

**IU22** ■ Myths and  
Legends  
Middle Primary



Blake's Topic Bank

# Myths and Legends

by **Jane Campbell**

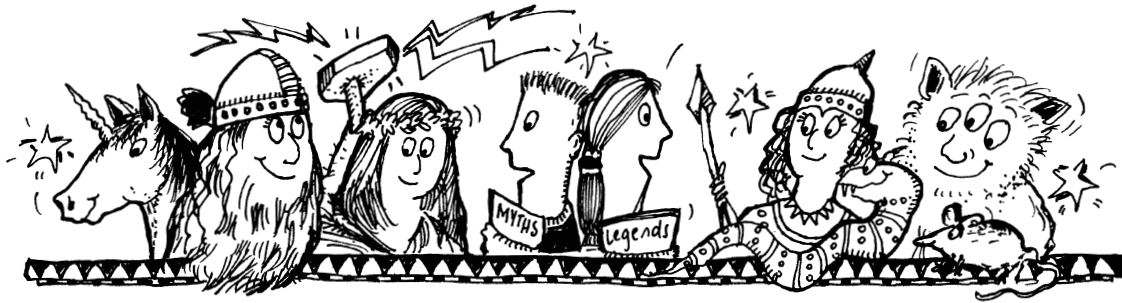


## **Each integrated unit contains:**

- 6 pages of teaching notes in an integrated teaching sequence
- 10 practical blackline masters
- National Profile outcomes
- A useful resource list

# Myths and Legends

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## MIDDLE PRIMARY

### Learning Area Focus Science

**Topic** Myths and legends are stories that explore the world and the nature of humanity. They are an excellent way to introduce students to other cultures and beliefs. Students who know nothing about mythology will be surprised to meet familiar characters, such as Robin Hood, King Arthur, goddesses and gods, unicorns, and other fantastical beasts. Characters will be invited, through books, into the classroom. Students will be able to investigate the origins of myths and legends and will learn how these stories are affected by a country's history, location and climate.

### National Profile Outcomes

Students will:

- **SOSE 3.1b** Interpret accounts and stories about people in other times.
- **SOSE 3.16** Frame questions to generate a discussion about myths and legends.
- **SOSE 3.17** Present information to explore key ideas about legends.
- **English 3.1** Interact to discuss and research information about myths and legends within the classroom and school communities using a range of text types.
- **English 3.6** Identify stereotypes in texts (e.g. heroes) and discuss their purpose and meaning.
- **English 3.8a** Integrate a variety of strategies for interpreting printed and visual stories about myths and legends.
- **Arts 3.8** Plan and present a play for the school community.
- **Arts 3.20, 3.24** Explore ideas and feelings about other cultures through their art.

### Resources

#### Myths and legends

*The Kingfisher Book of Mythology: Gods, Goddesses and Heroes from around the World*, Kingfisher.

Geraldine McCaughrean, *The Orchard Book of Greek Myths*, Orchard Books.

Geraldine McCaughrean, *Myths and Legends from around the World: The Crystal Pool*, Orion Children's Books.

Neil Philip, *Mythology*, Eyewitness Guides, Dorling Kindersley.

Ann Pilling, *Realms of Gold: Myths and Legends from Around the World*, Kingfisher Books.

Claude-Catherine Ragache, *The Creation of the World: Myths and Legends*, Cherrytree Books.

Morgan Roberts, *Classical Deities and Heroes*, Friedman Group.

Maurice Saxby and Robert Ingpen, *The Great Deeds of Heroic Women and The Great Deeds of Superheroes*, Millennium.

#### Aboriginal Dreaming Stories

Catherine Berndt, *Land of the Rainbow Snake: Aboriginal Children's Stories and Songs from Western Arnhem Land*, Scholastic.

Barbara Ker Wilson, *Tales Told to Kabbarli*, HarperCollins.

# Myths and Legends

## Teaching Notes

### Read all about it!

With students, locate and borrow books concerning myths and legends from the school and public libraries. Ensure you have stories from a variety of cultures. Ask students to bring in any books from home on myths and legends. Display all the books in the classroom and allow time for students to browse through them before discussing the topic.

