemis and Selene as a goddess of the moon, but the goddess of the dark side of the moon.

The river Styx had nine loops and surrounded the underworld. Originally she was a daughter of the Titans and helped the Olympians in the war, so she became the river of the gods. If a god swore by her, the oath was irrevocable.

Edging closer to Tartarus, the soul was greeted by Cerberus, the watchdog at the gates of Tartarus. According to most stories, he had three heads and venom dripped from all his mouths. In addition, he had a serpent's or a dragon's tail. He would let souls in but not out. However, he could be bribed with a honey cake on occasion or with sweet music.

The river of fire, Phlegethon, also led into and surrounded Tartarus. Tartarus itself formed a dismal picture -- gates of bronze guarded by Cerberus, surrounded by fire, encased within a triple wall, and within, the wailing and cries of those being punished. Tantalus was one of those sinners enduring punishment. He was guilty of many crimes, but perhaps the worst was the testing of the gods by serving them his son for dinner. The gods discovered his gruesome plot and Tantalus, as punishment, stood forever in a pool of water, unable to drink, and within reach of fruit trees, but unable to eat. Another soul in torment was Sisyphus. He died, but by a trick escaped from the underworld to return to earth. He was recaptured and for his trickery was condemned to forever roll a rock up a hill, only to have it roll back down. Ixion, another sinner, showed his disrespect for the gods and attempted to win the love of Hera. For his presumption, he was condemned to roll forever on a wheel of fire throughout Tartarus. Finally, the Danaids were all guilty of

murdering their husbands. Originally, there were fifty sisters, all betrothed to fifty male cousins. For some reason, they went through with the marriage and then forty-nine of them killed their husbands on their wedding night. (One didn't do it.) As punishment, they were to fill a barrel with water from a nearby stream, but the water had to be carried in sieves. Needless to say, the punishment lasted forever.

If Tartarus was not the destination of the soul, the wanderer would then find his or her way closer to the Elysium Fields. In the Abode of Sleep, the soul met Thanatos / Mors (death), Hypnos / Somnus (sleep, who is the brother of death), and Morpheus (the son of sleep and god of dreams).

Finally, the soul reached Lethe, the last river, the river of forgetfulness, on the edge of the Elysium Fields. One cup of water from the river and the soul forgot its past. From there the soul moved into the Elysium Fields, the enjoyment of the Happy Isles, where soft breezes always blew and the hideous creatures of the other infernal regions were barred from entrance. Nearby, stood Persephone's grove of black poplars and sterile willows, for nothing truly fruitful could bloom in the underworld. Finally, the soul saw the king and queen of Hades -- Persephone and Hades.

The tour is now complete. The dead must stay but the living may return to the upperworld.

From *Mythology*. The Center for Learning.

Why Study Mythology?

Ask students how they would define mythology. Some might say that myths are stories of gods and goddesses or the ancient religion of the Greeks. Some might say that myths are legends of famous heroes.

Tell students that mythology will be studied in a broader sense in this unit, as a body of traditional tales of a particular people, originally told orally, but later passed on in written form. Mythology extends from early Greek and Roman times (and even before to primitive or historic times) up to today. Myths range from the tale of an egg cracking open to form the earth to the traditional wedding belief of something old and something new, something borrowed and something blue. Mythical places range from Mt. Fuji in Japanese mythology to Mt. Olympus in Greek mythology to the Fountain of Youth in more modern times. Stress that mythology is not merely something from the olden times.

Words such as folklore, fairy tales, myths and legends are sometimes used interchangeably, but there are some differences to be noted.

Myths properly refer to early humanity's seeking for explanations of the phenomena of nature (the sun as a chariot, a volcano shows a god's anger); they are imaginative precursors of scientific investigation. Sometimes myths were used to explain customs or rituals (before you hunt buffalo, you dance--then the hunt will be successful).

Legends were usually true stories exaggerated. Thus, there was a real event -- a Trojan War -- but the stories dealing with the war cannot be proved. Legends frequently deal with heroes who may or may not have accomplished great deeds. Davy Crockett was a noted frontier settler, but did he kill a bear when he was three? Beowulf might have been a real person, but could he really wrench off a monster's arm or swim underwater for hours?

Folk tales or fairy tales are generally pure fiction -- to amuse, to entertain, or teach. Folk tales frequently use the supernatural (witches or fairies) and deal with the common people (forest dwellers or farmers).

Ask students to discuss the need within individuals to create myths. Lead them to an understanding that by studying myths we can learn how different societies or cultures have answered basic questions about the world and our place within it.

