

## Mythology Lesson #2: Cross-Cultural interpretations of Flood Myths

### **Mythology Lesson #2 Overview**

**Main Ideas:** Cross-Cultural interpretations of flood myths, comparative mythology

**Grade Level:** Third through Sixth grade level

**Subject Areas:** English Language Arts, Greek Mythology, World History, Visual Arts

#### **Learning Goals:**

Students will participate in a discussion facilitated by the teacher looking at the two images of the museum object created by Robert Lipnick, called *Tzedakah Box with Sleeping Figure*, 2002. This ceramic “bank” is one artist’s illustration of the story of Noah’s Ark and the great flood. Students will compare and share similarities and differences between various cultures explanations of the great flood.

**Duration:** 60 minutes

- Part A: Teacher Facilitation of images of Tzedakah Box with teacher: 15 minutes
- Part B: Compare and Share Student Activity Story Cards: 45 minutes

#### **Set up and Instructions:**

1. Project the two images of the Tzedakah Box on screen for the entire class to view.
2. Print out the Teacher Facilitation Questions. Teacher will facilitate discussion.
3. Print out single copy of each story card plus 5 additional copies of the Noah’s Ark card included with this activity.
4. Organize class into groups of 2 or more for comparing and sharing activity.
5. Each group of students gets one Noah’s Ark card from the Old Testament and one other country’s flood myth card.
6. The student sub groups will share with the class their discoveries made when comparing their two myths.

#### **Attachments:**

- Images for enlargement
- Lesson #2 Overview
- Teacher Facilitation Questions
- Story Cards Flood Myths

## Story Cards for 'The Flood' Mythology

Resource Websites:

<http://www.talkorigins.org/faqs/flood-myths.html>  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_flood\\_myths](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_flood_myths)

### Old Testament, Book of Genesis

In the Old Testament, the book of Genesis, when Noah is 500 years old, he and his three sons see the people of the world becoming violent and wicked. God warns that he will send a flood that will cover the whole world and Noah should build an ark to save his family and two of each animal. He asks Noah to take his time building the ark – 120 years – so that the sinful people in the world have a chance to change their ways. They never do, and finally, the flood comes and Noah takes his family and the animals inside as it rains for forty days and nights. When the rain stops, Noah lets a dove go and when it returns with an olive leaf in its mouth, he knows land is un-covered. When the flood waters recede completely, the whole world has been wiped clean and Noah and his family start over.

Genesis 6-9



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### Nigeria: Efik-Ibibio

The sun and moon are man and wife, and their best friend was flood, whom they often visited. They often invited flood to visit them, but he demurred, saying their house was too small. Sun and moon built a much larger house, and flood could no longer refuse their invitation. He arrived and asked, "Shall I come in?" and was invited in. When flood was knee-deep in the house, he asked if he should continue coming and was again invited to do so. The flood brought many relatives, including fish and sea beasts. Soon he rose to the ceiling of the house, and the sun and moon went onto the roof. The flood kept rising, submerging the house entirely, and the sun and moon made a new home in the sky.

Source: Eliot, Alexander. *The Universal Myths*, Truman Talley Books/Meridian, New York, 1976, pp. 47-48



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### India: Far East Hindu:

#### Manu and Matsya Avatar, Lord Vishnu Stories

Manu, the first human, found a small fish in his wash water. The fish begged protection from the larger fishes, in return for which it would save Manu. Manu kept the fish safe, transferring it to larger and larger reservoirs as it grew, and later the fish (some versions of this story portray the fish as a form of the Lord Vishnu, called Matsya) saved Manu from a deluge by warning him to build a boat and letting him tie the craft to the fish's horn. The fish led him to a mountain and told Manu to tie the ship's rope to a tree to prevent it from drifting. Manu, alone of all creatures, survived. He made offerings of clarified butter, sour milk, whey, and curds. From these, a woman arose, calling herself Manu's daughter. Through her, he generated this race.

Sources: Kelsen, Hans, 1943. "The Principle of Retribution in the Flood and Catastrophe Myths", in Dundes, p. 128.

Brinton, Daniel G. The Myths of the New World, Greenwood Press, New York, 1876, 1969, pp.227-228.



