

Mythology, Madness, and Mayhem: Creation Myths



Directions:

[Watch this video FIRST \(click here\)](#)

Read the following myths and use the video provided, then choose one of the following prompts to answer in an MLA-formatted, grammatically sound, 5 paragraph essay using quotations and parenthetical citations. This essay is a reading and writing diagnostic; it allows for immediate feedback at the beginning of the year on crucial skills. It is extremely important that this essay is completed. Please bring this essay with you on the first day of school.

Prompts:

1. Why do you think so many creation myths from different parts of the world share similar characteristics? Support your analysis with evidence from the texts and video provided.
2. After reading all of the stories, choose two myths to compare and contrast. Focus on how their similarities and differences highlight what each culture values. Support your analysis with evidence from the texts and video provided

Hopi Creation Myth:

The Four Creations

The world at first was endless space in which existed only the Creator, Taiowa. This world had no time, no shape, and no life, except in the mind of the Creator. Eventually the infinite creator created the finite in Sotuknang, whom he called his nephew and whom he created as his agent to establish nine universes. Sotuknang gathered together matter from the endless space to make the nine solid worlds. Then the Creator instructed him to gather together the waters from the endless space and place them on these worlds to make land and sea. When Sotuknang had done that, the Creator instructed him to gather together air to make winds and breezes on these worlds.

The fourth act of creation with which the Creator charged Sotuknang was the creation of life. Sotuknang went to the world that was to first host life and there he created Spider Woman, and he gave her the power to create life. First Spider Woman took some earth and mixed it with saliva to make two beings. Over them she sang the Creation Song, and they came to life. She instructed one of them, Poqanghoya, to go across the earth and solidify it. She instructed the other, Palongawhoya, to send out sound to resonate through the earth, so that the earth vibrated with the energy of the Creator. Poqanghoya and Palongawhoya were despatched to the poles of the earth to keep it rotating.

Then Spider Woman made all the plants, the flowers, the bushes, and the trees. Likewise she made the birds and animals, again using earth and singing the Creation Song. When all this was done, she made human beings, using yellow, red, white, and black earth mixed with her saliva. Singing the Creation Song, she made four men, and then in her own form she made four women. At first they had a soft spot in their foreheads, and although it solidified, it left a space through which they could hear the voice of Sotuknang and their Creator. Because these people could not speak, Spider Woman called on Sotuknang, who gave them four languages. His only instructions were for them to respect their Creator and to live in harmony with him.

These people spread across the earth and multiplied. Despite their four languages, in those days they could understand each other's thoughts anyway, and for many years they and the animals lived together as one. Eventually, however, they began to divide, both the people from the animals and the people from each other, as they focused on their differences rather than their similarities. As division and suspicion became more widespread, only a few people from each of

the four groups still remembered their Creator. Sotuknang appeared before these few and told them that he and the Creator would have to destroy this world, and that these few who remembered the Creator must travel across the land, following a cloud and a star, to find refuge. These people began their treks from the places where they lived, and when they finally converged Sotuknang appeared again. He opened a huge ant mound and told these people to go down in it to live with the ants while he destroyed the world with fire, and he told them to learn from the ants while they were there. The people went down and lived with the ants, who had storerooms of food that they had gathered in the summer, as well as chambers in which the people could live. This went on for quite a while, because after Sotuknang cleansed the world with fire it took a long time for the world to cool off. As the ants' food ran low, the people refused the food, but the ants kept feeding them and only tightened their own belts, which is why ants have such tiny waists today.

Finally Sotuknang was done making the second world, which was not quite as beautiful as the first. Again he admonished the people to remember their Creator as they and the ants that had hosted them spread across the earth. The people multiplied rapidly and soon covered the entire earth. They did not live with the animals, however, because the animals in this second world were wild and unfriendly. Instead the people lived in villages and built roads between these, so that trade sprang up. They stored goods and traded those for goods from elsewhere, and soon they were trading for things they did not need. As their desire to have more and more grew, they began to forget their Creator, and soon wars over resources and trade were breaking out between villages. Finally Sotuknang appeared before the few people who still remembered the Creator, and again he sent them to live with the ants while he destroyed this corrupt world. This time he ordered Poqanghoya and Palongawhoya to abandon their posts at the poles, and soon the world spun out of control and rolled over. Mountains slid and fell, and lakes and rivers splashed across the land as the earth tumbled, and finally the earth froze over into nothing but ice.

