



Myths are stories that explain the world and humans’ experiences. Mythological stories and characters reflect a culture’s past and traditions and, most importantly, tell the story of the values and beliefs that are central to a culture, and to the human race.

The universal appeal of myths is, in part, a result of **elements** that are typical or common across most myths. These repeated elements include symbols, themes, patterns, and characters. These elements help to develop and communicate the theme of a myth. Common themes in myths include the struggle between the forces of good and evil, the quest of a hero, or the origin of some aspect of the natural world.

Element	Description
Tension between Opposing Forces in the Universe	Myths are often structured around the tensions between opposing forces in the universe, like light versus dark and good versus evil. Often the main characters in myths have responsibility for resolving conflicts between these opposing forces; for example, heroes fighting to overcome evil monsters.
A Struggle for Power	The struggle for power in a myth occurs between two opposing forces. This struggle for power may be between two supernatural forces, a supernatural force and a mortal, or two members of a single family. This struggle may be a result of desire for control, vanity, or jealousy. Often this struggle ends with punishment or even death.
Explanation of the Origins of Life and the Natural World	Many myths come from humans’ early desire to explain the origins of life and the natural world. They try making sense of the wonders of the world they perceived. Myths often attempt to answer the fundamental questions: How did the world come to be? Who are we? What is our purpose on earth? Because ancient people could not rely on science, they told these stories to provide an explanation about where we came from and how things came to be.
Fate and Prophecy	The idea of fate, and its overwhelming power, is a central theme in many myths. Neither gods nor humans seem able to escape fate, despite many attempts to do so. Making this theme even more prominent, many myths begin with a prophecy. This prophecy then shapes the actions and interactions of the various characters of the myth.



Element	Description
Supernatural or Non-human Characters	Some of the characters in myths are often non-human even though they possess human qualities and emotions. These characters might include gods, goddesses, and supernatural beings. These non-human characters often possess super-human powers and use them to interact with our human world by, for example, controlling the weather. Gods and goddesses may also visit the human world by disguising themselves in different forms.
A Quest or Completion of a Task	Myths often tell stories of human characters who travel between worlds to complete a task; for example, finding someone or something. Often this involves travel between the present world and other worlds like Mount Olympus, the home of the gods, or the Underworld, which is hidden beneath the Earth and is the kingdom of the dead.