### What are myths and legends?

Brainstorm questions about myths and legends with students. Write each one on an individual piece of paper. Examples might include: What are myths and legends? Are a 'myth' and a 'legend' the same thing? Are they fact or fiction? Do different cultures have similar types of myths and legends? Why are there myths and legends? Why are many of the stories still popular today? Can you learn more about a culture by reading their myths and legends? Can you give examples of myths and legends?

Include other questions as students learn more about the subject and are able to think more critically. Questions, written on individual pieces of paper, can be displayed on the wall. As answers are found, display these as well. By the end of the unit, the classroom walls will be full of valuable information.

### Myth or legend?

While both are part of folklore, myths and legends are distinct from each other. Legends are a subsection of mythology. Allow students to revisit books on display and then, as a class, brainstorm differences between the types of stories myths and

legends tell. List on the board differences that the class has noticed.



## Myths

Myths are ancient stories that have their roots in the sacred beliefs or cosmology of groups of people long ago. The stories take place in a remote past, in a time before historical time, and the main characters are deities, semi-deities, or humans with extraordinary powers. Myths represent the ways in which all cultures, before the advent of modern science, sought to explain the origin of the world and of human beings' relationship to it.

Explain to students that myths stem from the desire to know and make sense of the world. They are explanations of how things began. The stories are timeless and concern the human condition: what we are, why we are and how we react to things. Some stories might seem unrealistic but the message behind the story usually has an important religious or social meaning that sets myths apart from ordinary stories. Encourage students to browse through books on myths and then fill in **BLM 1**.

## Legends

Legends too are explanatory stories. Like myths, they have fantastic elements in them. Legends however are set in historical times and in places that seem recognisable, and the main characters are humans. Legends may grow up around historical people and events or may be wholly imaginary.

Legends have often been passed down from generation to generation, and popularly accepted as part of history. While myths tend to explore the meaning of the world, legends are tales of heroes who generally go out on an adventure and accomplish amazing and sometimes impossible feats. Most races and cultures have national heroes, for example Ancient Greece has Hercules while Britain has King Arthur and France has Joan of Arc. Can students think of any other legendary figures, for example Robin Hood, Boadicea, Beowulf, Finn MacCool, William Tell and Gilgamesh? Ask students to research some of these legendary heroes to find out which country they come from. When students complete their research, compile their answers on chart paper. Ask students to fill in **BLM 2**.

## Truth or fiction?

Have students brainstorm qualities they feel a hero should have. Tell the story of Robin Hood to students. Discuss his qualities, for example his sense of humour, fair play and daring escapades. Do students think he is a hero? Did he really exist? Why has this story survived down the generations?

Group students and ask them to read other legends and discuss the hero in each legend. They can use these questions to start discussions: Is there a hero? Is the hero male or female? What do you think the hero looks like? What qualities does the hero possess (e.g. brave, never gives up)? What problems does the hero encounter and how does he or she overcome them? How does the story end?

Discuss, as a class, similarities and differences between heroes in legends. Why do most countries have some sort of legendary figure? Are these heroes good role models? Has our image of heroes changed over the generations, for example, do modern heroes have to be male, brave, strong and tough?

Discuss how the qualities of these heroes and heroines could be displayed by people today, including the students themselves. Have students complete **BLM 3**.

## Sharing stories

If any students have a favourite myth ask them to tell it, or read it, to the class. Encourage them to say why they like this myth. Discuss with students what the myth is about. What is it trying to explain?

## Spreading the word

Remind students that myths and legends were passed down the generations orally. Discuss what happens when people tell stories orally - are the facts accurately related? Encourage students to think of times when they have told stories about events in their lives. Ask if they ever exaggerated or altered facts when telling a story about themselves or a friend. Did it make for a better story? As a story is continually repeated, it can be hard to remember which parts are real or invented. Many heroes in legends may have originated from a real person but the story has changed over time. This is also why there are many different versions of the same story. Ask if students have found this in their research.

## Getting the message across

Have students brainstorm methods of giving information in forms other than talking and writing, for example through dance, ceremony, body painting and art. Have students choose a myth or legend they have read and paint a story of it. Ask them to draw a rough copy first and to discuss their work with a friend. Does it make sense? Then ask them to paint the final version. Have them write the name of the story underneath the painting. Display the paintings around the room.