This went on for years, and again the people lived with the ants. Finally Sotuknang sent Poqanghoya and Palongawhoya back to the poles to resume the normal rotation of the earth, and soon the ice melted and life returned. Sotuknang called the people up from their refuge, and he introduced them to the third world that he had made. Again he admonished the people to remember their Creator as they spread across the land. As they did so, they multiplied quickly, even more quickly than before, and soon they were living in large cities and developing into separate nations. With so many people and so many nations, soon there was war, and some of the nations made huge shields on which they could fly, and from these flying shields they attacked other cities. When Sotuknang saw all this war and destruction, he resolved to destroy this world quickly before it corrupted the few people who still remembered the Creator. He called on Spider Woman to gather those few and, along the shore, she placed each person with a little food in the

hollow stem of a reed. When she had done this, Sotuknang let loose a flood that destroyed the warring cities and the world on which they lived.

Once the rocking of the waves ceased, Spider Woman unsealed the reeds so the people could see. They floated on the water for many days, looking for land, until finally they drifted to an island. On the island they built little reed boats and set sail again to the east. After drifting many days, they came to a larger island, and after many more days to an even larger island. They hoped that this would be the fourth world that Sótuknang had made for them, but Spider Woman assured them that they still had a long and hard journey ahead. They walked across this island and built rafts on the far side, and set sail to the east again. They came to a fourth and still larger island, but again they had to cross it on foot and then build more rafts to continue east. From this island, Spider Woman sent them on alone, and after many days they encountered a vast land. Its shores were so high that they could not find a place to land, and only by opening the doors in their heads did they know where to go to land.

When they finally got ashore, Sotuknang was there waiting for them. As they watched to the west, he made the islands that they had used like stepping stones disappear into the sea. He welcomed them to the fourth world, but he warned them that it was not as beautiful as the previous ones, and that life here would be harder, with heat and cold, and tall mountains and deep valleys. He sent them on their way to migrate across the wild new land in search of the homes for their respective clans. The clans were to migrate across the land to learn its ways, although some grew weak and stopped in the warm climates or rich lands along the way. The Hopi trekked and far and wide, and went through the cold and icy country to the north before finally settling in the arid lands between the Colorado River and Rio Grande River. They chose that place so that the hardship of their life would always remind them of their dependence on, and link to, their Creator.

[Source](#)

Norse Creation Myth:

Odin and Ymir

In the beginning of time, there was nothing: neither sand, nor sea, nor cool waves. Neither the heaven nor earth existed. Instead, long before the earth was made, Niflheim was made, and in it a spring gave rise to twelve rivers. To the south was Muspell, a region of heat and brightness guarded by Surt, a giant who carried a flaming sword. To the north was frigid Ginnungagap, where the rivers froze and all was ice. Where the sparks and warm winds of Muspell reached the south side of frigid Ginnungagap, the ice thawed and dripped, and from the drips thickened and formed the shape of a man. His name was Ymir, the first of and ancestor of the frost-giants.

As the ice dripped more, it formed a cow, and from her teats flowed four rivers of milk that fed Ymir. The cow fed on the salt of the rime ice, and as she licked a man's head began to emerge. By the end of the third day of her licking, the whole man had emerged, and his name was Buri. He had a son named Bor, who married Bestla, a daughter of one of the giants. Bor and Bestla had three sons, one of whom was Odin, the most powerful of the gods.