Explain how myths, while retaining certain similarities, will vary according to climate, custom, or social system. For example, the Greeks living in a warm climate saw humans as created from the mud of a river bank; while, farther North, the first human beings were said to have come from frozen stones, licked by a divine cow until the person was released from the ice.

From: *Mythology*. The Center for Learning.

This Unit

This mythology unit is organized around three Sliammon myths. The students will be exposed to some of our local First Nations stories as well as be given an overview of classical mythology and related stories.

Mythology is an interesting study by itself; however, it is hoped that students will come away from this unit with an ability to locate and understand allusions made in other pieces of literature.

There are quite a few suggestions for additional readings and activities. Teachers are encouraged to choose as many of these as time permits or are relevant for their students. There are, of course, many other myths, stories, and assignments that can be used; feel free to include them.

Allusions in Literature

On First Looking Into Chapman's Homer John Keats

Much have I travelled in the realms of gold,
 And many goodly states and kingdom's seen;
 Round many western islands have I been
Which bards in fealty to Apollo hold.

Unequal laws unto a savage race,
 That hoard and sleep, and feed, and know not me. 5
 I cannot rest from travel: I will drink
 Life to the lees: All times I have enjoy'd
 Greatly, have suffer'd greatly, both with those
 That loved me, and alone; on shore and when
 Thro' scudding drifts the rainy Hyades 10
 Vext the dim sea; I am become a name;
 For always roaming with a hungry heart
 Much have I seen and known; cities of men
 And manners, climates, councils, governments,
 Myself not least, but honour'd of them all; 15
 And drunk delight of battle with my peers,
 Far on the ringing plains of windy Troy.
 I am a part of all that I have met;
 Yet all experience is an arch wherethrough
 Gleams that untravelled world whose margin fades 20
 For ever and for ever when I move.
 How dull it is to pause, to make an end,
 To rust unburnish'd, not to shine in use!
 As though to breathe were life! Life piled on life
 Were all too little, and of one to me 25
 Little remains: but every hour is saved
 From that eternal silence, something more,
 A bringer of new things; and vile it were
 For some three suns to store and hoard myself
 And this gray spirit yearning in desire 30
 To follow knowledge like a sinking star
 Beyond the utmost bound of human thought.
 This is my son, mine own Telemachus,
 To whom I leave the scepter and the isle --
 Well-loved of me, discerning to fulfill 35
 This labour, by slow prudence to make mild
 A rugged people, and through soft degrees
 Subdue them to the useful and the good.
 Most blameless is he, centred in the sphere
 Of common duties, decent, not to fail 40
 In offices of tenderness, and pay
 Meet adoration to my household gods,
 When I am gone. He works his work, I mine.

There lies the port; the vessel puffs her sail:
 There gloom the dark, broad seas. My mariners, 45

Siren Song Margaret Atwood

This is the one song everyone
would like to learn: the song
that is irresistible:

the song that forces men
to leap overboard in squadrons 5
even though they see the bleached skulls

the song nobody knows
because anyone who has heard it
is dead, and the others can't remember.

Shall I tell you the secret 10
and if I do, will you get me
out of this bird suit?

I don't enjoy it here
squatting on this island
looking picturesque and mythical 15

with these two feathery maniacs,
I don't enjoy singing
this trio, fatal and valuable.

I will tell the secret to you,
to you, only to you. 20
Come closer. This song

is a cry for help: Help me!
Only you, only you can,
you are unique

at last. Alas 25
it is a boring song
but it works every time.

According to myth, men were absolutely unable to resist the sirens' song. Odysseus (Ulysses) because of his desire to experience all things, wanted to hear the song. He had his crew tie him tightly to the ship's mast, then stop up their own ears with wax and sail close to the island. He is the only man to have heard their song.

How does Atwood make use of the myth in this poem? What does calling the song boring indicate?

Andromeda Graham Hough

One can get used to anything; the cave
Was dark, smelt bad, and twice a day the wave
Slopped on the floor; however much she swept
Sand, bladder-wrack and dead sea-urchins crept
Over the stones. The monster did not care, 5
But crouched preoccupied before the door,
Fretted at unsuccessful business deals,
Went out to fish and came back late for meals.

And when at last the heaven-sprung hero came,
Wing-heeled and gorgon-shielded, thirsty for fame, 10
Red-hot with bravery, he found her sitting
Upon a damp stone, busy with her knitting.
The monster lay asleep, and dinner stood
To simmer by a fire of smouldering wood.
The sword seemed pointless, something was amiss. 15
She stirred the pot. He had not come for this.

He was too late. The voyage had been too long.
The gorgon shield turned no ill thing to stone.
The gold helm hardly dazzled her at all.
She hung the iron ladle on the wall, 20
Stood up and faced him. Was the moment come?
But when the monster shivered in the gloom
She bent and spread a cloth over its coiled
Green limbs. The hero's attitude was spoiled.

