



MYTHS AND LEGENDS OF ANCIENT ROME

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MYTHS & LEGENDS OF ANCIENT ROME

Time: 19:40

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

A trilogy of ancient Rome's most enduring and fascinating tales is included in this animated video, written and produced for upper intermediate and junior high/middle school students. Each story centers on relationships between individuals and human nature.

In the first story, *Romulus and Remus*, Prince Amulius overthrows his brother Numitor and banishes his niece, Princess Sylvia, to the temple of Mars. The god of war marries Silvia, and they have twin sons, Romulus and Remus. Amulius, fearful that



the youngsters will try to reclaim the throne, orders them killed. The babies are thrown into the Tiber River. However, a wolf finds the infants and takes them to her cave, where she rears them as her own. Later, a shepherd finds the twins and they are eventually reunited

with their grandfather. The young men then take back the throne for their grandfather, and create a great city on the banks of the Tiber River. But Romulus and Remus fight over what the city should be named, and during the argument, Remus is killed.

In *Perseus and Medusa*, the goddess Minerva becomes so jealous of Medusa that she transforms the beautiful maiden into a monster so ugly that anyone who looks upon her turns to stone. Medusa terrorizes the ancient world until Jupiter sends his



son Perseus to slay her. Perseus uses his shield as a mirror to avoid being turned into stone and completes the mission. On his way back from Medusa's cave, Perseus meets and falls in love with Andromeda, who is to be sacrificed to a sea monster. Perseus slays the monster and marries Andromeda.

The final story, *Psyche and Cupid*, shows the importance of trust.



Psyche travels to a magical land to marry a monster. But it turns out that her husband is not a monster at all. Rather, he is Cupid, son of the goddess Venus. Psyche promises Cupid that she will never look at him. But when curiosity gets the best of her, she breaks the promise

and Cupid flees. In an attempt to get back her husband, Psyche goes on a quest to the underworld.

STUDENT OBJECTIVES

After viewing this video and participating in the suggested activities, students should be able to do the following:

- (1) Briefly review the plots of the three stories.
- (2) Discuss the views of human nature depicted in the stories.
- (3) Talk about the roles of greed, anger, jealousy, love and other human emotions in each of the stories.
- (4) Tell the themes of the stories.
- (5) Relate the stories to what the class might be studying in its social studies unit.

SUGGESTED LESSON PLAN

Introduction

While it may be best in some circumstances to show all the stories in one screening, it is recommended that they be shown one at a time. As is true with most other myths, the stories are outwardly simple; yet, in reality, they are rich in cultural, historical, religious, philosophical and psychological meaning. You may begin your introduction with a general discussion of mythology. Explain that many myths and legends have been told for thousands of years, and they have survived the ages because they offer much to the reader/viewer/listener — entertainment, insight into human nature, and lessons about morality and justice. To increase your students' understanding of the stories, mention that myths may appear simple, but they are somewhat like an onion. They have many layers of meaning. When one layer is peeled away, another is revealed. Explain that for purposes of discussion, the class will focus on four layers: historical, cultural, religious and philosophical, and psychological. (For younger viewers, or for older students who may not be ready for a sophisticated, in-depth discussion, the philosophical and psychological aspects of the stories may, of course, be ignored or mentioned only briefly.)

Previewing Activities

Tell the class that they will now see a video entitled “Myths and Legends of Ancient Rome.” If it would be useful, have the class locate Rome on a map or globe, then discuss briefly ancient Roman culture. Then, on the chalkboard, write the following: “Analysis of the stories — plot, theme, culture, history, philosophy and religion, psychology.” Define each term and tell the students you will want them to analyze the story according to the criteria mentioned. You may also analyze each story as a class activity.

Post-viewing Activities

As your class analyzes each story, you may want to highlight the following factors:

1. The lack of high technology in ancient Roman culture
2. Ways of dressing
3. Belief in fantastic creatures such as dragons.
4. Polytheism, and the role of gods in determining the fate of humans
5. The glorification of bravery
6. Views of good and evil
7. The role of women
8. The nature of quests
9. Intelligence versus brute strength
10. Reward for good deeds
11. Seeking justice as a human motivation
12. Overcoming obstacles as a virtue
13. The role of curiosity in human affairs
14. Political systems depicted
15. The role of love in human affairs
16. Failure to heed warnings
17. Divine justice
18. How the ancient Romans viewed their relationship to each other and to their gods

TRANSCRIPT OF THE VIDEO

NARRATOR: Long ago, in the kingdom of Latium, the good king Numitor, known for his wisdom and generosity, was dethroned by his evil brother, Prince Amulius.

At the same time, Amulius banished Numitor's daughter, the beautiful Princess Silvia, to the temple of Mars, the god of war.

There, thought Amulius, she would never have sons who might reclaim the throne.

But his plan didn't work as expected. For Sylvia married Mars, and somewhat later the couple had twin sons, whom they named Romulus and Remus.

It did not take long for news of the twins' birth to reach Amulius, who immediately ordered two servants to kidnap the newborns and drown them in the Tiber River.

That very night, the two men crept into the room where the twins lay sleeping, and, once there, began to carry out their terrible mission.

