Myths Explain the World

• The ancient Greeks believed in many gods.

• These gods were at the center of mythology.

• Each story, or myth, explained natural or historical events.
Greek Gods

• People today have scientific explanations for events like thunder, earthquakes, and volcanic eruptions.

• The ancient Greeks did not.

• They believed their gods caused these events to happen & they created myths to explain the gods’ actions.
Greek Gods

- Zeus, king of the gods
- Hera, queen of the gods
- Poseidon, god of the sea
- Hades, god of the underworld
- Demeter, goddess of agriculture
- Hestia, goddess of the hearth
- Athena, goddess of wisdom
- Apollo, god of the sun
- Artemis, goddess of the moon
- Ares, god of war
Greek Gods

- Aphrodite, goddess of love
- Hephaestus, god of metalworking
- Dionysus, god of celebration
- Hermes, the messenger god
Gods & Mythology

- The Greeks saw the works of the gods all around them.
  - Disasters
  - Daily events

- To keep the gods happy, the Greeks built great temples to honor them.
Gods & Mythology

• Many Greeks in need of advice traveled to Delphi to see the oracle.

• The oracle was a female priest of Apollo to whom they thought the god gave answers.

• The oracle was so respected that Greek leaders sometimes asked her for advice about how to rule their cities.
Heroes & mythology

• Not all Greek myths were about gods.

• Many were about the adventures of great heroes.

• Some of their heroes were real people while others were not.
Heroes & mythology

• They loved to tell stories of heroes who had special abilities & faced terrible monsters.

• The people of each city had their favorite hero, usually someone from there.

• Athens favorite hero was Theseus.
• The most famous of all Greek heroes was Hercules.
Ancient Greek Literature

• Early Greek writers produced long epic poems, romantic poetry, and some of the world’s famous stories.
Homer & Epic Poetry

• Among the earliest Greek writings are two great epic poems:
  – The *Iliad*
  – The *Odyssey*

• These were written by a poet named Homer.
Homer & Epic Poetry

• Both of these epic poems describe the deeds of great heroes.

• The heroes in Homer’s poems fought in the Trojan War.

• In this war, the Mycenaean Greeks fought the Trojans, people of the city called Troy.
Homer & Epic Poetry

• The *Iliad* tells the story of the last years of the Trojan War.

• It focuses on the deeds of the Greeks, especially Achilles, the greatest of all Greek warriors.

• It describes in great detail the battles between the Greeks & their Trojan enemies.
Homer & Epic Poetry

- The *Odyssey* describes the challenges the Greek hero Odysseus faced on his way home from the war.

- For 10 years after the war ends, he tries to get home, but many obstacles stand in his way.

- He has to fight his way past terrible monsters, powerful magicians and even angry gods.
Homer & Epic Poetry

• Both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* are great tales of adventure.

• These poems were central to the Greek education system.

• They would memorize long portions of the poems.
Lyric Poetry

• Other poets wrote poems that were set to music.

• During a performance, the poet played a stringed instrument called a lyre while reading a poem.

• Today, the words of songs are called lyrics after these ancient Greek poets.
Lyric Poetry

• The most famous Greek lyric poet was a woman named Sappho.

• Her poems were beautiful and emotional.

• Most of her poems were about love & relationships with her friends & her family.
FABLES

• Other Greeks told stories to teach people important lessons.

• Aesop is famous for his fables.
Fables

• In most of his fables animals are the main characters.
• The animals talk & act like humans.
  – The Ants & the Grasshopper
  – The Tortoise & the Hare
  – The Boy Who Cried Wolf
Greek Literature Lives

• Greek literature is still alive & popular today.

• Some of the words we still use & some of the stories we hear come from ancient Greece.
The most obvious way we see the influence of the Greeks is in our language.

Many English words & expressions come from Greek mythology:

- Odyssey (Odysseus) - long journey
- Titanic (Titans) – very large & powerful
Many places around the world today are also named after figures from Greek myths:

- Athens named after Athena
- Africa’s Atlas Mountains named after a giant from Greek mythology who held up the sky
- Aegean Sea named after Aegeus, a legendary Greek king
- Europe named from a Greek myth, a princess from Europa
Literature & the Arts

• Greek myths have inspired artists for centuries:
  – Painters & sculptors
  – Writers
  – Moviemakers
  – Sports teams use the names of powerful figures from myths
  – Businesses use images or symbols from mythology