Had he looked close enough he might have seen 25
A thin dry shudder where her heart had been,
But saw no thundering wrong to fight about,
Clattered his golden armour and went out;
Finding her patient unrebelling shape
No pretext for a plain heroic rape. 30
The tide was rising, and she turned once more
To sweep the dark sea from the door.

In this bitter and ironic poem, Hough is using the Perseus myth to express a very individual concept. So that his inner thought can be understood, he has had to utilize the universality of the myth.

What traditional aspects of the myth are present?

How has Hough changed our concept of each classical figure?

Hough seems to be looking at the entire idea of heroism from a modern and cynical perspective. What picture of the hero emerges now?

Is Andromeda any better off in the new tradition?

The World is Too Much With Us William Wordsworth

Musee des Beaux Arts W.H. Auden

About suffering they were never wrong,
The Old Masters; how well, they understood
Its human position; how it takes place
While someone else is eating or opening a window or just walking dully along;
How, when the aged are reverently, passionately waiting 5
For the miraculous birth, there always must be
Children who did not specially want it to happen, skating
On a pond at the edge of the wood:
They never forgot
That even the dreadful martyrdom must run its course 10
Anyhow in a corner, some untidy spot
Where the dogs go on with their doggy life and the torturer's horse
Scratches its innocent behind on a tree.
In Brueghel's Icarus, for instance: how everything turns away
Quite leisurely from the disaster; the ploughman may 15
Have heard the splash, the forsaken cry,
But for him it was not an important failure; the sun shone
As it had to on the white legs disappearing into the green
Water; and the expensive delicate ship that must have seen
Something amazing, a boy falling out of the sky,
had somewhere to get to and sailed calmly on. 20

Details in the first part of the poem seem to refer to two paintings by Pieter Brueghel: The Massacre of the Innocents and The Numbering at Bethlehem. In the second part of the poem, Auden describes Brueghel's painting The Fall of Icarus.

What do Auden and the "Old Masters" have to say about the significance and experience of human suffering?

Ode to a Nightingale John Keats

My heart aches, and a drowsy numbness pains
My sense, as though of hemlock I had drunk,
Or emptied some dull opiate to the drains
One minute past, and Lethe-wards had sunk:
'Tis not through envy of thy happy lot, 5
But being too happy in thine happiness,
That thou, light-wingèd Dryad of the trees,
In some melodious plot
Of beechen green, and shadows numberless,
Singest of summer in full-throated ease. 10

O for a draught of vintage! that hath been
Cool'd a long age in the deep-delvèd earth,
Tasting of Flora and the country-green,
Dance, and Provençal song, and sunburnt mirth!
O for a beaker full of the warm South! 15
Full of the true, the blushful Hippocrene,
With beaded bubbles winking at the brim,
And purple-stainèd mouth;
That I might drink, and leave the world unseen,
And with thee fade away into the forest dim: 20

Fade far away, dissolve, and quite forget
What thou among the leaves hast never known,
The weariness, the fever, and the fret
Here, where men sit and hear each other groan;
Where palsy shakes a few, sad, last grey hairs, 25
Where youth grows pale, and spectre-thin, and dies;
Where but to think is to be full of sorrow
And leaden-eyed despairs;
Where beauty cannot keep her lustrous eyes,
Or new Love pine at them beyond to-morrow. 30

Away! away! for I will fly to thee,
Not charioted by Bacchus and his pards,
But on the viewless wings of Poesy,
Though the dull brain perplexes and retards:
Already with thee! tender is the night, 35
And haply the Queen-Moon is on her throne,
Cluster'd around by all her starry Fays
But here there is no light,
Save what from heaven is with the breezes blown
Through verdurous glooms and winding mossy ways. 40

I cannot see what flowers are at my feet,
Nor what soft incense hangs upon the boughs,
But, in embalmèd darkness, guess each sweet
Wherewith the seasonable month endows
The grass, the thicket, and the fruit-tree wild; 45
White hawthorn, and the pastoral eglantine;
Fast-fading violets cover'd up in leaves;
And mid-May's eldest child,
The coming musk-rose, full of dewy wine,
The murmurous haunt of flies on summer eves. 50

Darkling I listen; and, for many a time
I have been half in love with easeful Death,
Call'd him soft names in many a musèd rhyme,
To take into the air my quiet breath;
Now more than ever seems it rich to die, 55
To cease upon the midnight with no pain,
While thou art pouring forth thy soul abroad
In such an ecstasy!
Still wouldst thou sing, and I have ears in vain—
To thy high requiem become a sod. 60

