

The Selection and Adaptation
of Old Norse Mythology
For the Elementary School

A Thesis
Presented to
the Faculty of Graduate Studies
The University of Manitoba

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Education

by
Sandra Julia Heidrick
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SANDRA JULIA HEIDRICK

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this thesis was to construct a unit based on old Norse mythology which would be suitable for children at the grade four-to-six level. This was accomplished, first, by selecting from among the major myths those judged as most appropriate for young readers. The chosen myths were then adapted to suit the children's interest and understanding.

In addition to the selection and adaptation, general suggestions for the teaching of the myths, together with specific questions and activities, were incorporated.

Nine myths are included in this study. They were the following: The Creation, Yggdrasil, The Gods' Meeting, Thor's Journey, A Meeting with a Giant, The Theft of Thor's Hammer, The Death of Baldur, The Punishment of Loki, and Ragnarok: The Sun Sets on Asgard.

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Chapter I INTRODUCTION

The Problem

Statement of the Problem

The major purpose of this thesis was to construct a unit based on old Norse mythology which would be suitable for children at the grade four-to-six level. This was accomplished, first, by selecting from among the major myths those judged as most appropriate for young readers. The chosen myths were then adapted to suit the children's interest and understanding.

In addition to the selection and adaptation, general suggestions for the teaching of the myths, together with specific questions and activities, have been incorporated.

Importance of the Problem

Although, as the following section attempts to establish, myth is an important aid in the education of young people, it is generally agreed that its use is relatively neglected at the critical grade four-to-six level in Manitoba schools. Because of this, this thesis was written.

For pre-scientific, pre-rationalistic cultures, mythology was an attempt to explain the otherwise inexplicable. It was an essential way for making sense of a world which contained powerful, frightening, uncontrollable and often destructive forces, both human and natural. Myth was therefore much more than entertaining fiction.

Mythology is a potentially exciting, useful teaching tool which tends to be too often neglected or misused in the teaching of literature. Children can be enticed by the deceptively simple,

attractive exterior appearance of mythological tales into learning or thinking about, on an elementary level, such concepts as plot, theme, character analysis and metaphorical language. If children in the elementary school had more exposure to these concepts they would grow into knowledgeable high school students who can truly understand literary analysis and who, therefore, can appreciate and enjoy complex literature more easily.

Not only is mythology an excellent introduction to great literature and basic literary devices, but it also provides a cultural awareness of the merging influences of a number of preceding civilizations. Mythology provides knowledge, in an interesting way, about the way of life and beliefs of our ancestors--those who have made us the way we are and our world the way it is. We realize how people coped with daily living and how they reacted to phenomena they could not understand or explain.

Mythology presents moral and ethical issues which are complex and unclear in real life in a vivid, dramatic, simple form which children can enjoy and understand.

Myths also serve as an elementary look at the supernatural in life and in literature.

They have bold, larger-than-life characters that can grab the interest of children and provide a beginning for later, more subtle studies of human character and character conflict. Mythology, with its characteristically fast-moving plot development, could also be the beginning of the study of plot and what strengthens or weakens it.

While Greek mythology is referred to more frequently in the literature of the Western civilization, old Norse mythology, which embodies North European medieval literature and language, has had more influence on the customs, laws and language of English speaking

people. Experts in children's literature have stated that old Norse mythology is, in some ways, more suitable and appealing to children than Greek mythology.¹

The grade four-to-six level was initially chosen as the ideal age for the introduction of mythology after years of teaching Olivia Coolidge's edition of Greek mythology at the grade nine level.² Grade nine students were too young to grasp the complexity of mythology at a university level, and they were too old to enjoy the myth simply as an imaginative explanation of the world around them. Students in the junior high school were not as interested in mythological tales as were students in the elementary school. Students in grades one to three might not have the necessary reading or comprehension skills for these stories. Thus, the grade four-to-six level was selected.

Theoreticians of children's literature and literature responsiveness, reading interests, and the teaching of literature agree that mythology should be presented at the grade four level³, as this is the age at which children are most receptive to literature of this type.

Grade nine readers tend to sneer at the imaginative explanations of natural phenomena and the incredulous plots and characters of mythology. They seem to read for information or entertainment, and they are not particularly amused by these mythic tales which appear to underestimate their sophistication and intelligence.

¹ Charlotte S. Huck, Children's Literature in the Elementary School (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1961), p.220.

² Olivia Coolidge, Greek Myths (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1964).

³ Alan C. Purves and Richard Beach, Literature and the Reader: Research in Response to Literature, Reading Interests, and the Teaching of Literature (Illinois: National Council of Teachers of English, 1972), p. 78.

Grade four readers, conversely, can relax, enjoy and identify with mythology's heroes and their adventures. They accept the stories for their entertainment value and imaginative qualities.

The rapid changes that occur in the context of reading interests of young children also suggest the fourth grade level for mythology.

Pupils in the first and second grades prefer subject matter about animals, nature, fantasy (fairy tales), and characters as children (Witty, Coomer, and McBean, 1946; Nelson, 1966; Consuelo, 1967). Students in third and fourth grades become more interested in adventure, daily life or familiar experiences, nature, and animals, with a decreasing interest in fantasy, usually in the form of fables (Curley, 1928). A stronger interest in more realistic subject matter develops as students begin to read more on their own and begin to perceive reading as a source of information about the world (Terman and Lina, 1931)⁴.

Norse mythology satisfies the fourth grade desire for stories of adventure that occurs in the daily life of the gods of Asgard. Nature, and explanations of natural phenomena, as well as animals are also present in these myths.

Historical Background

In order to understand why old Norse mythology is also called Icelandic mythology, the historical origins of this mythology must be considered.

As early as the first few centuries before the beginning of the Christian era, the Teutonic people spread over a considerable part

⁴ Ibid., p. 70.

of central Europe, north of the Rhine and the Danube. Of the same race, religion and customs, they inhabited Germany and what today are the Scandinavian countries - Norway, Sweden, Denmark - and developed a set of myths which are to a large degree uniform for the entire area. Lacking the literary culture of the Greeks and Romans, the Northmen transmitted their myths by word of mouth.

