



**IN THE BEGINNING: FIRST
ENCOUNTERS**

Native
American Myths
1600's

WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A MYTH AND A LEGEND?

A myth is an anonymous oral story that has been handed down through history that explains why the world is the way it is or helps make sense of the world.

- Myths rely on the **supernatural** to explain a **natural** phenomenon, **human behavior**, or **mystery**.
- This is what is also known as the **ORAL TRADITION**.

A LEGEND...

is a traditional narrative (story) often focusing on a specific location or specific historical figure.

SIDENOTE:

Like the myth, a legend often provides an etiological narrative, and it often fills in gaps in historical records. Unlike myths, **legends usually do not involve powerful gods or world altering supernatural events—though they can to a small degree.**

ORAL TRADITION

-Oral Tradition literature is more like a **performance**.

These stories are passed down from generation to generation through **spoken language**.

Also, the Oral Tradition is unique because each American Indian tribe has their own language and culture.

THE 4 FUNCTIONS OF MYTHS CONVEY BELIEFS ABOUT...

- ❑ the nature of physical world
- ❑ social order and appropriate behavior
- ❑ on human nature
- ❑ the problem of good and evil/spirituality

WE'LL BE LOOKING AT 3 TYPES OF MYTHS...

- Creation myths
- Origin myths
- Trickster hero myths

THE PURPOSE OF CREATION MYTHS ARE TO...

- ❑ instill a sense of awe toward the mystery of the universe
- ❑ explain the workings of the natural world
- ❑ support and validate social customs
- ❑ guide people through the trials of living

THE PURPOSE OF ORIGIN MYTHS

- To explain why phenomena like the stars, moon, and sky came to be and why certain animals have certain characteristics.
- Side note:** Origin myths are sometimes combined with creation myths.

TRICKSTER MYTHS...

- ❑ Trickster myths were told to help **inform** clan members on certain topics that weren't always good or appealing.
- ❑ The Trickster often uses **cleverness** and **wit** to make up for his **physical weakness**.
- ❑ You could define a “Trickster” as a character who rebels who defy/challenge authority and frequently causes trouble, but they are also clever and creative figures who can unexpectedly reveal wisdom.

WHAT IS AN ARCHETYPE?

An archetype is a pattern (reoccurring symbol or motif) throughout literature that represents universal events of human nature.

It can also refer to the original model on which all other things of the same kind are based.

An archetype is the way we describe characters; think of them as general categories of characters.

PAY ATTENTION TO ARCHETYPES BY LOOKING AT:

- Characters
- Conflicts
- Plot/Story line
- Themes
- Images

EXAMPLES OF ARCHETYPES:

- The hero who dies with honor
- The Wise Old Man
- Ill-fated lovers
- The Trickster Hero
- An initiation task
- A life-giving tree

LITERARY TECHNIQUES

Terse style: using very few words; simple and to the point

Repetition: use of words, images, phrases used multiple times

Enumeration: detailing parts, causes, effects, or consequences to make a point more forcibly

Imagery: language that evokes a mental image in our mind –detail of touch, smell, taste, hear, and sight. (5 senses)

Homily: Another word for a lecture, speech, or moral lesson.

THE OWL

Represents wisdom. Owls have amazing vision bringing the gift of insight.

THE COYOTE

A trickster... embodies things that we cannot change or understand. He is about acceptance of human limitation. The coyote is a survivor.

THE GRIZZLY BEAR

The protector. Symbolizes physical strength and leadership as well as the wild, untamable side of humanity.

THE HAWK

The messenger of the spirit world. Relies on the using power of focus.

Known to take the lead when the time is right. Has the power to see strong connections with spiritual awareness.

THE EAGLE

A symbol of courage, vision, strength and endurance. American Indians see the eagle as a sacred messenger that carries prayers to the Creator and returns with gifts and visions. We use eagles feathers to connect to this majestic and powerful spirit guide as we know the eagle feather holds cleansing and healing powers.

THE BEAVER

The beaver's spirit is never defeated. Beavers are ingenious builders, orchestrating megalith dams that can change the flowing course of entire rivers. The beaver tells us to **believe in our dreams** as if they were real. (Build on them as if the dream is your reality.)

THE SQUIRREL

Known to be a gatherer and a planner. Squirrels deal with practicality. As the squirrel is commonly known to hide and save its food and return to it in the winter months - we take this as a sign in our own lives; a sign that it might be **time to look into our own provisions.**

THE WOLF

A teacher of new ideas and wisdom, he shows intense loyalty with a balance of independence. The wolf teaches cooperation, protectiveness and the value of extended families.

THE OTTER

Otters are considered lucky animals in many Native American cultures and the otter is a symbol of loyalty and honesty. They symbolize enjoyment, adventure, and motherhood.

THE RAVEN

Did you know that Ravens are the largest songbird in North America? Ravens represent mystery and are often referred to by some indigenous tribes as the 'secret keepers' and are the subject of many stories. Their ebony black color is sometimes associated with darkness.

THE RABBIT

A mother rabbit can have forty or more babies a year. That's **symbolic of the cycle of life**, and they way life carries on generation after generation. This could hearken to our ideals of ancestry. Indeed in many cultures (Asian, for example) the rabbit is a symbol of longevity and a long family line.

THE HORSE

The horse spirit animal symbolizes personal drive, passion and appetite for freedom. Among all the spirit animals, it is one that shows a strong motivation that carries one through life.

THE COUGAR

A symbol of power. A cougar or a Mountain Lion teaches you to balance your own. He responds to any challenge with swiftness.

THE FALCON

At its core, the Falcon animal totem represents **visionary power**, wisdom, and guardianship. This powerful bird awakens visionary power, and leads you to your life purpose. The Falcon carries with it a message of transition and change - perhaps in your vocation, work, career, etc.

THE GOOSE

Geese are incredibly **gifted navigators** and instinctively know the way across the long haul to warmer climates. They forge ahead with confidence and bravery.



THE SNAKE

Usually seen in healing and fertility rites. The snake is considered a hunter. He symbolizes transformation.

THE DEER

Symbolizes speed and family protection. The deer is known for being alert and serves as a symbol of sensitivity and kindness.