

# Storytelling and its Role in Cultural Heritage

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## Introduction

In our research, we wanted to explore how storytelling connects people to cultural heritage. First, we focused on how Greek mythology and constellations are linked to cultural heritage. We also investigated how Norse mythology and storytelling connect people to their cultural heritage.

Before moving onto our research, it is necessary to define the following terms that are crucial for understanding our results:

- Cultural heritage: “the past created by humankind and its various tangible and intangible manifestations.”
- Mythology: “a body of beliefs, fables, or legends belonging to a people, usually involving spiritual tales that reflect the philosophy of the culture.”
- Folklore: “traditional beliefs and customs, narratives and sayings, and activities that are preserved among cultures.”

## Methodology

In our exploration of these subjects we employed a few different research methods.

We both attended shows at the Parkland Planetarium:

- “In My Backyard” - where the night sky is explored from our backyards through Storytelling, Poetry, and Song.
- “Spring Prairie Skies” - a live narrated tour of the wonders of the night skies, with some stories about the ancient sky.

Investigating how Norse mythology and storytelling connects people to their Cultural Heritage:

- An interview with a focus on questions about storytelling, and how it is an important part of cultural heritage.
- An interview focused on Norse mythology, and on Norse culture and how the Norse told stories.

Exploring how Greek mythology and constellations are linked to cultural heritage:

- One Interview focused on how constellations and Greek mythology are linked to cultural heritage and how people used greek mythology stories to learn more about astronomy.
- A second interview focused on greek mythology as an educational tool to teach children about these myth origins.



Parkland Planetarium. Image by Asia Djafar

## Results

While exploring Greek mythology, I collected data by using different research methods:

- ❖ Participant Observation: We discovered that many people were fascinated and excited to learn about constellations and stories related to them. Children were interested in learning about and exploring the different objects in the planetarium. We also learned about how those stories and Greek mythology connect different cultures. We learned why seasons happen and how we should prepare for the different seasons. We learned about what day the sun is in the sky and when it rises and sets how people use stars and constellations to find their way. We explored or tried to describe the star's different shapes and how constellation interpretations vary from culture to culture.



Image of a Greek mythology family tree, scanned from *Greek Myths for Young Children*, EDC Pub. 2004

- Through two interviews, I learned about the many ways Greek mythology is used:

I learned how constellations and Greek mythology stories were used to connect or link people to their cultural heritage. Also, how Greek myths are used to teach children on subjects like science. Greek myths are used as a guide and teaching tool to teach people about astronomy and constellations. I also learned how Greek mythology stories could be used in the psychology field as a foundation of learning education to recognize objects and understand where they came from, see new perspectives about the story, connect people to their origin, or teach them about history. Greek mythology can also be related to some of the psychological theories of childhood development.



Image of constellations scanned from *Greek Myths for Young Children*, EDC Pub. 2004

## Results

When attending both performances at the planetarium, I got the chance to observe the effects of immersive oral storytelling. During the “In my backyard,” I witnessed people of all ages get excited to participate with the speaker. No one seemed embarrassed or scared to participate because it was a part of the experience. Everyone was fully immersed in listening to what the presenter had to say and, watching the projections that went along with it. I learned that oral storytelling is an effective way to teach people, which is an important part of this research because so much of Norse Storytelling was oral.



Oslo Medieval fair. Image by Isabel Scarborough

The first interview I did was with a professor who is very knowledgeable about storytelling. I asked them why they thought humans connected to myths and fantasy as easily as real human stories? They said, “stories are what makes us human,” and we talked about how myths and fantasy stories teach important life lessons while also providing “explanations” for things they cannot understand, providing people comfort. So people will take these stories and use them as inspiration in their everyday lives when faced with challenges.

For my second interview, I interviewed a professor who is an expert in the field of Viking mythology. I wanted to learn more about the specifics of the setup of Viking mythology and get more insight into which stories were the most influential. I asked them, “why did the Norsemen have mortal gods, and what do you think that says about Norse culture?” They said, “death was never considered the “end” in viking culture, nor was it always a bad thing. Sometimes it was considered an honor”. We talked about how mythology can teach us about the values of the culture it came from. We can learn what was important to that culture, giving us insight into their everyday lives.



Viking carved pillar. Image by Isabel Scarborough

## Discussion

We learned a lot from our exploration of our research questions. We discovered the influence oral storytelling has had on cultural heritage. Oral storytelling has been a long-standing tradition in societies all over the world.

We saw firsthand, through participant observation, what makes oral storytelling so unique. And what makes it such an effective way to connect people to cultural heritage.

Through our interviews, we learned that another big part of oral storytelling was the education aspect. These stories were not solely intended to be a form of entertainment; they were also used to educate people within the societies.

Storytelling was a crucial part of connecting people from different societies worldwide. Some stories would influence stories within other societies. Stories also give us insight into the values of the cultures they originate from.

Future Research Questions:

- How is technology interfering with teenager’s ability to learn about mythology?
- What are some connections between Marvel superheroes and greek mythology?
- How can mythology be used as an educational subject?
- How is greek mythology used in the psychology field?
- How are fairy tales linked to ancient mythology?
- Why does mythology and legend influence so much of pop culture today?
- Why is it so important for people to feel connect to their cultural heritage?
- Does mythology have an impact on a child development and their decision making or problem solving?
- How is mythology related to psychological theory?

## Resources

Comstock, N. W. (2021). Mythology. *Salem Press Encyclopedia*.

Rydgren, E. (2020). Folklore. *Salem Press Encyclopedia*.

Timothy, D. J. (2020). Cultural heritage and tourism. In *Cultural heritage and tourism: An introduction* (2nd ed., Vol. 7, pp. 1-12). Blue Ridge Summit.