When Christianity came to the North, these tales, which once had been religious beliefs, largely disappeared from writings in Germany and Scandinavia. However, the Vikings had colonized Iceland, and it was during the next few centuries in Iceland that the pagan faith of the Viking ancestors was preserved; it was in this country that the first written record of these pre-Christian Nordic myths was set down. In the Elder (or Poetic) Edda of the tenth century, and the Younger (or Prose) Edda several centuries later is to be found a detailed account of the cosmogony, mythology, and traditions of the Teutonic and Norse people.

Eddic poems can be divided into two groups - the mythological, or stories in which divinities are the chief personages, and the heroic, in which the deeds of the human hero are glorified. This study is concerned with the selection and adaptation of the mythological, not the heroic. These Icelandic (and therefore old Norse) myths and legends form one of the great bodies of the world's mythology.

Icelandic mythology is thus synonymous with old Norse mythology. The Icelanders were the first people to write down these orally transmitted, pre-Christian Nordic myths.

Organization of the Design of the Thesis

Chapter 2 presents a review of the literature related to the problem as well as the research which has been done on this topic. Chapter 3 provides a description of the procedures employed while

selecting, editing and devising teaching procedures for the myths. Chapter 4 contains the myths themselves. Chapter 5 suggests recommendations for future studies and for teachers using the materials provided in this thesis.

Chapter II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

This review of literature discusses the importance of mythology in general for the education of young people. The unique value of Norse mythology is also considered. The importance of teaching mythology at the grade four-to-six level as opposed to other age groups is discussed. The chapter concludes with criteria for selection and adaptation in terms of children's interests and needs.

The Importance of Mythology for the Education of Young People

Mythology can provide an excellent introduction to literature for children. Deceptively simple in appearance, mythological tales give the teacher ample opportunity to introduce to the child, on a very simple level, such concepts as plot, theme, character analysis and metaphorical language. Children with this elementary school exposure to literary analysis and concepts would be in a better position to understand and enjoy more complex literature when they reached the high school level.

Albert L. Lavin substantiates this importance of mythology in the education of young people with the results of his study group, Some Meanings and Uses of Myths: Study Group Paper No. 6: On Myths and Translation: And Appendices I through VII.¹

Mythology increases power and discernment of language, deepening the understanding of metaphor. Students become aware of the connection between history and literature. They become aware of

¹ Albert L. Lavin et al, Some Meanings and Uses of Myths: Study Group Paper No. 6: On Myths and Translation: And Appendixes I through VII (Champaign, Illinois: National Council of Teachers of English, 1966).

language as a symbolic process as mythology leads the mind to analogies with man's other systems of metaphor.

Jane Yolen, in her article "How Basic is Shazam?"² reiterates the belief that a knowledge of myth will help children understand allusions. She states that when myth is excluded from a child's life, an important contribution to linguistic and artistic growth is denied him. Instead of creating adults with a grasp of literary allusion, symbolic language, and a metaphorical tool for dealing with the serious problems of existence, teachers will teach children who speak their own truncated, allusion-free, barren language. Language reflects life just as language helps develop life. It is the most important part of the human condition. The child lacking language lacks true memory and the ability to think. What could be more important in the education of children?

Mythology helps children learn about themselves. It justifies the existing social system and accounts for traditional rites and customs which children today have inherited.

Lavin³ agrees that myth can be used to develop the child's historical imagination by knowledge of the major myths provided by the language of other times and places. Much of the appeal in myth derives from the fears and fantasies every child experiences as part of the way in which he defines himself. Literature is one of the best ways the child has of coping with the tensions of identity and the agonies of growth. The danger for the myth enthusiast is that his teaching may drift toward a fantastical learning or merely diffuse pedantry.

² Jane Yolen, "How Basic is Shazam?", English Journal, Language Arts Volume 54, No. 6, September, 1977.

³ Albert L. Lavin et al, Some Meanings and Uses of Myths: Study Group Paper No. 6: On Myths and Translation: And Appendixes I through VII (Champaign, Illinois: National Council of Teachers of English, 1966).

Sutherland and Arbuthnot, in Children and Books, substantiate this relevance of myth by beginning their mythology section with the following quotation:

"Myths are original revelations of the pre-conscious psyche, involuntary statements about unconscious psychic happenings, and anything but allegories of physical processes.

C.G. Jung, 'The Psychology of the Child Archetype', Essays on a Science of Mythology."⁴

Jane Yolen⁵ also believes that a knowledge of myth, legend, and folklore will enable children to understand their cultural ancestry and themselves. She contends that mythology is a tool of therapy. Myth, conceived of as symbolic form, is a way of organizing the human response to reality. It is a fundamental aspect of the way man processes experience.

This idea of folklore as a tool of psychotherapy has found its most recent articulation in the bestseller of Dr. Bruno Bettelheim, The Uses of Enchantment. Bettelheim believes that such stories offer new dimensions to the child's imagination, suggesting to him images with which he can structure his daydreams.

Mythology provides a model for belief. The stories are a statement about our existence which provide a framework for an individual belief system. The stories from previous cultures are the most serious expression of those cultures, created in a symbolic language.

⁴ Zena Sutherland and Mary Hill Arbuthnot, Children and Books (Illinois: Scott, Foresman and Company, 1947) p. 187.

⁵ Jane Yolen, "How Basic is Shazam?", English Journal, Language Arts Volume 54, No. 6, September, 1977.

Mythology not only helps a child learn about himself but also teaches him to distinguish right from wrong. Moral and ethical issues which are complex and unclear in real life are presented in myths in a vivid, dramatic, simple form. Children quickly comprehend the morality implicit in the myths and derive satisfaction and enjoyment from it.

Diane L. Schmiesing, in "An Introduction to Mythology in Children's Literature,"⁶ contends that the study of mythology helps children understand the influence of religion upon a culture. Myths are in part science because they attempt to relate cause and effect; in part religion, since many of them seek to explain the unknown and our relationship to it; and in part social and moral law, since ethics and morality evolve from belief.

Mythology thus is relevant to several subjects important for the education of young people. Lavin⁷ observes that during the past one hundred years, the significance of myth has attracted the best minds from a variety of fields, for they have found in its encompassing strategies some of the keys to history, psychology, linguistics, and anthropology. Thinking of this development, the names of Frazer, Freud, Jung, Muller and Cassirer occur, as well as those of modern literary critics such as Anerbach, Frye, Bush, Fergusson, Wheelwright, Tillyard, Bodkin, Graves, Campbell and Fiedler.