The next morning, the servants reported to Amulius that Romulus and Remus were dead. But, in fact, they were not.

The twins' cradle bobbed and dipped like a tiny boat in the rushing waters. But it did not overturn, as expected. Nor did it sink. Instead, the cradle eventually came to rest in a clump of rushes.

After awhile, the babies awakened and began to cry from cold and hunger. Now, as it happened, a she-wolf was nearby, and heard the newborns' cries.

She was curious and went to investigate. The animal was puzzled by these tiny humans, but she sensed their despair.

And, although she feared people, her motherly instincts overcame her. She carried the two youngsters to her cave, where she reared them as her own.

As the months passed, Romulus and Remus grew strong and healthy.

And, in time, they began to venture out, farther and farther from their cave. One day, a shepherd named Faustulus noticed the boys as they chased each other down a path.

The shepherd was struck by their curious clothing and their wolf-like gait. He followed them to their cave, and was, to say the very least, astonished at what he saw.

Now, Faustulus and his wife were childless, so later that night, while the wolves slept, he came to take the youngsters to his home.

For many years, Faustulus and his wife took care of the twins as if they were their own sons (although, at first, the boys found it difficult to eat as humans).

In time, Romulus and Remus grew strong and handsome. Even so, they never completely lost their wild, wolf-like ways.

They helped Faustulus with his herding.

And when they weren't in the pastures, the twins took to ambushing thieves who had stolen livestock and food.

Then they returned the stolen goods to their rightful owners.

Over the years, stories of the twins' brave deeds spread far and wide until, one day, reports of their exploits reached their grandfather, Numitor, who, banished to the far, northern reaches of the kingdom, had led a lonely life for many years.

The old man wanted to meet these brave young heroes and so he asked his guards find the twins and bring them back.

As soon as he saw them, Numitor was struck by their resemblance to his daughter, Silvia.

And when Romulus and Remus told him their story, he realized what had happened.

NUMITOR: You are my grandsons. My daughter, the princess Silvia, is your mother.

Your wicked Uncle Amulius tried to kill you and has stolen your birthright.

Now that you know these things, you must take back the throne for me so that one day it can be yours'."

NARRATOR: When the two brothers returned home, they began to plan how they would accomplish the task. First, they decided to recruit as soldiers all whom they had helped over the years.

Then, their army would attack Amulius and his forces as they slept.

Finally, they would take their army to the temple of Mars to rescue their mother. And because Romulus and Remus were cunning and brave, their plan worked.

Silvia returned to the castle and Numitor regained his crown.

To commemorate their victory, the twins decided to build a great city on the banks of the Tiber River, where the she-wolf had found them.

Romulus designed the streets and houses; Remus, the temples and baths.

And, in time, a magnificent city blanketed the seven hills that stood near the river. But what was to be called?

Remus said it should be named "Reme" because he had designed the temples; Romulus wanted the city to be named "Rome" because he had designed the houses.

And because both retained the wildness of their early upbringing, they began to fight savagely, so savagely in fact, that the fight ended only when Remus lay dead. And so, "Rome" was given its name.

In time, Romulus became king of the city named after him, and ruled wisely and compassionately for many years.

Because he had done so many good and noble things, the gods looked favorably upon him.

And so, when he died, he was taken to where the gods dwelled.

From that time on he was called "Quirinus," and became a noble god of war.



The gods and goddesses of ancient Rome could be jealous and vengeful. There is perhaps no better example than the goddess Minerva.

When she discovered that her suitor, the god Neptune, had fallen in love with the beautiful maiden, Medusa, she vowed that the young woman would never again enchant god nor man.

To carry out her oath, she changed Medusa into a gorgon — a monster so hideous that anyone who laid eyes upon her turned to stone!

Shunned and feared, Medusa was banished to a cavern by the sea, where she lived for many years.

Those whose curiosity outweighed their prudence, and who dared gaze upon her, stood petrified nearby.

For many years, Medusa terrorized the land where she dwelled, until it was decided that Perseus, son of the great god Jupiter, should slay her.

For the task, the fleet god-messenger Mercury gave his winged shoes to Perseus, and Minerva loaned him her shield.

Thus armed, the young god flew to the earth below.

Several nights later, Perseus entered Medusa's cave, using the shield as a mirror to guide himself to the gorgon. In that way, he could avoid looking directly at her.

Once he discovered where Medusa slept, Perseus slayed her! Yet, as he did, the gorgon's reflection became so life-like, it was as if she now lived inside the shield itself!

Sensing that the reflection also would turn those who gazed upon it into stone, Perseus quickly covered it with his cape! :

And then he began his journey back.

Eventually, he reached the country of Aethiopia, where he came upon the beautiful princess Andromeda tied to a rock.

Smitten by her beauty, the young god flew down and asked how she came to be there.

ANDROMEDA: I am here as a sacrifice to a terrible sea monster that has come to destroy our land.

The oracle of my father, King Cepheus, stated that Aethiopia would be saved only if I were to be sacrificed to the beast.

NARRATOR: At that very moment, the ghastly creature swam toward Andromeda — his sole intent, her destruction.