Ymir was a frost-giant, but not a god, and eventually he turned to evil. After a struggle between the giant and the young gods, Bor's three sons killed Ymir. So much blood flowed from his wounds that all the frost-giants were drowned but one, who survived only by building an ark for himself and his family. Bor's sons dragged Ymir's immense body to the center of Ginnungagap, and from him they made the earth. Ymir's blood became the sea, his bones became the rocks and crags, and his hair became the trees. Bor's sons took Ymir's skull and with it made the sky. In it they fixed sparks and molten slag from Muspell to make the stars, and other sparks they set to move in paths just below the sky. They threw Ymir's brains into the sky and made the clouds. The earth is a disk, and they set up Ymir's eyelashes to keep the giants at the edges of that disk.

On the sea shore, Bor's sons found two logs and made people out of them. One son gave them breath and life, the second son gave them consciousness and movement, and the third gave them faces, speech, hearing, and sight. From this man and woman came all humans thereafter, just as all the gods were descended from the sons of Bor.

Odin and his brothers had set up the sky and stars, but otherwise they left the heavens unlit. Long afterwards, one of the descendants of those first two people that the brothers created had two children. Those two children were so beautiful that their father named the son Moon and

the daughter Sol. The gods were jealous already and, when they heard of the father's arrogance, they pulled the brother and sister up to the sky and set them to work. Sol drives the chariot that carries the sun across the skies, and she drives so fast across the skies of the northland because she is chased by a giant wolf each day. Moon likewise takes a course across the sky each night, but not so swiftly because he is not so harried.

The gods did leave one pathway from earth to heaven. That is the bridge that appears in the sky as a rainbow, and its perfect arc and brilliant colors are a sign of its origin with the gods. It nonetheless will not last for ever, because it will break when the men of Muspell try to cross it into heaven.

[Source](#)

Japanese Creation Myth:

The Origin of Japan and her People

When heaven and earth began, three deities came into being, The Spirit Master of the Center of Heaven, The August Wondrously Producing Spirit, and the Divine Wondrously Producing Ancestor. These three were invisible. The earth was young then, and land floated like oil, and from it reed shoots sprouted. From these reeds came two more deities. After them, five or six pairs of deities came into being, and the last of these were Izanagi and Izanami, whose names mean "The Male Who Invites" and "The Female who Invites".

The first five deities commanded Izanagi and Izanami to make and solidify the land of Japan, and they gave the young pair a jeweled spear. Standing on the Floating Bridge of Heaven, they dipped it in the ocean brine and stirred. They pulled out the spear, and the brine that dripped of it formed an island to which they descended. On this island they built a palace for their wedding and a great column to the heavens.

Izanami examined her body and found that one place had not grown, and she told this to Izanagi, who replied that his body was well-formed but that one place had grown to excess. He proposed that he place his excess in her place that was not complete and that in doing so they would make new land. They agreed to walk around the pillar and meet behind it to do this. When they arrive behind the pillar, she greeted him by saying "What a fine young man", and he responded by greeting her with "What a fine young woman". They procreated and gave birth to a leech-child, which they put in a basket and let float away. Then they gave birth to a floating island, which likewise they did not recognize as one of their children.

Disappointed by their failures in procreation, they returned to Heaven and consulted the deities there. The deities explained that the cause of their difficulties was that the female had spoken first when they met to procreate. Izanagi and Izanami returned to their island and again met behind the heavenly pillar. When they met, he said, "What a fine young woman," and she said "What a fine young man". They mated and gave birth to the eight main islands of Japan and six minor islands. Then they gave birth to a variety of deities to inhabit those islands, including the sea deity, the deity of the sea-straits, and the deities of the rivers, winds, trees, and mountains. Last, Izanami gave birth to the fire deity, and her genitals were so burned that she died.

Izanagi grieved over Izanami, and a deity was born from his tears. Distraught after burying Izanami, he used his long sword to behead his son, the deity of fire, whose birth had killed Izanami. From the blood on the sword came three deities of rocks, two deities of fire, and

one of water, all of which are needed to make a sword. Eight more deities arose from the body of Izanagi and Izanami's slain son.