## A myriad of myths

Group students and give each group a myth to read and discuss. Ask students to consider ideas the myth is exploring, for example it may be trying to show how the world was created or why there is a sun and a moon. Students might like to draw individual story maps. Each group appoints a spokesperson to present a short summary of their myth and explain what message they feel the myth is giving. Ask students if they enjoyed the myth they read, and why or why not?

## A world of myths

Most countries have myths and legends. Ask students to consider why this might be. Explain that most people, no matter their culture, have the same basic emotions and desires (love, friendship, searching for answers, wanting good to triumph over evil, etc). Ask students if they think it would be possible to learn about a culture by reading their myths and legends.



Show students a map of the modern world. Explain to students that the world would not have looked like this thousands of years ago when civilisation (and mythology) was beginning. If possible, *briefly* display a map of the world showing the continents when they were joined together. It will be less confusing and more useful for students to become familiar with the position of the countries in the world today. Ask students if the location of a country can influence its myths and legends. Reasons might include climate and proximity to more powerful countries.

People in Arctic lands (Greenland, North America, northern Russia and Scandinavia) relied heavily on fishing and hunting for food as it was too cold for farming. Animals and weather are prominent in their mythology.

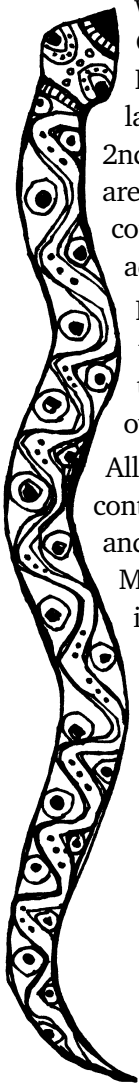
Greek, Roman and Egyptian myths have many similarities because of their proximity to each other. For thousands of years they invaded and traded

with each other. In the 4th century BC the Greeks conquered countries in the Near East and spread Greek culture and language over the area. However, by the 2nd century BC, Romans had conquered the area and expected all the people and countries to worship Roman gods and to adapt to Roman culture.

People in Central and South America have the common theme of sun worship and used mythology to reinforce their power over the people they conquered.

Allocate different parts of the world (either continents or countries) to pairs of students and ask them to locate their area on the map.

Make sure at least one student in each pair is a competent reader. Ask them to read myths and legends from that area. What did they learn about the particular culture?



## Aboriginal Dreaming Stories

Australian Aborigines are closely linked to the land and to nature. As with other cultures, Aboriginal people have passed their creation stories to their descendants through story-telling, dance, art, etc. Read some of the creation stories to students (see Resources) and discuss how Aboriginal people explained the events around them.

## Themes

### Creating the world

Many myths describe the creation of the universe and the formation of the Earth and of people. Different cultures all have stories explaining how they believe the universe began. Keep students in pairs from the previous activity and have them research another culture to see what myths they told to explain creation. Ask students to present their findings in the form of an interview or a play. After all students have completed their presentation, discuss some of the ideas in the myths. Do students think that they help make sense of the world?

### The natural world

Many cultures have myths that explain how different parts of the natural world got to be the way they are. For example, many cultures have myths to explain the constellations. Explain to students that a constellation is the name given to a group of stars that appear to make up a particular shape. One constellation they may know is the Southern Cross, found on Australia's flag.

The constellation known as the Pleiades (ply-a-deez) is also known as 'the seven sisters' in both Greek and Aboriginal myths, with stories in each culture of how the seven sisters got to be in the sky.

Distribute **BLM 4** and have students research two stories from different cultures that explain how one particular constellation came into being.

### People

According to most mythologies, people were created by the gods, for example the Egyptians believed that the first human beings were made from the tears of Ra, the Sun god; the Norse god, Odin, made a man and a woman from driftwood. Ask students to research some myths that suggest how people were created. Discuss, as a class, the different explanations.