When it came into view, the princess's parents, who had come to see their daughter, cried out in anguish, thinking that their beloved Andromeda would now perish. As the beast came closer still, an idea came to Perseus.

PERSEUS: If you promise to give me Andromeda's hand in marriage, I pledge to slay the beast.

NARRATOR: The two eagerly — and thankfully — agreed.

Perseus then fulfilled his vow, as did the king and queen. A wedding banquet was held in a matter of days.

And Andromeda and Perseus dwelled among the gods, where they lived in happiness for all of time.

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There was once a king and queen who had three daughters. Two of the girls were quite average, except for their tempers.

They constantly argued with each other, and with everyone else.

The youngest, named Psyche, was much more even tempered — and extremely beautiful.

In fact, the beauty of Psyche was so great, and her suitors so many, that the goddess Venus became filled with jealousy.

VENUS: How dare this mortal girl take from me the attentions of so many men!

NARRATOR: And so, Venus went to her son, Cupid, and told him to take a magic potion and place it on the lips of the young princess, so that she would no longer be the object of so much adoration.

That very night, he followed his mother's command.

But Cupid, too, was struck by her beauty, and so he brushed her side with one of his magical arrows to undo the curse.

But for many years, it seemed as if his attempt was in vain. For the suitors stopped coming.

The queen and king, not knowing what had happened, consulted an oracle.

ORACLE: Your daughter will marry. But her future husband, who awaits her atop yonder mountain, is neither man nor god. He is, I say with great remorse, the most terrible of monsters.

NARRATOR: When the king and queen told Psyche of the oracle's prediction, she decided that it was simply her destiny.

PSYCHE: I shall go there tomorrow, to meet whatever the future holds.

NARRATOR: After Psyche reached her destination, the mountain's peak, she stood there for many hours, alone, sad and fearful.

But then, a breeze began to blow, and it beckoned her to a nearby meadow, where she soon fell fast asleep.

Several hours later, when the princess awoke, she noticed a grove at the edge of the field. Again, the breeze softly pushed her forward, this time into the thicket.

When she reached the far edge the grove, she saw a castle.

And, at that instant, she heard voices.

VOICES: Welcome, your majesty! All that you see is yours. We are your faceless servants.

If it pleases you, you may now enter your castle, where your dinner awaits.

NARRATOR: Psyche wandered through the hallways of the palace until, at last, she sat in the dining room.

As soon as she did, a table set with the most delicious | foods appeared before her very eyes!

Later that night, as Psyche slept soundly, a figure, masked in the darkness, came into her chambers and gently awakened her. She was afraid, for she could not see who it was.

But he spoke softly, and soon her fears faded away.

CUPID: I shall be your devoted husband. But you must promise to never look upon my face.
You will find everything that you need here. And if you keep your vow, I make a sacred promise that you will never be harmed.

NARRATOR: For many months, the two conversed in the shadows. Psyche came to deeply love her new husband, even though she could not see him. For he was kind, tender and intelligent.

Yet as the months passed, Psyche became increasingly curious.

Finally, when she could no longer hold her curiosity in check, she went to her husband's room late one night to find not a monster at all, but rather a winged god, radiant and handsome — Cupid, son of Venus!

When the princess moved forward to look closer at his face, a drop of hot wax fell from her candle and landed on her husband! And then, another!

Startled, Cupid awoke and immediately saw what had happened.

CUPID: Oh, foolish Psyche! Is this how you repay my love? By breaking your vow?

There can be no devotion if promises are broken!

NARRATOR: And with that, he flew from the room!

Psyche ran outside to call him back, but he was gone!

For months, poor Psyche searched for her Cupid, until at last, she found herself at the home of her mother-in-law, the goddess Venus.

VENUS: My son Cupid will return to you only when you have proved yourself worthy of him.

To prove your worthiness, you must take this box to Hades, where Proserpine, queen of the underworld, lives, and fetch a portion of her beauty.

Ask her to put it in the box, which you must never open.

NARRATOR: Protected by the love of Cupid, Psyche descended into the underworld, past the three-headed guard dog, Cerberus, until she found, on a throne of frozen fire, Proserpine, whom she convinced to relinquish the beauty requested by Venus.

And then, the princess began her return journey.

After several hours, she decided to rest. And as she did, Psyche began to talk to herself.

PSYCHE: Although Venus has forbidden me to look inside the box, was it not I who made this dangerous passage for its contents? Surely, I deserve at least some of the beauty so I may please my husband's eyes.

NARRATOR: And so she opened the box. But it was not beauty that was found inside!

Instead, an evil, sleep-producing mist drifted out and took possession of the princess.

At that very moment, Cupid began to feel the terrible pangs of loneliness.

And so, he decided to forgive Psyche, find her, and bring her back.

Guided only by his love, he soon found her.

He gathered the evil mist and placed it once again inside the box, and then released its spell by touching Psyche with one of his arrows.

When the princess returned with the box, Venus kept her promise, and the couple never again lived apart.

In time, Cupid and Psyche had a daughter, whom they named "Happiness," an appropriate description of both the child, and their lives together.