Izanagi still longed for Izanami, and he went to the underworld in search of her. Finding her in the darkness, he called to her and asked her to come back to the land of the living with him. She promised him that she would go ask the gods of the underworld, but she begged him to not look at her as she did so. She was gone long, however, and eventually he broke off the end of a comb in his hair and set it afire for a light. He found her body with maggots consuming it, and these maggots were the eight deities of thunder. Ashamed to be seen in this condition, Izanami chased Izanagi out of the underworld. First she sent the thunder deities after him, and then she herself pursued him. At last he grasped a huge rock and used it to close the passage to the underworld. Enraged, she shouted to him that she would each day strangle one thousand people of Japan. He responded that if she did so, he would each day cause fifteen hundred Japanese people to be born. This is why fifteen hundred children are born each day and one thousand people die each day.

Izanagi returned to his home and bathed to purify himself after this terrible experience. As he disrobed, new deities arose from his clothing, and more arose from the water as he bathed. Three of these were ancestors of Japanese families. The last of the deities was a son, Susa-nō-wo, who became the deity of the sea. He was eventually exiled to earth for his behavior in the heavens, but he and his sister, the Goddess of the Sun, parented eight deities. Among these was the ancestor of Yamato family that ruled Japan, and two others were ancestors of nineteen of its highest families.

When the deities had pacified the land, the Goddess of the Sun dispatched Japan's first ruler from the heavens to the earth. Descending from the Floating Bridge of Heaven to the mountain tops, he built his palace. Eventually he met a beautiful young woman, Princess Brilliant Blossoms, and asked her to marry him. She deferred to her father's judgment, and her father gave him both Princess Brilliant Blossoms and her older sister, Princess Long as the Rocks. The new emperor refused the older sister, however, because of her ugliness. When the father heard this, he explained that he had offered Princess Long as the Rocks because her children would have lived eternally. Instead, the children of Princess Brilliant Blossoms were mortal, which is why the emperors have never had long lives.

Princess Brilliant Blossoms was soon with child, so soon that the emperor could hardly believe that she bore his children. To prove herself, she built a palace and shut herself in it and set fire to it, knowing as he did that the children of anyone but the emperor could not survive the flames. Amidst the flames she gave birth to three deities, and ultimately their descendants were the imperial family of Japan. [Source](#)

Chinese Creation Myth:

Pan Gu and Nü Wa

Long, long ago, when heaven and earth were still one, the entire universe was contained in an egg-shaped cloud. All the matter of the universe swirled chaotically in that egg. Deep within the swirling matter was Pan Gu, a huge giant who grew in the chaos. For 18,000 years he developed and slept in the egg. Finally one day he awoke and stretched, and the egg broke to release the matter of the universe. The lighter purer elements drifted upwards to make the sky and heavens, and the heavier impure elements settled downwards to make the earth.

In the midst of this new world, Pan Gu worried that heaven and earth might mix again; so he resolved to hold them apart, with the heavens on his head and the earth under his feet. As the two continued to separate, Pan Gu grew to hold them apart. For 18,000 years he continued to grow, until the heavens were 30,000 miles above the earth. For much longer he continued to hold the two apart, fearing the return of the chaos of his youth. Finally he realized they were stable, and soon after that he died.

With the immense giant's death, the earth took on new character. His arms and legs became the four directions and the mountains. His blood became the rivers, and his sweat became the rain and dew. His voice became the thunder, and his breath became the winds. His hair became the grass, and his veins became the roads and paths. His teeth and bones became the minerals and rocks, and his flesh became the soil of the fields. Up above, his left eye became the sun, and his right eye became the moon. Thus in death, as in life, Pan Gu made the world as it is today.

Many centuries later, there was a goddess named Nü Wa who roamed this wild world that Pan Gu had left behind, and she became lonely in her solitude. Stopping by a pond to rest, she saw her reflection and realized that there was nothing like herself in the world. She resolved to make something like herself for company.