## Animals

Common types of animals play important roles in myths and legends. Some cultures, for example, believed that when birds migrated, they were leaving this world for another. Some myths tell how an eagle (in Finland) or a swan (in India) laid the egg that gave birth to the world. Have students read about myths and legends that contain animals. Do animals play an important role in the myths? Why were they used? Ask students to fill in **BLM 5**.

## Extra! Extra!

Explain that some myths contain unusual beasts; serpents such as the many-headed Hydra and the winged horse Pegasus are important beasts in Greek myths. Encourage students to imagine that they have discovered a drawing of an unusual and fabulous beast on a cave wall. Using **BLM 6**, ask them to write an article about this animal, then read their article to the class. Is it believable?

## Gods and goddesses

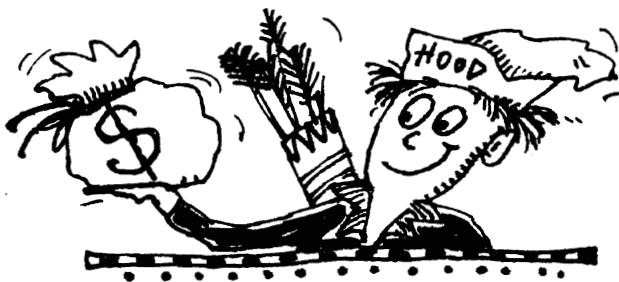
With students, brainstorm the names of some of the gods and goddesses that feature in myths and legends. Discuss their names and their roles. Are they important and if so, why? Have students research these gods and goddesses and fill in **BLM 7**.

## My hero

In Greek mythology, heroes are nearly as important as gods. Heroes are usually the child of a god and a human. Ask students to choose a hero and to write about them on **BLM 8**. Heroes could include Achilles, Atlas, Odysseus, Perseus and Heracles.

## The message in the myth

Explain to the class that many myths carry messages that are still relevant today. Look at some of the myths you have already examined, and discuss what the main message of each myth is. Distribute **BLM 9** and have students complete it.



## The A to Z of myths and legends

Allocate a letter to each student. Ask them to research a mythical character whose name begins with the allocated letter. If more than one student has the same letter, they should make sure they do not choose the same character. Ask students to write down any relevant information they find about their character and add an illustration. Encourage them to list the myths their characters appear in. Are they good or evil, a god/goddess, an animal or human? Notes can be compiled into a class book on mythical characters, and once all students have looked at it, it could be donated to the library.

## Magic of myths and legends

Ask students if they have enjoyed reading the myths and legends. Group students to brainstorm possible reasons why myths and legends are popular stories today. Why do most cultures have such stories? Reasons might include the universal themes; relating to the characters, from those who squabbled, wore disguises, were vain, rude and jealous to those who were lovely, generous, fell in love and helped people; the imaginative (real?) mythical beasts; or simply because they are good stories.

## My favourite myth or legend

Students are now familiar with a variety of myths and legends. Ask them to consider which myth or legend they like best, and to complete **BLM 10**.

## Dramatising a myth or legend

Have students perform a play of a myth at school assembly. Ask students to write down their favourite myth or legend. List all their choices on the board. Ask students to convert this information into a bar chart (an excellent visual method of viewing results). When graphs are completed, choose the most popular story and base the play on this. Devise a simple script; have students create costumes and make-up; choose roles (remember to include a prompter); discuss and locate appropriate music (if necessary); allow time for rehearsals and make invitations for parents, teachers and students to attend the performance.

## My myth

With students, brainstorm a list of themes that myths explore, for example good against evil; creation myths; the afterlife; animals; natural history, such as floods and droughts. Encourage students to choose a theme and write their own myth. Remind students that the myth does not have to be a scientific fact but a way of explaining why something may have happened. When students have drafted and revised their stories have them type them on the school computer (or at home for homework) and then bind them into a class book on modern myths. Allow students to read these myths in their quiet reading time.

## Urban myths

Though today's culture doesn't have as strong an emphasis on oral storytelling as ancient cultures did, storytelling in different forms persists, and one example is the urban myth. Urban myths involve ordinary people, and often an element of the grotesque. An example is the story of the man with dreadlocks who fell ill, it being discovered later that he had a nest of redback spiders in his hair. (This story is also found in the United States, with the black widow spider featuring instead of the redback. Urban myths are often found in several versions.)