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### China: Gun-Yu myth

Under the reign of Emperor Yao, a great flood begins of natural causes. Both the Yellow River and the Yangtze River overflow for two generations. The emperor asks a man named Gun to help. Gun uses special soil to build dams and banks to hold back the water – but it doesn't work. Later, Gun's son Yu tries to help by digging drainage channels and hauling away mud. In the end, Yu succeeds in stopping the flood waters and becomes a heroic Emperor of China, beginning the Xia Dynasty.



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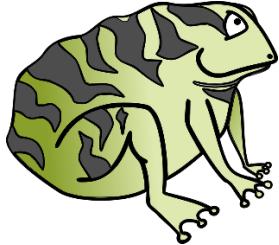
Resource Websites:

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### Australia: Lake Tyres, Victoria

A giant frog once swallowed all the water, and no one else could get anything to drink. After many other animals failed, eel, with his remarkable contortions, made the frog laugh, releasing the water. Many were drowned in the flood. The whole of mankind would have perished if the pelican had not picked up survivors in his canoe.

Source: Berndt, Ronald M. and Berndt, Catherine. *The Speaking Land, Inner Traditions International, Rochester, Vermont, 1994.*



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### Huichol People of Western Mexico

Grandmother Nakawe, goddess of the earth, told a farmer that a flood was coming in five days. Per her instructions, he built a box from the fig tree and entered it with five grains of corn and beans of each color, fire with five squash stems to feed it, and a black dog. She closed him in and caulked the cracks, and he floated in the flood for five years. Finally, the box came to rest on a mountain near Santa Cantarina. The world was still under water, but parrots and macaws pulled up mountains and created valleys to drain the water, and the land dried. The man lived with the dog in a cave. Every evening he would return home from work in the fields to find dinner prepared. He spied on the dog one day, and saw that she took off her skin and became a woman to do the work. He threw her skin into the fire. She whined like a dog, but he poured water on her, and she remained a woman. The farmer married the woman and they had a family.

Source: Horcasitas, Fernando, 1953. "An Analysis of the Deluge Myth in Mesoamerica", in Dundes.



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### **Washington State, USA: Skokomish American Indians**

The Great Spirit, angry with the wickedness of people and animals, decided to rid the earth of all but the good animals, one good man, and his family. At the Great Spirit's direction, the man shot an arrow into a cloud, then another arrow into that arrow, and so on, making a rope of arrows from the cloud to the ground. The good animals and people climbed up. Bad animals and snakes started to climb up, but the man broke off the rope. Then the Great Spirit caused many days of rain, flooding up to the snow line of Takhoma (Mount Ranier). After all the bad people and animals were drowned, the Great Spirit stopped the rain, the waters slowly dropped, and the good people and animals climbed down. To this day there are no snakes on Takhoma.



Mt. Rainier

Source: Clark, Ella E. Indian Legends of the Pacific Northwest, University of California Press, 1953, pp. 31-32

## Mythology Lesson #2: Cross-Cultural interpretations of Flood Myths

### Teacher Facilitation Questions for Mythology Lesson Plan #2: Multi-cultural interpretations of Flood Myths

- While looking at the two sides of the image, help the students identify and point out as many of these recognizable objects as possible:  
[Boat, rocks, chalice (vase), a large padlock on a door, mountain peaks or land, a sleeping man at the base, a bowl of cherries on a table, a chair, a cracked ewer (pitcher/vase). Possibly not visible are images are a globe, the Torah (a scroll), and a heart.]
- Which color appears to be sky and which color indicates water?
- Does the water appear smooth and calm? [Look at waves under the boat.]
- We have questions such as, who is the man sleeping at the bottom of the object, what is he dreaming about?
- Why are objects from a home (vase, chair, lock) scattered all over and some are broken?
- Why are the sky and ocean mixed up?
- Why is there a boat near the middle of the sculpture?
- Ask the students, has anyone ever heard of the story of Noah's Ark? If no, read the following summary of the story from the Old Testament to the students.
- Explain the object to the students. This is a Tzedakah box (tseda'ka box). It is an object of ritual in Judaism. Jewish families place coins into it during holidays and special occasions. Most of these boxes are simply decorated and made out of either metal or wood.
- This one is ceramic and is a modern version but illustrates an ancient myth, the story of the Great Flood. The small boat is Noah's ark. The boat actually lifts off to expose a hole where you can insert coins like a bank. The money is sent to charitable organizations to support causes of justice.
- This object is just one artist's version of an ancient story about a great flood. There are many different interpretations of flood myths from all over the world. These flood myths interpret events from thousands of centuries ago and explain the creation of the world.