Thou wast not born for death, immortal Bird!
No hungry generations tread thee down;
The voice I hear this passing night was heard
In ancient days by emperor and clown:
Perhaps the self-same song that found a path 65
Through the sad heart of Ruth, when, sick for home,
She stood in tears amid the alien corn;
The same that ofttimes hath
Charm'd magic casements, opening on the foam
Of perilous seas, in faery lands forlorn. 70

Forlorn! the very word is like a bell
To toll me back from thee to my sole self!
Adieu! the fancy cannot cheat so well
As she is fabled to do, deceiving elf.
Adieu! adieu! thy plaintive anthem fades 75
Past the near meadows, over the still stream,
Up the hill-side; and now 'tis buried deep
In the next valley-glades:
Was it a vision, or a waking dream?
Fled is that music:—do I wake or sleep? 80

Keats wrote this poem in May of 1819 while living with his friend Charles Brown in London. Brown made the following comment on Keats' composition: "In the spring of 1819 a nightingale had built her nest near my house. Keats felt a tranquil and continual joy in her song; and one morning he took his chair from the breakfast table to the grass plot under a plum tree, where he sat for two or three hours. When he came into the house, I perceived he had some scraps of paper in his hand, and these he was quietly thrusting behind the books. On inquiry, I found those scraps, four or five in number, contained his poetic feeling on the song of our nightingale."

The year 1818 was a difficult one for Keats. In addition to other problems, Keats' younger brother Tom contracted tuberculosis, and Keats cared for him constantly, running the risk as he knew of contracting the disease himself. Tom died in December, 1818. Keats did fall ill himself. He died of tuberculosis in February, 1821.

Locate the allusions that Keats makes in the poem. Provide an explanation for each one.

Night Clouds Amy Lowell

The white mares of the moon rush along the sky
Beating their golden hoofs upon the glass Heavens;
The white mares of the moon are all standing on their hind legs
Pawing at the green porcelain doors of the remote Heavens.
Fly, Mares!
Strain your utmost,
Scatter the milky dust of stars,
Or the tiger sun will leap upon you and destroy you
With one lick of his vermilion tongue.

5

Amy Lowell was an American poet who lived between the years of 1874 and 1925.

What time of day is Lowell describing in this poem? She is alluding to a Greek goddess in the poem. Try to discover to whom she is referring.

Sea Grapes Derek Walcott

(Modern poet, born 1930, on St. Lucia, a West Indian island)

That sail which leans on light,
tired of islands,
a schooner beating up the Caribbean

for home, could be Odysseus,
home-bound on the Aegean;
that father and husband's

longing, under gnarled sour grapes, is
like the adulterer hearing Nausicaa's name
in every gull's outcry.

This brings nobody peace.
The ancient war
between obsession and responsibility
will never finish and has never been the same

for the sea-wanderer or the one on shore
now wriggling on his sandals to walk home,

since Troy sighed its last flame,

and the blind giant's boulder heaved the trough
from ground-swell the great hexameters come
to the conclusions of the exhausted surf.

The classics can console. But not enough.

Odysseus...Aegean: Odysseus is the Greek hero whose ten-year voyage home from the Trojan

War is described by Homer in the Odyssey. The Aegean is the sea, between Greece and Turkey, on which he voyaged.

Nausicaa's: Nausicaa was a beautiful young woman who helped Odysseus when he was shipwrecked. The "adulterer" is Odysseus himself.

obsession: A persistent idea or desire that cannot be gotten rid of by reasoning.

Troy: The city in Asia Minor that Odysseus and his fellow Greeks conquered.

blind giant's boulder: In the Odyssey, the blind giant Polyphemus hurls a boulder at Odysseus' ship.

hexameters: The meter in which Homer's Iliad and Odyssey were composed.

In this poem, the theme or central idea about life is stated directly. In the poem, the allusions to Homer's Odyssey help convey the theme. Walcott states the theme in the final line of the poem. The poem's previous eighteen lines, which compare a modern situation with episodes in Homer's

epic, have all built up to this statement. Often writers draw comfort from such comparisons, offering solace for current problems by showing how past ones were overcome. Here the poet frustrates that expectation, his last line casting a chill over both the modern event and Homer's story.

1. What is the mood of "Sea Grapes"? Which words and phrases convey this mood?
2. In your own words, explain the conflict between "obsession" and "responsibility" that the poet mentions in the fourth stanza. Why does he say that that conflict will never be resolved?
3. How can "The classics...console" someone who is experiencing such a conflict? Why is such consolation "not enough"? Has a work of art ever made you feel better about your life? Explain.
4. How does the statement of theme in the final line relate to the mood of the poem?
5. Would you rather be a "sea-wanderer" or the one on the shore?