Urban myths often point a moral or give a warning, but tend not to tackle the larger themes that other myths embrace. One characteristic feature of an urban myth is that the teller will usually assure the listener(s) that the story actually happened to someone they know of, but usually not personally, e.g. the sister of a friend, someone they work with's second cousin...

Discuss the subject of urban myths in class.

Do students know any of the myths that circulate? Have they heard the one about the baby alligators bought as pets and later found to inhabit New York sewers fully-grown? Or the woman eating fried chicken who discovered she was eating a battered rat?

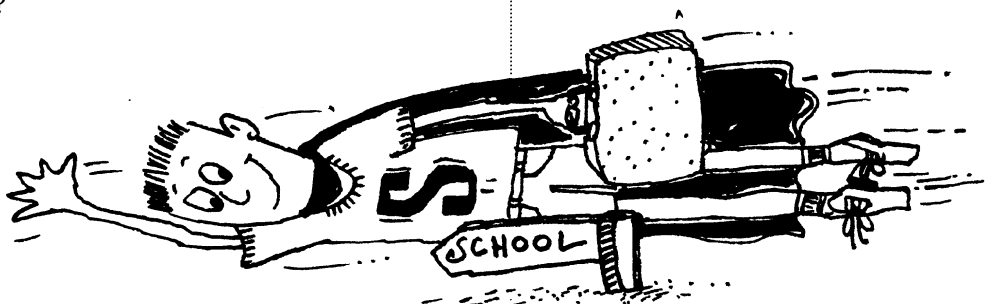
## Interesting images

Myths and legends have given us stories offering explanations about our world, and have also bestowed us with wonderful words and images, for example Cyclops, the one-eyed giant; Pegasus, the winged horse; Medusa, with snakes in her hair; fire-breathing, winged dragons such as Fafnir; Chiron, a centaur (half man and half horse). Have students research and choose one interesting character from mythology, then draw a picture of their character, labelling its unusual features. They can add a short explanation explaining what this character did.

## Advertising myths

Have students look for mythical images in advertising, on TV and in magazines and newspapers. Have a class brainstorming session on brand names based on myths. Students may be unaware that Nike (nigh-kee) shoes are named after the Greek goddess of victory, usually represented as a winged maiden, and that the Apollo space program was named after the Greek and Roman god of light, prophecy, music and healing. Ajax floor cleaner is named after a Greek warrior who was a hero in the Trojan war, and Vulcan heaters are named after the Roman god of fire. Consider why these products have been associated with those particular myths. In advertising, words used to describe products could often also be associated with mythological figures, e.g. a 'powerful' cleanser that 'cleans like magic'.

Have students invent their own product and name it after a mythological or legendary figure, keeping in mind what they want the brand name of the product to suggest, e.g. Mercury Speedy Couriers, named after the Roman messenger god with winged cap and shoes, could suggest speed of communication. Have students design an advertising campaign for their product.





Name: ..... Date: .....

# Multiple myths



<p>Country myth is from.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>Characters.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p>	<p>Message.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p>
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<p>Country myth is from.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>Characters.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p>	<p>Message.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p>
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<p>Country myth is from.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>Characters.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p>	<p>Message.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p>
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Name: ..... Date: .....

# Heroes around the world

Hero's name	Country	Brave deeds
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Name: ..... Date: .....

# Hero/Heroine material!


Heroes and heroines of old showed many amazing or admirable qualities, such as strength, courage, determination. Choose two heroes/heroines and fill out their ID cards, saying how this quality could be shown by someone today (perhaps you!).

**Name:** Demeter

**Feat:** Searched for a year for her daughter Persephone

**Quality:** persistence

**How shown today:** Practising on roller-blades till you can balance



**Name:** .....

**Feat:** .....

**Quality:** .....

**How shown today:** .....

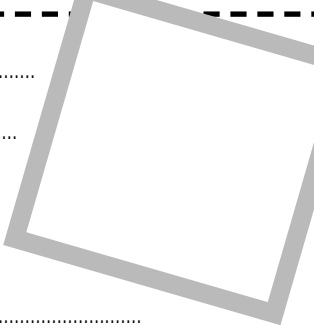


**Name:** .....

**Feat:** .....

**Quality:** .....

**How shown today:** .....





Name: ..... Date: .....

