

Earth-Centered Traditions

Lesson 2: Creation Myths

9.26.2021

Objectives: Exploring organizing ideas and characteristic motifs in creation myths.

Materials: Colored Playdough, trays, Native American creation myths.

Time allotments: Suggested for 50 minute class, followed by 25 minute closing service.

1. Nametags and Graffiti Wall (5 minutes before class begins):

- Make nametags using blank paper, markers, and holders. Youth can create their own unique but LEGIBLE nametag. Make it a regular practice to wear nametags.
- “Graffiti Wall” questions: Write the following on whiteboard. Invite youth as they arrive to grab a marker and weigh in with their responses:
 - ▶ What was the last thing you created: an essay, a doodle, bracelet, computer program, etc.?
 - ▶ Would you prefer that the universe was finite or infinite?
- Teachers complete attendance sheets.

2. Opening Activity: “Know Any Creation Myths?” (5 minutes)

Ask youth what creation myths they may already know, from different cultures and even pop culture. See if they can identify any of the following and guess from what religions or cultures they originate:

- Genesis and six days of creation: (*Answer: Judaism, Christianity, Islam*)
- Gaia (Mother Earth) and Uranus (Father Sky) give birth to the Titans: (*Answer: Greek mythology*)
- Two watery beings, one male and one female, Apsu (fresh water) and Tiamat (salt water), join and give birth to a variety of sea monsters and gods. One of the gods, Marduk, rises against Tiamat and splits Tiamat’s body in two, creating heaven and earth: (*Answer: ancient Mesopotamia, from famed saga Enuma Elish*)
- P’an Ku, the first living being, is hatched from a cosmic egg. Half the shell above him is the sky, the half below him is the earth. He grows for 18,000 years until his limbs become the mountains, his blood the rivers, his breath the wind, and his voice the thunder. His two eyes are the sun and the moon. The parasites on his body are humankind: (*Answer: Chinese, but just one of many creation stories*)

- Middle-earth and the lands of Elves, Dwarves, and Hobbits: (Answer: J.R.R. Tolkien and the Lord of the Rings)

3. **Chalice Lighting:** Light the chalice, saying these words together: *“We light this chalice as a symbol of our faith; the light of truth and the warmth of love.”*

Teacher reads (from author Stephen King):

“It’s a mystery. That’s the first thing that interests me about the idea of God... I understand where [some people are] coming from when [they say that] the world is destroying itself over a bunch of fairy tales about talking snakes and men who are alive inside fishes. I’m very sympathetic to it; but at the same time, given the cosmos that we’re living in, it’s very persuasive, the idea that there is some kind of first cause that’s running things. It might not be the god of [fundamentalists], it might not be the god of al-Qaida, and it might not be the god of Abraham, but something very well could be running things. The order of the universe as we see it, the interlocking nature, and the way things work together, are persuasive of the idea that there may be some overarching first cause.”

4. **What are Core Ideas among Creation Myths?** (10 minutes)

Teacher summarizes: It is in the nature of humans to wonder about the unknown and search for answers. At the foundation of nearly every culture is a creation myth that EXPLAINS how the wonders of the earth came to be. These myths have powerful influence over people as an ORIENTING FRAME OF REFERENCE, shaping ways people think about the world and their place in the cosmos. Despite being separated across time and distance, diverse cultures have developed creation myths with similar (not same!) features or “functional equivalents.” (Example: a bird’s wing is not the same as a human arm but may share some similar functions.)

- Many creation myths begin with the theme of BIRTH, perhaps because birth speaks both of a child’s new life as well as the birth of life on earth. This is closely related to the idea of a MOTHER/FATHER figure at work in the creation of the world.
- A SUPREME BEING appears in many creation myths, a being who sets in motion series of events that create the world. Sometimes there are two beings, a passive and active creative force.
- Not all creation myths imagine life starting on earth. Some originate life on a plane either ABOVE or BELOW where we live now. Still other myths claim the earth was once covered with water then brought to the surface. These are called *diver-myths*, with creatures/beings who dive into the deep waters and bring up the earth.
- According to some creation myths, HUMANS and ANIMALS once lived together peacefully in harmony. But some wrong or evil caused by humans fractures that sacred relationship. This ORIGINAL SIN/WRONG is often brought on by darkness and

associated with fire. Other myths depict a LOSS OF INNOCENCE, taken away by a god.

We continue to wonder. Even now in the 21st century, we continue to theorize about the origins of the cosmos. While science has served as a powerful means of observation and explanation, science itself is another explanatory tool as creation myths are. Two of our six Unitarian Universalist sources emphasize that we value a “free and responsible search for truth and meaning,” as well as “spiritual teachings of Earth-centered traditions which celebrate the sacred circle of life and instruct us to live in harmony with the rhythms of nature.” So, we practice listening with humility and openness!

Questions for Discussion:

- Is there a difference in how you hear the words “creation story” versus “creation myth”?
- Can a story or myth have truth “on the inside” even if it cannot possibly be true “on the outside”? (Can myths be *truthful* while not *true*?)
- Some have argued that science is NOT like a myth at all, while others have argued that science is increasingly revealing a magical universe not unlike what ancient myths have described (with wormholes and “spooky action” of quantum particles that act in sync with each other while galaxies apart). What do you think?

5. Sculpting Creation Stories (25 minutes)

- Group youth into teams of three, with each team taking one of the three creation stories (attached): Lakota, Iroquois, or Ojibwe. Make sure all three stories are covered.
- In their groups, youth should read the story aloud and then craft a 2-3 min summary to be shared with the whole class.
- Pass out the Playdough in four colors representing the four directions: white, yellow, red, and black. Each team will sculpt THREE scenes from the story: the BEGINNING, the MIDDLE, and the END. Imagine trying to capture the essence of the story for a museum display of creation myths.

***Important:** This activity is meant to be fun but must also be respectful. We are retelling an important part of a people’s identity. If it helps, try imagining presenting your version of another’s story in their presence.

- After **15 minutes of work** (give a 5-minute warning), groups take turns retelling their story in 2-3 minutes using their sculptures as visual aids.

6. Questions for Discussion (10 minutes)

- What parts of these stories strike you as most interesting or most beautiful?
- What common themes were in all three stories? How were they uniquely different?
- What do you think of the Creator figure in these stories? Is it more *like* or more *unlike* your own notions of God or Creative Force?
- What do you think of the gender roles in this story? How would you compare them to the gender roles in our culture's dominant creation story of the Garden of Eden?
- What echoes of scientific knowledge or natural observation are present in this story? (For example: Was the world covered with water at one point? Did the continent emerge from material that came from the bottom of the ocean?)

7. Say goodbye until next time: Extinguish the chalice, saying together: *"May the light of truth and the warmth of love go with us in our hearts."*

8. Help clean up classroom before leaving: Please keep regular practice of readying classroom for the next class.

- leave lesson plan and all materials organized
- wipe the whiteboard clean
- tables and chairs neatly returned
- nametags collected in Ziploc bag
- leave any comments for RE staff on attendance sheets