One of the most important functions of mythology in the education of young people, however, and the one that affects children most directly, is that it encourages children to read for pleasure and entertainment.

⁶ Diane L. Schmiesing, "An Introduction to Mythology in Children's Literature" (Dayton, Ohio: Wright State University Public Education Religion Studies Center, 1976).

⁷ Albert L. Lavin et al, Some Meanings and Uses of Myths: Study Group Paper No. 6: On Myths and Translation: And Appendixes I through VII (Champaign, Illinois: National Council of Teachers of English, 1966).

In Children's Literature in the Elementary School, Charlotte Huck states that teachers have become so concerned with teaching the skills of reading that they have neglected to help children discover the joys of reading.

I believe that children become readers only by reading many books of their own choosing and by hearing someone reading literature of quality aloud with obvious delight and enthusiasm.⁸

Mythology has the necessary criteria for helping children discover the joys of reading. Mythology stimulates reader interest and definitely satisfies the requirements of "literature of quality".

Huck discusses the nature of myth and why its appeal to children is so great. Myth evolved as primitive man searched his imagination and related events to forces, as he sought explanation of the earth, sky and human behaviour. These explanations moved slowly through the stages of a concept of one power or force in human form, who controlled the phenomena of nature; to a complex system in which the god or goddess represents such virtues as wisdom, purity, or love; to a worshipping of the gods in organized fashion. Gods took the form of man and woman, but they were immortal and possessed supernatural powers.

Myths deal with human relationships with the gods, with the relationships of the gods among themselves, with the way people accept or fulfill their destiny, and with the struggle between good and evil forces. The three main types of myths are creation, nature and hero myths.

⁸ Charlotte S. Huck, Children's Literature in the Elementary School (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1961), p. viii.

Myths appeal to children because they are good short stories containing action, suspense, and basic conflicts. Usually, each story can be enjoyed by itself, without deep knowledge of the general mythology.

These qualities encourage children to read for pleasure and entertainment. Nothing seems as essential for the scholastic success of young students as the ability to read easily. Therefore, myth is definitely important for the education of young people.

The Unique Value of Norse Mythology

While Greek mythology is referred to more frequently in the literature of the Western civilization, Norse mythology, which embodies North European medieval literature and language, has had more influence on the customs, laws and language of English speaking people. Every English speaking student should be aware of the mythology and thus the ideas and traditions of those who helped to create their language and culture.

Norse mythology provides a seemingly simple framework for students to begin their first serious study of mythology as literature. It is attractive to students and has several obvious examples of literary devices, language analysis, plot, theme, character study or other lessons that teachers wish to teach. Each myth can be taken separately by the class. Knowledge of the entire mythology is not necessary for comprehension by the student or the teacher.

Charlotte S. Huck, in Children's Literature in the Elementary School, specifically recommends the study of Norse mythology for the education of children.

It is too bad that children do not know these myths as well as they know those of the Greeks. In some ways the Norse tales seem more suited to children than the highly sophisticated, gentle Greek tales. These stories appeal to the child's imagination, with their tales of giants and dwarfs, eight-legged horses and vicious wolves, and magic hammers and rings.⁹

The University of Nebraska Curriculum for English¹⁰ suggests that children should study Norse mythology because of the excellent examples of reiterating devices used in mythology and because of the opportunity provided for the first serious study of mythology as literature. The study introduces a consideration of the contribution of the Germanic language to English and, therefore, forms a foundation for later study of the history of the language. This study also notes that, although the myths of many primitive cultures are amazingly similar, only Norse, Indian, Japanese and Greek myths are original with their cultures.

Norse mythology has unique value worthy for consideration in the study of mythology and literature.

⁹ Charlotte S. Huck, Children's Literature in the Elementary School (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1961) p. 220.

¹⁰ A Curriculum for English, Grade 6, Units 58-70 (Nebraska: The University of Nebraska Press, 1966);

Core text:

Padraic Colum, The Children of Odin (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1962);

Alternate text:

Dorothy Hosford, Thunder of the Gods (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1952).

The Importance of Teaching Mythology at the Grade Four-to-Six Level

The experience of teaching mythology at the grade nine level originally prompted the realization that this was not the optimum age for maximum student interest in or response to literature of this type. Grade nine students are generally too immature to grasp the complexity of mythology at a university level, and they are too old to enjoy the myth simply as imaginative entertainment. The characters of myth seem too simple to them while the plot is either too predictable or not plausible.

Grade four readers, however, are intrigued by the dramatic, fast-paced plots, the use of the supernatural and other imaginative devices, and the fearless or omnipotent heroes. Their basic psychological needs to identify with these heroes, and to experience their adventures vicariously, are also satisfied.

Although conventional curricula make limited concessions to mythology at the grade nine level¹¹, theoreticians of children's literature and literature responsiveness, reading interests, and the teaching of literature agree that this grade is not the ideal age level for the introduction of mythology. According to Alan C. Purvis and Richard Beach, grade four is the level at which the student is most receptive to literature of this type. While the student finds mythology highly appealing

even up to the sixth grade, ... the popularity of myth and legend declines after that point (Bruner, 1929; Gates, 1930; Norwell, 1958). This last finding has not really been used by curriculum makers.¹²

¹¹ Olivia Coolidge, Greek Myths (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1964).

¹² Alan C. Purves and Richard Beach, Literature and the Reader: Research in Response to Literature, Reading Interests, and the Teaching of Literature (Illinois: National Council of Teachers of English, 1972), p. 78.

These authors also maintain that one bias of many studies of content is that the researchers never quite freed themselves from notions of what students' interests "should be". Thus, certain subject matter has been totally ignored. Yet the value of many of these studies is that they do reveal what may be assumed to be students' actual interests, interests which conflict with literature curricula in the schools. Such findings must not remain ignored or the value of mythology as a teaching tool will be lost because of student exposure to this literature at the wrong grade level.

The rapid changes that occur in the context of reading interest of young children must be considered. They substantiate the value of teaching myth at the grade four level.