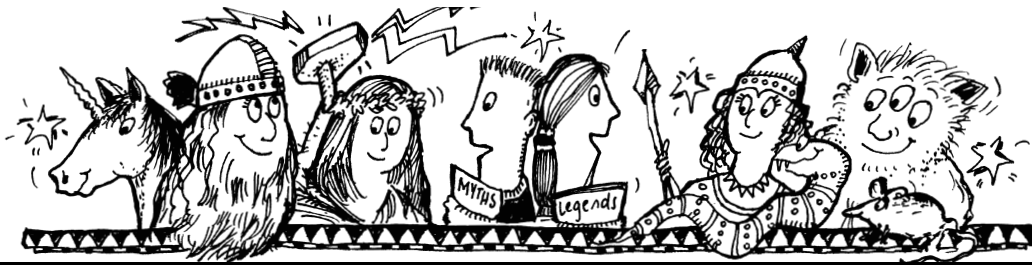
# ★ ★ ★ Star stories! ★ ★ ★

Find stories from two different cultures that tell the story of the creation of the same constellation. Some possible constellations to research would be the Pleiades (the 'seven sisters'), or the Milky Way...

Constellation: .....  
Country: .....  
Myth: .....

Constellation: .....  
Country: .....  
Myth: .....

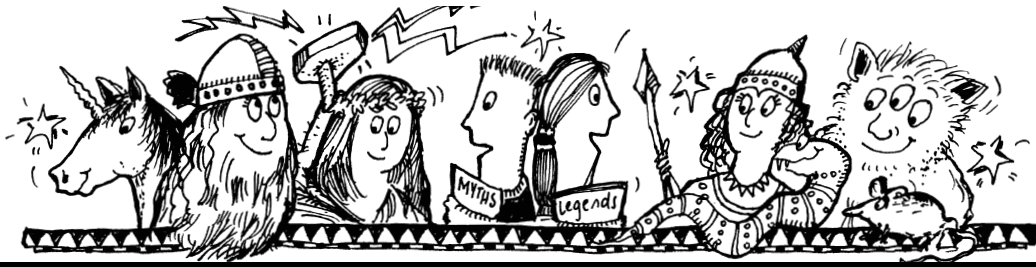




Name: ..... Date: .....

# Extra! Extra!





Name: ..... Date: .....

# Gods and goddesses

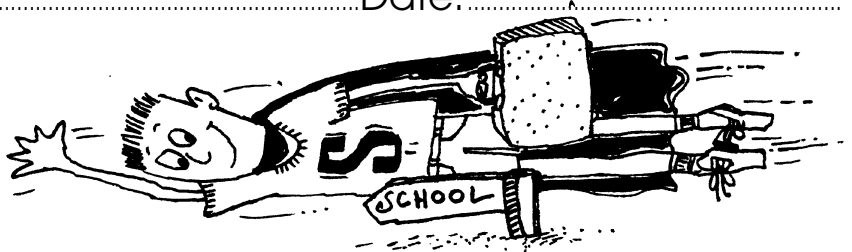
Research these gods and goddesses and fill in the table.  
The first one has been filled in as an example.

Name	Country	God or goddess	God/dess of?	Appearance
Aphrodite	Greece	goddess	love	very beautiful, wore a magic girdle that inspired others to love her
Zeus				
Thor				
Gaia				



Name: ..... Date: .....

# My hero!



Name: .....

Parents (if known): .....

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Description: .....

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Good at: .....

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Weaknesses: .....

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Nationality: .....

Famous for: .....

