

Myths & Legends

Tricksters in Mythology

By Charlotte Rance

Segment: Secondary

Level: Intermediate

Materials: The worksheet and text (divided into A, B, C sections)

Teaching Objectives	Learning Aims
To introduce vocabulary related to tricksters in mythology	I can recognise and understand vocabulary related to tricksters
To practise summarising information from a reading text	I can give an oral summary of a text I have read
To work collaboratively and make decisions as a group	I can negotiate with a group and come to a decision
To research tricksters, myths and legends	I can use English language websites to research a topic



The lesson

1. Write the following questions on the board and ask students to discuss them with a partner:
Do you ever play tricks or jokes on your friends and family? Can you think of any characters from films or books that like to play tricks on people? Encourage the students to extend their answers.
2. Explain that in today's lesson you will be looking at the character of 'the trickster'. Elicit ideas from the class about what role this character plays in stories. Encourage students to use their examples from the discussion at the beginning of class to support their ideas.

Background Information

Tricksters are characters that can be found in the myths of many different cultures. They are known for their habit of breaking rules, and they often openly question and mock authority figures. Tricksters are typically cunning and intelligent, and they can often change their shape. The role of the trickster is to bring changes to society: their jokes often make the other characters angry, but the results often benefit everyone around them.

3. Hand out the worksheet and ask students to look at Exercise A. Explain that words 1 – 8 are all connected to tricksters. Ask students to work on their own to match the words to their definitions (a – h). Once students have completed the activity, ask them to check their answers with their neighbour, then confirm the answers as a class.

Answers

4. Explain to the students that they will learn about three famous tricksters. Arrange the class into three groups: (A, B, C). Give each student a copy of the relevant reading passage for their group. Ask the students to read their paragraph, then summarise it with the members of their group.

Myths & Legends

Tricksters in Mythology

5. Draw the students' attention to Exercise B on their worksheet. Explain that each group should work together to complete the first column of the table, using the information from their reading passage. Explain that they will need to choose two interesting facts about their character. Each member of the group should write the same information, so it is important that they discuss their ideas and choose their answers as a group. Monitor the students, helping with grammar and vocabulary and prompting them with ideas when necessary.

Reading Activity

This is a typical 'jigsaw reading' activity. This is an information gap approach that emphasises cooperative learning. Typically, students are given part of a text to read and become an expert on. They then teach this information to the other members of their group. This strategy helps students to improve their summarising skills and encourages group work and real-life communication.

6. Explain to the class that they will now share what they have learned with their classmates. Rearrange the students into groups of three, with one student from each of the original groups (ABC, ABC, ABC).
7. Ask students to complete the final two columns of the table from Exercise B with the information they have learned from their new groups. Once students have completed their tables, take feedback as a class on what students have learned about the three tricksters.
8. Tell students they will now work in pairs to research further information on the topic of tricksters. Explain that students should give a short presentation to their classmates (2 – 3 minutes only). Write the following two options on the board: A. Find out about another trickster character from another country's myths and legends or B. Learn and retell a story of Loki, Anansi or Coyote. Below you will find some suggested websites that the students can use for this task. If you do not have access to computers in the classroom, this activity could be done as homework.

Website Suggestions

- <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Ananse>
 - <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Loki>
 - <https://mythology.net/mythical-creatures/trickster/>
 - <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Coyote-mythology>
9. Allow students time to present their findings to the class. This can be done during the following lesson if necessary.

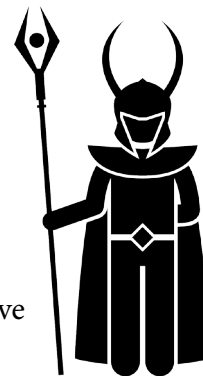


Myths & Legends

Tricksters in Mythology

A) Loki

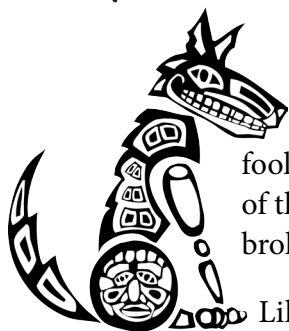
Loki is the trickster god of Norse mythology, the stories of Scandinavia. He lives in Asgard, the home of the gods, and is the blood brother of Odin. Loki is known by his nickname 'lie-smith'. He is depicted as neither good nor bad, but in all the stories he is shown to be intelligent and cunning. He has the ability to disguise himself and can shape-shift into the form of any animal. He is always making mischief and causing trouble for the gods. However, no matter how angry Loki made the gods, his tricks have helped them on many occasions.



Loki is a central figure in many of the stories. It is because of him that Thor gets his infamous hammer, and in one story we learn that he is the father of Sleipnir, Odin's eight-legged horse. Loki is probably the most famous trickster of any mythology. He often appears as a character in books, such as Neil Gaiman's 'American Gods', or computer games like 'God of War'. However, recently he has become best known for the role he plays in the Marvel films.



B) Coyote



Coyote is a key figure in the Native American mythology of the Navajo tribe. He is a shadowy character who is sometimes funny but sometimes fearsome.

Coyote is depicted with many negative traits. He is greedy, vain, and can be foolish, but he is also shown to be cunning and sometimes powerful. An example of this is the story of Coyote and the Giant, where he convinces the giant that if he broke his leg and then healed it, the Giant would be able to run as fast as Coyote.

Like many of the other tricksters in mythology, he fights against authority and often brings chaos to those around him. In Navajo culture, the coyote is an omen of unfortunate events. There is a saying that if a coyote crosses your path, you should turn around and go back without completing your journey.



C) Anansi

Anansi is one of the most important characters of West African and Caribbean folklore. Although he often acts and appears as a man, Anansi is actually a spider. Depictions of Anansi sometimes show him looking like an ordinary spider, however sometimes he is a spider with a human face, or like a human with spider elements, such as eight legs. Anansi can control the weather, for example bringing the rain to stop fires. In some beliefs, he is responsible for creating the sun, the stars and the moon. Anansi has a wife, Aso, and seven children, all of whom appear in his stories along with other characters such as Goat, Monkey and Rat.



Anansi is often celebrated as a symbol of slave resistance as, like other tricksters, he uses his cunning and trickery to take advantage of his oppressors. Slaves would tell stories of how Anansi helped them to plan resistance against their masters. Stories of Anansi became so important that, in some cultures, all folklore stories are known as "spider-tales", even if Anansi doesn't appear in the story.

Myths & Legends

Tricksters in Mythology - Worksheet

Exercise A

- | | |
|----------------|--|
| 1. Trickster | a. A sign of what is going to happen in the future |
| 2. Cunning | b. The act of describing or giving an impression of something in words |
| 3. Shape-shift | c. Dislike of or opposition to a plan or an idea, refusal to obey |
| 4. Fearsome | d. A state of confusion or a lack of order |
| 5. Omen | e. A person who tricks or cheats people |
| 6. Chaos | f. Able to get what you want in a clever way, especially through tricking people |
| 7. Depiction | g. Making people feel frightened |
| 8. Resistance | h. To change into other people, animals or things |



Exercise B

	Character A	Character B	Character C
Name			
Mythology			
Further Information	1.	1.	1.
	2.	2.	2.