Pupils in the first and second grades prefer subject matter about animals, nature, fantasy (fairy tales), and characters as children (Witty, Coomer, and McBean, 1946; Nelson, 1966; Consuelo, 1967). Students in third and fourth grades become more interested in adventure, daily life or familiar experiences, nature, and animals, with a decreasing interest in fantasy, usually in the form of fables (Curley, 1928). A stronger interest in more realistic subject matter develops as students begin to read more on their own and begin to perceive reading as a source of information about the world (Terman and Lima, 1931).¹³

Norse mythology has the characteristics required for reader response and interest at the grade four level. Adventure is provided as the students follow the daily life of Thor of Asgard. Nature, and explanations of natural phenomena, as well as animals (magic goats and an eight-footed horse) are also present in these myths. While the content presented to readers has changed drastically due to changes in educational philosophy and attitudes toward teaching classical literature,

¹³ Ibid., p. 70.

many studies indicate highly similar interests over the years and the consistency of children's basic psychological needs - the need to fantasize, explore, or identify with animals, heroes, and children who provide optimistic models for vicarious experiences.¹⁴

At the grade four level, children are attracted to the qualities that are most characteristic of mythology - action and plot. Unusual experiences, fantasy and humour are also preferred attributes of literature that children choose to read at this level and definitely find in Norse mythology.

Some twenty-five studies, dated as early as 1899, agree that early elementary students prefer literary to nonliterary presentations. Whether the form happens to be fiction, drama, or poetry is less important than the fact that the presentation is not informational in character. Wissler (1899) suggested that students enter school with an interest in the story form.

Narrative material, particularly that with a suspenseful plot, much action, humor, and nonsense is preferred. More detailed studies correlated judges' rating of types of forms present in reading materials with students' interest ranking. Although the categories were not well defined, surprise, action plot, narrativeness, liveliness, conversation, animalness, and moralness were the most interesting to students in grades one through three. Liveliness and moralness seemed less popular, and action and plot, most popular (Dunn, 1921; Gates, 1930; Zeller, 1941). A much more recent study confirmed these earlier ones, adding only the preferred categories of unusual experiences, fantasy, and humor (Stranchfield, 1968) ... However, more fourth grade children chose "make believe" stories, suggesting a developmental

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 71.

trend from fantasy interests to interest in real-life stories or possibly in realistic treatments.¹⁵

These findings suggest that primary students perceive their reading, for the most part, as entertainment - the more successful the action plot in gripping their attention or making them laugh, the more they like it. Another factor is that primary children tend to prefer a form which does not confine them, which allows free extensions of vicarious experience. Mythology satisfies these requirements.

The University of Nebraska Curriculum for English, Grade 6,¹⁶ concurs with the idea that the grade four-to-six level would be the most appropriate time to introduce and discuss mythology, as after this level reading interest and response decline.

The above curriculum is written for a grade six level. At this age, children can approach seriously the question of the relationship between man and god that is the dominant characteristic of myth as identified in this curriculum. Children should begin, at this age, to recognize the symbolic quality of myth in its constant concern with the struggle between the forces of good and evil, the concern that gives structure and unity to nearly every body of mythology.

Sutherland and Arbuthnot also recommend the grade four-to-six level for mythology, as younger children cannot appreciate myth fully.

Six to seven year old children can take only the bare bones of these stories, but children from nine or ten to fourteen can enjoy rich versions of some of the originals.¹⁷

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 77.

¹⁶ A Curriculum For English, Grade 6, Units 58-70 (Nebraska: The University of Nebraska Press, 1966).

¹⁷ Zena Sutherland and Mary Hill Arbuthnot, Children and Books (Illinois: Scott, Foresman and Company, 1947) p. 189.

The value of teaching mythology at the grade four-to-six level as opposed to other age groups has therefore been well established.

Criteria for Selection and Adaptation

Student reading interests, or the qualities that children at the grade four-to-six level enjoyed the most in their reading material, were carefully considered in the selection and adaptation of the myths. Primary students want a fast-moving, vivid plot full of action, surprise, "unusual experiences, fantasy and humor".¹⁸ They read for entertainment and prefer a narrative, rather than informational, form with conversation and qualities of "liveliness, moralness, animalness".¹⁹

Although primary students wanted an action plot to grip their attention or to make them laugh, by fourth grade they are maturing and beginning to read for information about the world around them. Therefore, taken into account was the finding that

more fourth grade children chose "make believe" stories, suggesting a developmental trend from fantasy interests to interest in real-life stories or possibly in realistic treatments.²⁰

The basic psychological needs of children at this age level were also considered. One example of this is the need to fantasize, explore, or identify with heroes who provide optimistic models for vicarious experience.

¹⁸ Alan C. Purves and Richard Beach, Literature and the Reader: Research in Response to Literature, Reading Interests, and the Teaching of Literature (Illinois: National Council of Teachers of English, 1972), p. 77.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 77.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 77.

The adaptation of the myth had to be simple enough to be thoroughly comprehensible without sacrificing the spirit or richness of the original.

Sutherland and Arbuthnot discuss this problem involved in the selection and adaptation of mythology. "The chief difficulty in using mythology with children is to select satisfactory versions of the stories".²¹ They cite, as an example, Nathaniel Hawthorne, who, by his process of adaptation and selection, "lost almost completely the dignity of the gods and sometimes he even lost the significance of the story".²²

The selection and adaptation of this mythology must be academically as well as artistically responsible. The details of the stories must be similar to the details of the original myth, but the adaptation must be written so that it appeals to modern children.

²¹ Zena Sutherland and Mary Hill Arbuthnot, Children and Books (Illinois: Scott, Foresman and Company, 1947) p. 189.

²² Ibid., p. 189.

CHAPTER III PROCEDURES

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to construct a unit based on old Norse mythology which would be suitable for children at the grade four-to-six level. The contents of this chapter describe how this purpose was accomplished. The procedures are discussed in three parts: the selection process, the editing process and the construction of teaching procedures and exercises. The selection of individual myths and detailed activities for each myth have been included in the appendix.

The Selection Process

The myths chosen for this unit of Norse mythology were judged to have action-packed, dynamic plots that grip the attention of the reader. Children at this age level also like "unusual experiences" and "fantasy".¹ The more they are surprised or made to laugh by what they are reading, the more they enjoy their reading material. An excellent example of an adventure story that was selected for these specific criteria is "The Theft of Thor's Hammer".

The chosen myths attempted to satisfy the "basic psychological needs"² of children at the grades four-to-six level. Children can identify with a hero who provides an optimistic model, for example the illustrious warrior Thor, and experience vicariously his adventures as he journeys to giantland.

