

# Myths





Myths like that of Atlas gave answers to questions about the world.

## What Are Myths?

People have always wanted to know why things happen. Where does the Sun go at night? What causes thunder? How was the world created?

Today, we use science to answer questions like these. Long ago, people found answers in stories called myths. The Norse people believed that a god made thunder with a great hammer. The Egyptians believed that the world was created from a huge body of water.

Many myths are about gods, or divinities. Divinities have powers far beyond what people have, yet in many myths they act like people. They have the same emotions as people and make the same mistakes as people.

Ancient myths are part of our world today. When people talk about someone with a golden touch or opening a box full of trouble, they're talking about things that happened in Greek myths.

### Key Notes:

What might you find in a myth?

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One artist showed  
the Roman god Janus  
as having two faces.

## Roman Myths

The study of myths is called mythology. Roman mythology tells stories about ancient Roman divinities and Roman history.

One myth tells how the city of Rome was started. According to this story, there were twin brothers whose mother was a human and whose father was the Roman war god Mars. As babies, the twins were put into a basket that was left floating on a river. A wolf found the basket and saved the twins. When the twins were grown, they decided to build a city at the place where the wolf found them.

The romans took many of their gods from the Greeks. The chief Roman god, Jupiter, was like the chief Greek god, Zeus. Like Zeus, Jupiter controlled thunder. Another important Roman divinity was Jupiter's wife, Hera, a divinity who was the goddess of women and childbirth.

### Key Notes:

What is Roman mythology?

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In Egyptian myths,  
the crocodile was  
considered divine.

## Egyptian Myths

The ancient Egyptians believed that before the world was created, there was nothing but a huge ocean. When a god rose from the water and found that he had no place to stand, he created a hill. Then, he created more gods, who were his children. One day they disappeared, and the god was very upset. When his children finally returned, he cried with joy. As his tears landed on the ground, the tears became people.

After this, the god created crocodiles, other animals, plants, and other living things. In Egyptian mythology, some animals are considered divine. The Egyptians regarded cats and crocodiles as divine.

The sky was a goddess called Nut. She was often shown as a cow standing over Earth. Each morning, she gave birth to the Sun. Each evening, Nut swallowed the Sun, leaving people in darkness.

### Key Notes:

How did the ancient Egyptians believe the world was created?

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This painting shows Pandora, a character in a Greek myth.

## Greek Myths

Some ancient Greek myths are part of the English language today. You may have heard the names of some people from these myths.

The gods gave Pandora, who was said to be the first woman, a box that held many troubles. Pandora was told to never open the box, but she was very curious. One day she lifted the lid and all of the world's troubles flew out. Today, "a Pandora's box" means "something full of trouble." Opening a Pandora's box means releasing the trouble inside.

Another Greek myth tells of Midas, a king who wanted to be rich. When a god granted him a wish, he asked that everything he touched turn to gold. Midas got his wish, but he had a problem, even his food turned to gold. Today, "having the Midas touch" means being successful at everything you do.

### Key Notes:

Where do you hear the names from ancient Greek myths today?

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