From the edge of the pond she took some mud and shaped it in the form of a human being. At first her creation was lifeless, and she set it down. It took life as soon as it touched the soil, however, and soon the human was dancing and celebrating its new life. Pleased with her creation, Nü Wa made more of them, and soon her loneliness disappeared in the crowd of little humans around her. For two days she made them, and still she wanted to make more. Finally she pulled down a long vine and dragged it through the mud, and then she swung the vine through the air. Droplets of mud flew everywhere and, when they fell, they became more humans that were nearly as perfect as the ones she had made by hand. Soon she had spread humans over the

whole world. The ones she made by hand became the aristocrats, and the ones she made with the vine became the poor common people.

Even then, Nü Wa realized that her work was incomplete, because as her creations died she would have to make more. She solved this problem by dividing the humans into male and female, so that they could reproduce and save her from having to make new humans to break her solitude.

Many years later, Pan Gu's greatest fear came true. The heavens collapsed so that there were holes in the sky, and the earth cracked, letting water rush from below to flood the earth. At other places, fire sprang forth from the earth, and everywhere wild beasts emerged from the forests to prey on the people. Nü Wa drove the beasts back and healed the earth. To fix the sky, she took stones of many colors from the river and built a fire in which she melted them. She used the molten rock to patch the holes in the sky, and she used the four legs of a giant turtle to support the sky again. Exhausted by her labors, she soon lay down to die and, like Pan Gu, from her body came many more features to adorn the world that she had restored.

[Source](#)

Christian Creation Myth:

The Story of Creation

In the beginning, when God created the universe, the earth was formless and desolate. The raging ocean that covered everything was engulfed in total darkness, and the Spirit of God was moving over the water. Then God commanded, “Let there be light”—and light appeared. God was pleased with what he saw. Then he separated the light from the darkness, and he named the light “Day” and the darkness “Night.” Evening passed and morning came—that was the first day.

Then God commanded, “Let there be a dome to divide the water and to keep it in two separate places”—and it was done. So God made a dome, and it separated the water under it from the water above it. He named the dome “Sky.” Evening passed and morning came—that was the second day.

Then God commanded, “Let the water below the sky come together in one place, so that the land will appear”—and it was done. He named the land “Earth,” and the water which had come together he named “Sea.” And God was pleased with what he saw. Then he commanded, “Let the earth produce all kinds of plants, those that bear grain and those that bear fruit”—and it was done. So the earth produced all kinds of plants, and God was pleased with what he saw. Evening passed and morning came—that was the third day.

Then God commanded, “Let lights appear in the sky to separate day from night and to show the time when days, years, and religious festivals begin; they will shine in the sky to give light to the earth”—and it was done. So God made the two larger lights, the sun to rule over the day and the moon to rule over the night; he also made the stars. He placed the lights in the sky to shine on the earth, to rule over the day and the night, and to separate light from darkness. And God was pleased with what he saw. Evening passed and morning came—that was the fourth day.

Then God commanded, “Let the water be filled with many kinds of living beings, and let the air be filled with birds.” So God created the great sea monsters, all kinds of creatures that live in the water, and all kinds of birds. And God was pleased with what he saw. He blessed them all and

told the creatures that live in the water to reproduce and to fill the sea, and he told the birds to increase in number. Evening passed and morning came—that was the fifth day.

Then God commanded, “Let the earth produce all kinds of animal life: domestic and wild, large and small”—and it was done. So God made them all, and he was pleased with what he saw.

Then God said, “And now we will make human beings; they will be like us and resemble us. They will have power over the fish, the birds, and all animals, domestic and wild, large and small.” So God created human beings, making them to be like himself. He created them male and female, blessed them, and said, “Have many children, so that your descendants will live all over the earth and bring it under their control. I am putting you in charge of the fish, the birds, and all the wild animals. I have provided all kinds of grain and all kinds of fruit for you to eat; but for all the wild animals and for all the birds I have provided grass and leafy plants for food”—and it was done. God looked at everything he had made, and he was very pleased. Evening passed and morning came—that was the sixth day.