¹ Alan C. Purves and Richard Beach, Literature and the Reader: Research in Response to Literature, Reading Interests, and the Teaching of Literature (Illinois: National Council of Teachers of English, 1972), p. 77.

² Ibid., p. 71.

Children are seeking guidelines to behaviour at the grade four-to-six level. Their concept of right and wrong or good and evil and their desire for "moralness"³ is developed after reading such selections as "The Punishment of Loki".

Children of this age are beginning to show a "developmental trend from fantasy interests to interest in real-life stories or possibly in realistic treatments."⁴ Myths were selected that dealt with such traditionally difficult ideas for the child to deal with as creation ("The Creation"), and death or where souls go after death ("The Death of Baldur").

These are only brief examples of the general process of implementing the criteria for selection of the myths. Additional details may be found in the appendix.

The Editing Process

The myths were edited and adapted always considering the reading interests and preferences of children at the grade four-to-six level.

As children prefer narration to a strictly informational style⁵, the adaptations attempted to satisfy this preference. The myths were written with an action-packed plot that did not confine imaginative tendencies.

The myths had as much conversation as possible in the first person. "The God's Meeting" is a good example of these criteria as it introduced the gods, their duties and personalities but not in a strictly informational way.

³ Ibid., p. 77.

⁴ Ibid., p. 77.

⁵ Ibid., p. 77.

This conversation is also an example of how the myths attempted to be as realistic as possible in view of the fact that children of this age begin to be more interested in real life and "realistic treatments"⁶ than fantasy. Children enjoy fanciful happenings described in a realistic tone.

The requirement that children's literature be "entertainment"⁷ for them, providing unusual experiences, fantasy, humor and surprise, was always of prime importance during the editing process. These qualities are best illustrated by Thor's journeys to giantland.

The problems of adaptation discussed in Children and Books⁵ were also considered in the editing process. An attempt was made to retain the significance of the story and not to have stories "written down" to a child's level. An example of this is the fact that none of the less desirable aspects, such as Loki's punishment in "The Punishment of Loki" were omitted or changed so that students could appreciate the triumph of good over evil.

These are only brief examples to show the general manner in which the criteria for selection and adaptation were implemented during the editing process.

The Construction of Teaching Procedures and Exercises

Teaching procedures are a vital part of the success of any learning process. Thus, teaching procedures were included in the appendix for each of the nine myths.

⁶ Ibid., p. 77.

⁷ Ibid., p. 77.

⁵ Zena Sutherland and Mary Hill Arbuthnot, Children and Books (Illinois: Scott, Foresman and Company, 1947) p. 189.

Each myth was reviewed and any word which the student might have difficulty defining or pronouncing was explained. The pronunciation guide was also intended to help the teacher with some of the more difficult Norse names.

Simple questions which would test only fact recall were included. Activities which would require more imagination and creativity from the student were also supplied for the teacher, although the teacher would be free to improvise his own questions if they were more suited to a particular classroom. These activities attempted to relate the myths to the student's own experience and to make the mythology more entertaining.

The simple fact recall questions such as "Who was the first frost giant?" would enable the child to feel successful at answering a question so easily. It would also give a more "realistic treatment"⁶ to a make-believe story, which students prefer at this age level.

Students at the grades four-to-six level read for "entertainment"⁷ and they especially enjoy humor and anything that will make them laugh. Some of the questions and activities were designed for entertainment. An example of this is the activity following "The Theft of Thor's Hammer," an improvisation in which a male student acts out Thor's bridal role.

Students at this age level love to fantasize and often about "unusual experiences".⁸ Several questions encourage this, such as the

⁶ Allan C. Purves and Richard Beach, Literature and the Reader: Research in Response to Literature, Reading Interests, and the Teaching of Literature (Illinois: National Council of Teachers of English, 1972), p. 77.

⁷ Ibid., p. 77.

⁸ Ibid., p. 77.

second activity after myth one. Students are instructed to write a continuation of "The Creation" myth from the viewpoint of the trees who became human.

The next activity question asks students to research the creation myths of other cultures. This is meant to satisfy older students' decreasing interest in fantasy and increasing interest in more "realistic treatments"⁹ or subject matter as students begin to read as a source of information about the world. The creation myths of other cultures would provide an insight into many other social structures and people of the world.

Thus, the teaching procedures were constructed adhering as much as possible to the reading interests of children at the grade four-to-six level.

⁹ Ibid., p. 77.

Chapter IV
NINE OLD NORSE MYTHS

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I

The Creation

(or how the world was born)

Once upon a time, long, long ago, the Norsemen believed the world was made of fire and ice. They thought one end of the universe had raging red fire and the other end had frozen, blue cold.

Tiny flames and crystals of ice whirled together endlessly until one day--poof--life began. A huge, ugly frost giant named Ymir bellowed into the emptiness with his fearsome voice. His black stringy hair almost covered his hulking dark body.

Ymir drank milk from a large cow who had also conveniently appeared from the space between the fire and ice. Ymir grew to a monstrous size. Other monstrous giants also emerged from the ice. Soon they had children and the world had far too many wild, gruesome frost giants.

The Birth of the Gods

While Ymir slept, and slept....and slept some more, hundreds of years passed. The great hornless cow licked away the ice in search of food. As she licked, the face and form of a handsome, new giant could be seen.

This blue-eyed, golden-haired giant was in every way the opposite of the evil Ymir. This good giant had three fine sons--Odin and his two brothers. These were really the Aesir (pronounced I-sir). These gods had the power to create a world. However, they could do so only on one condition. First, they had to get rid of Ymir.

The Formation of the World

The three Aesir gods and Ymir fought a wild and horrible battle that boomed across space for ages. The gods finally destroyed Ymir. They pushed the evil dark monster into outerspace. The blood flowing from the giant's wounds turned into salt water and so the oceans were formed.

The gods made the earth from Ymir's body. Mountains were formed from his giant bones while his teeth became huge boulders. The gods made the sky from the curve of Ymir's great skull. The sparks they fastened inside it became stars.

Odin said to his brothers, "I want everyone to be warm and cheerful. We need light. The biggest spark of all will become the sun and a smaller spark will become the moon. So that everyone in the world will share these lights, six horses will pull them around the earth in golden chariots, the sun in front, the moon behind."