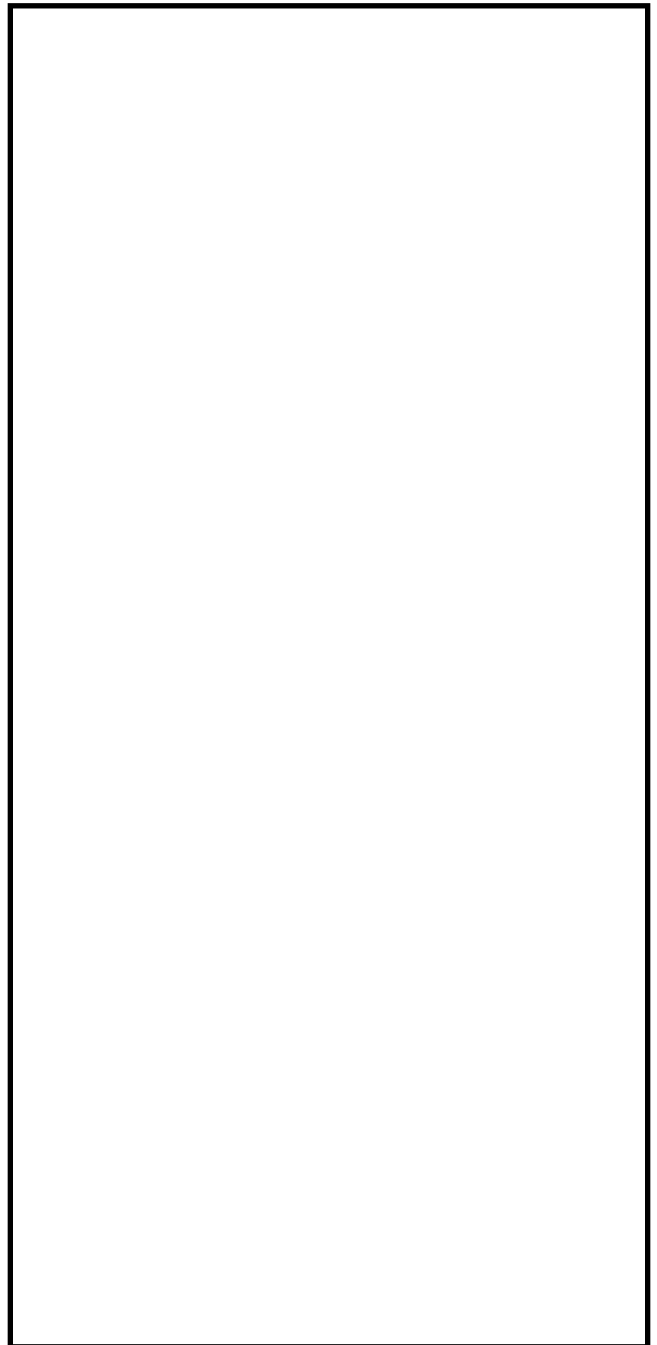
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Interesting facts: .....

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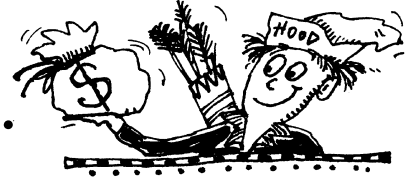
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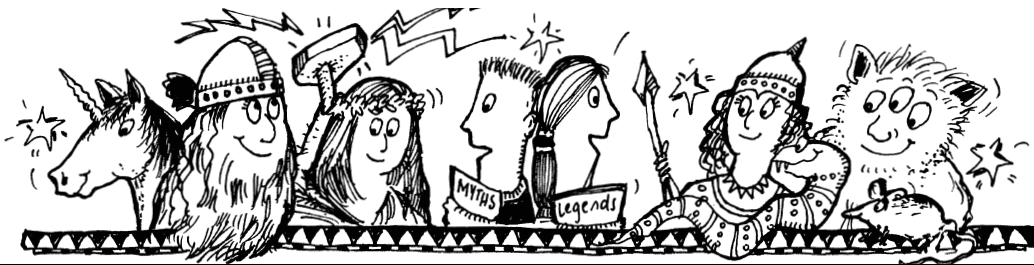
Name: ..... Date: .....

# And the message is...



Story	Idea or message	Example from today
Robin Hood robbed the rich to give to the poor	Rich people should share their wealth with poorer people	People with more money who give their services as volunteers to help those with less eg. the Smith Family





Name: ..... Date: .....

# My favourite myth or legend

Name: .....

Country: .....

Characters: .....

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Plot: .....

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My favourite part: .....

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