[Source](#)

Yoruba Creation Myth:

The Golden Chain

Long ago, well before there were any people, all life existed in the sky. Olorun lived in the sky, and with Olorun were many orishas. There were both male and female orishas, but Olorun transcended male and female and was the all-powerful supreme being. Olorun and the orishas lived around a young baobab tree. Around the baobab tree the orishas found everything they needed for their lives, and in fact they wore beautiful clothes and gold jewelry. Olorun told them that all the vast sky was theirs to explore. All the orishas save one, however, were content to stay near the baobab tree.

Obatala was the curious orisha who wasn't content to live blissfully by the baobab tree. Like all orishas, he had certain powers, and he wanted to put them to use. As he pondered what to do, he looked far down through the mists below the sky. As he looked and looked, he began to realize that there was a vast empty ocean below the mist. Obatala went to Olorun and asked Olorun to let him make something solid in the waters below. That way there could be beings that Obatala and the orishas could help with their powers.

Touched by Obatala's desire to do something constructive, Olorun agreed to send Obatala to the watery world below. Obatala then asked Orunmila, the orisha who knows the future, what he should do to prepare for his mission. Orunmila brought out a sacred tray and sprinkled the powder of baobab roots on it. He tossed sixteen palm kernels onto the tray and studied the marks and tracks they made on the powder. He did this eight times, each time carefully observing the patterns. Finally he told Obatala to prepare a chain of gold, and to gather sand, palm nuts, and maize. He also told Obatala to get the sacred egg carrying the personalities of all the orishas.

Obatala went to his fellow orishas to ask for their gold, and they all gave him all the gold they had. He took this to the goldsmith, who melted all the jewelry to make the links of the

golden chain. When Obatala realized that the goldsmith had made all the gold into links, he had the goldsmith melt a few of them back down to make a hook for the end of the chain.

Meanwhile, as Orunmila had told him, Obatala gathered all the sand in the sky and put it in an empty snail shell, and in with it he added a little baobab powder. He put that in his pack, along with palm nuts, maize, and other seeds that he found around the baobab tree. He wrapped the egg in his shirt, close to his chest so that it would be warm during his journey.

Obatala hooked the chain into the sky, and he began to climb down the chain. For seven days he went down and down, until finally he reached the end of the chain. He hung at its end, not sure what to do, and he looked and listened for any clue. Finally he heard Orunmila, the seer, calling to him to use the sand. He took the shell from his pack and poured out the sand into the water below. The sand hit the water, and to his surprise it spread and solidified to make a vast land. Still unsure what to do, Obatala hung from the end of the chain until his heart pounded so much that the egg cracked. From it flew Sankofa, the bird bearing the sprits of all the orishas. Like a storm, they blew the sand to make dunes and hills and lowlands, giving it character just as the orishas themselves have character.

Finally Obatala let go of the chain and dropped to this new land, which he called "Ife", the place that divides the waters. Soon he began to explore this land, and as he did so he scattered the seeds from his pack, and as he walked the seeds began to grow behind him, so that the land turned green in his wake.

After walking a long time, Obatala grew thirsty and stopped at a small pond. As he bent over the water, he saw his reflection and was pleased. He took some clay from the edge of the pond and began to mold it into the shape he had seen in the reflection. He finished that one and began another, and before long he had made many of these bodies from the dark earth at the pond's side. By then he was even thirstier than before, and he took juice from the newly-grown palm trees and it fermented into palm wine. He drank this, and drank some more, and soon he was intoxicated. He returned to his work of making more forms from the edge of the pond, but now he wasn't careful and made some without eyes or some with misshapen limbs. He thought

they all were beautiful, although later he realized that he had erred in drinking the wine and vowed to not do so again.

Before long, Olorun dispatched Chameleon down the golden chain to check on Obatala's progress. Chameleon reported Obatala's disappointment at making figures that had form but no life. Gathering gasses from the space beyond the sky, Olorun sparked the gasses into an explosion that he shaped into a fireball. He sent that fireball to Ife, where it dried the lands that were still wet and began to bake the clay figures that Obatala had made. The fireball even set the earth to spinning, as it still does today. Olorun then blew his breath across Ife, and Obatala's figures slowly came to life as the first people of Ife.

[Source](#)