The hideous frost giants were furious. They hated warmth and light. They said to each other, "Two of us will become wolves and chase those silly horses across the sky forever."

So, day and night began. You can still see the sun and moon move across the sky as wolves chase them.

"To protect ourselves from the frost giants, let's build a fort from Ymir's eyebrows," Odin said.

This fort was so enormous it circled the whole middle part of the earth and was called Midgard. Inside the fort, but high above earth, was Asgard, home of the gods.

When you see a rainbow in the sky, it is really the Aesir's bridge between heaven and earth that you are looking at. The reddish

colors of the rainbow are the fires that burn constantly to stop any evil giants from crossing over this bridge.

The Creation of Man

The Aesir gods were very pleased with the world they had created. However, Odin was not completely happy. He said to his brothers, "I am happy with everything we have made and yet I am lonely. There is not one creature in all creation who looks the same as we do. It is time we created man."

Passing over the earth, the three handsome brother gods came upon a pair of ash trees standing side by side. From these they created man. In the hundreds of years that followed, the trees took on human shape and became the first man and woman.

Odin looked lovingly upon them and said, "These are my children. I will protect and love them for as long as they live upon the earth."

Thus Odin, king of gods, became the wise All-Father Creator, and the world and man began, according to the ancient Norse legends. It is an interesting story, don't you think?

II

Yggdrasil

(the tree of life)

Trees are like people. From tiny seeds, they grow for years and years into beautiful, tall living things.

Yggdrasil was a tree that grew in the middle of all the world that the gods had created. It was the world tree, the tree of all life. Odin held all his important meetings with the other gods under its branches.

Yggdrasil was a giant ash tree with leaves that were always green. It had three roots which stretched to three wells found in three different worlds.

One well was in the land of the frost giants. It belonged to the wise giant Mimir. Odin had come to this well for a drink of the water because anyone who drank here would know everything automatically. Odin had to give up one eye for one drink from this water of wisdom. He did, and this is how he became so wise.

Yggdrasil's second root ran into the world of three, old, witch-like hags, the Norns. The Norns were the three Fates who controlled what would happen in the lives of all men and all gods. They knew everything that was happening now, had happened in the past and would happen in the future. (This would be very handy, don't you think?)

Once, Odin came to the Norns and asked, "What will happen to Asgard, the world of the gods?"

The Fates answered, "There will be peace for hundreds of thousands of years. The gods will be famous for brave deeds. But beware of the third root of Yggdrasil, the root that lies in Niflheim,

the world of dark and fog. No one must drink from this third well because it is guarded by the serpent (Nith hogg) who gnaws at the roots of Yggdrasil, and waits for Ragnarok.

"Ragna-what?" asked Odin. "What are you taking about, Norns? What is this Ragnarok?"

The Norns replied, "Ragnarok is the end of the world. Evil will destroy Asgard and the Aesir. The gods will no longer be happy and will battle and kill each other."

Odin shouted, "Never! I will not allow one god to kill another. They will always stand together, united."

However, Odin sadly realized that he could not control Fate. He could not change what was bound to happen. He could only make the best of it.

III

The Gods' Meeting

In the centuries after creation, the earth became full of people and Asgard became full of gods and goddesses. Odin gave each god and goddess a special job so that everything would run smoothly in Asgard and on earth.

Odin himself was the handsome god of intelligence, wisdom, poetry and war. In his golden helmet and shining protective breastplate, he spoke with such ease that all he said seemed true to those who heard him. He liked to speak in verse. Odin had the power to change himself instantly into whatever shape he wished; he would become a fish or a bull, a bird, a snake or a monster. When he advanced in battle his very approach would suddenly strike his enemies deaf and blind.

It was Odin who made the laws which ruled human society. It was on his command that dead warriors were burned with all that belonged to them on funeral pyres. By thus taking with him all his worldly possessions the dead warrior would find them again when he reached Valhalla.

Odin held court in a vast hall glittering with gold which was called Valhalla. Supernatural warrior-like women called Valkyries would bring fallen hero warriors to Valhalla where Odin would preside over their warlike games and feasts.

These Valkyries were usually seen as helmeted goddesses, grasping spears crowned with flames, and mounted on flying horses from whose manes the dew falls in the valleys or hail descends on the forests. They were sometimes seen as beautiful maidens in swans' feathers who could fly through the air; often they appeared in human form.

Valhalla had five hundred and forty doors, each wide enough to admit eight hundred soldiers at once. The framework of the huge chamber or hall was formed by spears. The roof was covered by gleaming shields. Breastplates lay on the benches. In the evening this immense hall was lighted by the flash of swords which reflected the huge fires burning in the midst of the festive tables. Valhalla was indeed a suitably majestic hall for the great god Odin.

Odin knew what was happening everywhere because of his two ravens, Thought and Memory. Every day they flew throughout the universe. Every evening at suppertime, they returned to sit on Odin's shoulders and to report on the day's events.

Odin could sit in his high seat (Lidskjalf) and see everything everywhere, on earth or Asgard. He owned a magic horse named Sleipnir who had eight feet. Sleipnir was the fastest horse in the world. Odin's spear, Gungnir, was also magical. It would hit whatever he aimed at.

Odin's ravens began to whisper stories that made Odin worry. They told him of war, disease and death. Even in Asgard, gods sometimes fought with each other, forgetting their duties. Odin thought, "I will hold a banquet, invite all my children and talk to them. I am worried about what the Norns have predicted will happen. I must try to avoid the end of the world, the Ragnarok."

The gods and goddesses were all very pleased to be invited to the great hall for a feast. They found Odin sitting on his throne. His ravens were on his shoulder; his magic spear was in his hand. His loyal watchdogs, two enormous wolves, pretended to sleep at his feet.

"Welcome everyone," Odin said. "This banquet is to thank you for the good work you have done in Asgard and the world. Yet, I am worried about the future and the prophecy of the Fates."

Thor, god of rain and thunder, frowned. He was tall and strong, handsome and dignified. His red hair and long red beard flamed even redder.

Thor was the greatest of the fearless warriors, always ready to face combat and danger. Although hot-tempered and hasty, he was never too tired to protect man and his labours from the wild forces of nature or giants. Thor's powerful voice would rise above the noise of battle and would fill any enemy with terror.

