

## Section B: The Storehouse of Myths

**Objective: Students identify mythical elements in their cultural inheritance.**

[*To the teacher:* This section views myths as stories we tell ourselves as cultural beings to explain those phenomena which appear to resist scientific treatment: such things as death, evil, our yearning for immortality and social injustice. It assumes myth-making to be an enduring property of language. It also assumes that the students in our classrooms are already repositories of myth in ways this section may enable them to obtain a glimpse into.]

### Activity 1: Delving for myths (Teacher directed)

*To the teacher:* To prepare for this exercise have students put their heads on their desks and close their eyes. Explain that you are going to lead them on a fantasy exploration and that afterwards they will be recording their fantasy on paper. In leading them in this exploration, make sure you don't rush it. Leave time for them to envisage and savour detail. It is crucial to the success of this activity that they do not communicate with others until their writing is finished. The following fantasy is simply a guide. Feel free to adapt it.

I want you to imagine that you are standing on the edge of a great forest. Before entering, picture as clearly as you can the shape and colour of the trees.

Is there much undergrowth? Is there a path to follow? Can you hear anything? Smell anything?

As you enter the forest, try to keep imagining things sharply in your mind. How are you feeling? Do you notice anything unusual. Are you aware of any animals, birds or insects?

After some time, you are aware that you have travelled deep into the forest. What thoughts are passing through your mind?

Suddenly, you become aware of a person. What does the person look like? Eyes? Facial features? clothing? Are they carrying anything? Do they speak to you? If so, what do they say?

After a moment, the person beckons you. You follow. Willingly or unwillingly? Where do they take you? Picture the place you are taken as clearly as you can.

The person asks you do do something. What is it? How do you feel about doing it?

Suddenly something unexpected occurs. A danger of some kind is threatening. Imagine in detail where the danger is coming from.

Fortunately, however, you obtain an object that gives you special power against the danger. What is the object? How did you get it? Did someone give it to you? If so, what kind of creature gave you the special object?

Imagine in detail how you use the special object to free yourself from the danger.

In getting the class to write their account, suggest to them they write as quickly as they can so as to get down as much detail as they can before the dream fades. Suggest they use the first person and use past or present tense.

Questions for class discussion:

- \* Was the forest predominantly friendly, unfriendly or neutral in your stories?
- \* Were there some commonly occurring animals, birds or insects?
- \* What sorts of persons did class members imagine in their stories? Were there common features?
- \* Were there common predicaments in the class's stories?
- \* Were there common features of the 'rescues' that occurred in the class's stories?

### Activity 2: Elements of myth (Groups)

Read the story of 'Jorinda and Joringel' and answer the following questions:

- \* What values are attached to the following elements in the story: forest, cat, owl, flower, dream, nightingale, castle, old woman?
- \* Which of these values would you identify as **conventional** (commonly agreed-upon) in your culture?
- \* Which characters are portrayed as powerful? Powerless?
- \* Identify the following plot elements in the story: predicament, conflict, quest, problem, vision, resolution, magic, resolution.
- \* Does this story have anything in common with any of your group's stories (from Activity 1)?

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Do not halloo till you are out of the woods.

[To the teacher: This activity can be extended into an inquiry into the common elements (e.g. locations, character or animal types, plot devices, sacred objects) and attached values in various folk-lore and mythical traditions, European, Polynesian, Oriental, African, Indian and others. If you have a variety of ethnic groups in your class, you may find that students enjoy researching and sharing their own cultural traditions. It may assist some Pakeha students to overcome feelings of cultural deprivation!]

#### **Activity 4: Te wao tapu nui a Tane (the great sacred forest of Tane) (Groups)**

[To the Teacher: The language of the extract on Pages 15-17 may prove too difficult for some classes. Other versions of the material can be substituted and replacement questions drafted to the ones listed below.]

As a group, use the following tasks as starting points to explore the contribution of the *tangata whenua* to the storehouse of language and culture of New Zealand (Aotearoa). Your teacher will direct you how to write up your group's findings.

- \* Compile a list of Maori words used in the extract. How many of these are you familiar with? Work out the meanings of the words you are unfamiliar with by using clues from the passage. Add to your list other Maori words that have become added to the vocabulary store of New Zealand English.
- \* As a group, come up with a theory as to why Maori words have become part of New Zealand English.
- \* What value is attached in the extract to Po? To the forest itself?
- \* You will notice the use of repetition in the chant on p. 15. Read through the extract and find examples of the repetition of sentence shapes. (Your teacher will help you understand the term 'sentence shape' if it is new to you.) As a group, come up with an explanation as to why repetition is a common feature of the language of cultures which have a strong **oral** tradition, even when that language is translated and written down.

- \* Look at the sentence on p. 15: 'Their names represent the personification of nature's various manifestations and powers.' Ask your teacher to explain the word **personification**. Make a list of the 'manifestations and powers' of nature which are personified in the extract. Which Maori gods personify these natural forces?
- \* Finally, a "Level 5" question. What sorts of attitudes to the natural world are indicated by the act of personifying it? (You might also like to reflect on the use of personification in the extract about Blackie. [Pages 9-10])

#### **Activity 5: The kindred forest (Individual)**

In your journal or workbook, imagine you share a traditionally Maori attitude to the forest. Picture yourself walking through a stand of native bush. How do you feel about the forest that surrounds you and the forest creatures you see? Use as much detail as you can in your writing. Do you feel similarly about an exotic pine forest which you can see in the distance?

#### **Activity 6: Extension through research**

[To the teacher: There are a number of suggested research activities in this resource. **Appendix D** is an example of a management plan which can be used to help students organise most research activities.]

- \* Compare two different cultures in terms of their attitudes to the forest as an environment.
- \* Compare two different cultures in terms of particular sorts of myth, e.g. creation myths.
- \* Compare two different cultures in terms of legends or folk-tales which have the forest as an important setting.

Avoid an over-dependence on **secondary resources**. Try to incorporate at least one **primary resource** into your research. (If your school is part of the K12-Net, your teacher may be able to book a project channel which would enable you to seek information by communicating via an electronic bulletin board system with students of different cultures all over the world.)

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He iti kahikaatoa pakaru rikiriki te tootara  
[A split totara is easy prey to the axe.]