Mjollnir, which meant The Destroyer, was Thor's stone hammer. Thor carried Mjollnir whenever he was battling giants. Never did this dreaded weapon--which was thrown--miss its mark. Afterwards it would return of its own accord to Thor's hand and, when necessary, become so small that he could easily hide it under his garments.

Other than his magic hammer, Thor owned two other miraculous objects. One was a belt of strength which doubled his Aesir power as soon as he belted it around his waist. The other object was a pair of iron gloves which he needed in order to grasp and hold the shaft of Mjollnir.

Thor lived in one of the largest palaces anyone had ever heard of, with five hundred and forty rooms. This palace was found in that part of Asgard known as the Field of Strength.

When Thor left his palace, he loved to roam the world in his chariot which was drawn by two goats. Occasionally this chariot took him as far as the kingdom of the dead. As this chariot rolled along it produced thunder. If, during his travels, Thor became hungry he would kill and cook the goats. The following day he had merely to place his sacred hammer on the hide of the dead beasts for them to leap to their feet again, alive and ready for the road.

Odin said to Thor, "You have done well as the god of fertility, Thor, helping the farmers of the world by bringing them

rain for their crops and by protecting them from evil. However, you must control your temper and quit throwing your hammer, Mjollnir, across the heavens for no reason at all. You cause too much thunder and lightning on earth. You must learn to control yourself or floods and storms will threaten the earth forever."

Loki, god of fire and mischief, laughed and teased Thor. Thor picked up his hammer and would have thrown it if Odin had not stopped him.

"Loki!" he roared. "Someday you will go too far."

After Thor had stomped out of the room, slamming the door behind him, Odin said, "Thor is right, Loki. Although you are handsome and clever, the gods will not put up with your crafty tricks forever. A terrible fate waits for you unless you change your ways."

Loki smiled charmingly. "Why is everyone picking on me? What have I done? Just because I have a good laugh now and then. That isn't a crime."

Loki was really a giant who had been adopted and brought up by Odin's father. This is how he had come to live in Asgard with the gods.

Although Loki was extremely witty, handsome and charming, he was also treacherous, crafty and malicious. He was the secret friend of the evil giants. Almost always occupied with making mischief, Loki helped the gods on several occasions but never stopped working to undermine their power. It was he in the end who brought about their eventual downfall. Loki's three children, the Fenris Wolf, the Midgard Serpent and the ugly hag of death, Hela, were especially troublesome for the gods.

Heimdall, watchman of the gods, frowned at Loki. His white armor and bright sword shone like the sun. Tall and handsome, his teeth were of pure gold. He had an enormous horn which could be heard in all the worlds, and which would eventually call the gods to their final battle, the end of the world, Ragnarok. "You forget who I am, Loki. I am called Heimdall, god of the early sun. I guard the great bridge Bifrost, the rainbow, which leads from the dwelling place of men to Asgard. I can see for a hundred miles by day or night. My ears are so sharp that the sound of grass growing is like thunder to my ears."

Loki became angry and said, "Of course I know who you are, Heimdall. Do you think I am stupid?"

Heimdall answered, "Then don't think that I believe your silly lies, Loki. I have seen your tricks with my own eyes and I have heard them with my own hearing. You are more a friend of the giants than of the gods. You make fun of the Aesir and take what doesn't belong to you. You may amuse us for awhile but in the end you will bring us sorrow."

Loki was just going to throw something at Heimdall when a soft voice quietly said, "Let us be happy."

Everyone turned to look at Baldur, god of light and joy. They couldn't help but admire how handsome he was.

Baldur was the son of Odin and the goddess Frigga. He was so bright and fair that light shone from his face and hair. Wise, eloquent, gentle and lenient, Baldur and his judgments were always held in high esteem by the Aesir. Nothing impure could live in Baldur's home. He was so perfect.

His twin brother, Hodur, the blind god of darkness, sat beside him. All the Aesir loved these two gods--Baldur for his kind and gentle ways and Hodur because he never complained.

Tyr, god of war and victory, said to Loki, "Loki, you are a jealous, spiteful god. If you must fight with someone, fight with me."

Loki went pale as Tyr put his hand on his sword. He was not foolish enough to fight with the god of war. Loki said, "Relax, Tyr. I was only joking."

After everyone had said goodnight, Odin said to his beloved and beautiful Frigga (goddess of the clouds and sky), "Now I am more worried than ever. I'm afraid that all the troubles of gods and men are just beginning."

Frigga smiled. "Do not worry, Odin. They will live with honour and face their troubles with courage."

Odin quietly answered, "I guess that is all we can hope for. We should be happy with that."

But from that day on Odin was anxious, for he realized that the gods could become so angry that they would fight each other.

IV
Thor's Journey

Thor was bored. Asgard had become too quiet. The reason was that Loki, who provided most of the humour among the gods, had his lips sewn shut. There was not a god in Asgard who had not been tricked or cheated by him. Loki had opened his mouth once too often and a dwarf had sewed it shut with a magic needle.

The gods missed his clever humour and began to argue. Thor, finally, had had enough. He picked up his hammer and went to find his chariot. As he passed a sad-looking Loki, Thor felt pity for him and said, "Loki, I'm going to Jotunheim to fight the giant king. You can come too if you promise to behave yourself."

As Loki nodded yes, his stitches fell away. Thor's chariot, drawn by two great goats, disappeared through space. All the gods of Asgard listened as thunder boomed from the sky. Thor had raised his hammer as they left.

After travelling millions of miles, Thor and Loki became hungry. They looked down upon earth and saw a light. After shrinking themselves to the size of men, they knocked on the door of a small cottage. A little, tired-looking man answered the door. Thor said, "We are hungry travellers. Could you spare some food?"

The man quietly answered, "We are poor and have not much but you are welcome to share what we have."

When the wife brought a thin soup to the table, Thor bellowed, "What! No meat?"

The farmer hung his head. "I'm sorry."

Thor went out to his chariot and quickly killed his goats. The wife gladly cooked a fine meal and they all ate heartily. Thor spread the goat skins on the floor and told everyone, "Eat all you want but throw your bones on the skins when you are finished. Be careful that none are broken."

The man's son, Thyalfi, was so hungry that he snapped a small bone with his teeth. He was too shy to say anything about it to Thor, so he threw this broken bone in with the others.

The next morning, when Thor and Loki were leaving, Thor went to the bones and touched them with his magic hammer. Instantly, the goats sprang to life again. However, one goat limped.

Thor screamed, "Who has dared to disobey me? Death will be his reward."

Thyalfi stepped forward and told Thor everything. Thor was so impressed with the boy's courage that he forgave him and invited Thyalfi to join Loki and himself on their journey.

Thor left the goats with Thyalfi's father so that the broken leg would be healed by the time they returned. Thyalfi was very excited to be going to the land of the giants with two such impressive gods.

"Let's go," Thyalfi said, thinking of all the adventures ahead of him. And so, leaving the goats to heal, they set off for Jotunheim, the land of the giants.

V

A Meeting with a Giant

Thor and Loki changed themselves back to their full, giant size and continued on their journey. They waded across the ocean, carrying the boy Thyalfi on their shoulders.

That evening, Loki searched for a place to sleep in the forest. He found a very curious, empty building. The three tired travellers had no trouble falling asleep on the floor. After all, they had just crossed the ocean in one day.

They slept very soundly until midnight when a loud noise suddenly awoke them. Frightened, they ran into a tunnel which they found at the back of the strange room.

The next morning, Thor went out to explore. He had not gone far when he found, much to his surprise, an enormous, hairy sleeping giant.

Thor was so shocked to find someone larger than he was that all he could squeak out was a quiet, "Hello. What is your name?"

"Skrymir," roared the giant. Thor jumped. "And I know you are Thor. Have you seen my glove?"

Thor felt ill when he realized the glove of the giant was the strange building in which he had spent the night. The tunnel at the back of the building was the thumb of the glove! Thor shuddered. He had never met anyone more powerful than he was. He did not know how to act humbly.

Skrymir continued on the journey to giant land with Thor, Loki and Thyalfi. Thor and Loki had never been better behaved!

After travelling all day, the giant Skrymir decided to lie down and sleep. He roared to Thor, Loki and Thyalfi, "I'm going to sleep. Help yourself to your supper from my bag."

Not one of the three, not even the mighty Thor, could untie the knot on the food bag. Loki and Thyalfi gave up and fell asleep. Thor was very ashamed and angry. He drew his magic hammer and hit the sleeping giant on the head.

"Did an acorn drop on my head?" murmured Skrymir as he rolled over and fell asleep again.

Thor could not believe that Skrymir had not felt his hammer. He quietly went to sleep under a huge elm tree, feeling very weak and defeated.

When Skrymir left the next morning, he warned Thor not to brag about his strength in giant land.

Thor, Loki and Thyalfi were so glad to see Skrymir leave that they did not even mention the knot on the food bag.

They travelled east, through a gap in the mountains, and onto a great plain. Blinking in astonishment, they gazed at the most enormous, gigantic castle that they had ever seen.

The walls of this great fortified castle were so high that the travellers had to throw back their heads to see the battlements. The entrance was barred by a heavy grille. In vain the gods attempted to open it. In the end they had to slide through the bars. Inside, in a huge hall, they finally met the immense giant king. "Could this possibly be the famous Thor of Asgard?" sniffed the giant king, scarcely bothering to return their salute.

"Of course I am!" replied Thor, attempting a roar and a brave shake of his long red beard.

The giant king only laughed and said, "Let's have a contest of skill and strength. Show us what you can do. We never allow anyone to stay in giant land who isn't best at something."

Loki, who had not had a good meal for a very long time, shouted, "I bet I can eat faster than anyone here."

He was very disappointed, but full, when he lost.

The giant king sneered, "Can't anyone of you win a race?"

Thyalfi volunteered to outrun anyone, but he, too, lost.

Now only the great Thor was left to keep the honour of the Aesir.

The giant king looked at Thor and said, "Could the great Thor outdrink anyone in giant land? Here is our drinking horn."

Thor was very sad when he lost. He tried his best but liquid kept appearing in the giant's horn just as quickly as he could drink it. "What do I care for drinking contests anyway?" gasped a blue Thor. "I am a warrior. Who wants to fight with me?"

The giants laughed scornfully and finally the king said, "You can fight my old nurse Elli. Maybe you can win at least one contest."

Thor was so angry he picked up the old woman, but could do nothing. She was too strong.

"Try the house cat," snickered the giant king. Thor could not even lift up the cat.

The three exhausted losers ate a hearty meal and went to bed, thinking how soft the huge giant beds were.

The next morning, the giant king himself showed them to the castle door. "Did you enjoy your visit, Thor?" he asked.

"No," answered Thor. "I am embarrassed and ashamed of how weak I am."

The giant king smiled as he said, "Now that you are safely out of the castle, I will confess. You have been tricked by magic. You are so strong, mighty Thor, that you nearly killed all of us. I was really the giant that you met on your way here. My sack was tied with magic troll iron, not leather. No wonder you couldn't untie it to get your food!

"When you tried to hit me with your hammer, I put an invisible mountain between us. The canyon over there is what your hammer did to the mountain!

"Loki and Thyalfi were also tricked. Loki's eating contest was against fire. Not even a god can devour as much as fire, nor as quickly. Thyalfi raced against Thought itself. No one can run more quickly than Thought.

"You could never have won that drinking contest, Thor. The drinking horn was the sea. The cat you fought was the Midgard Serpent that lies coiled around the earth. The old woman you fought was Old Age. No one can beat or escape her."

Thor became red-faced with anger. He raised his hammer. Before he could hit the giant king, a cloud of fog appeared from nowhere. When it was gone, so were the giant king and his castle.

Thor was secretly relieved to know his great strength had not failed him. His honour was safe. He could return to Asgard with his head held high.



VI

The Theft of Thor's Hammer

One morning, Thor woke up to find that Mjollnir, his magic hammer, had vanished. Even Loki was worried, because Thor's hammer was a sign, or symbol, of the strength of Asgard. The gods could be easily attacked without it.

Loki thought that the most likely place to find the hammer would be in the land of the giants, so that is where he went. He found the king of the giants in a very happy mood--because he had Thor's hammer, of course.

He would return it only if the beautiful Freya would marry him.

Freya, goddess of love and beauty, in her magic cloak of falcon feathers, flew over the battlefields of earth and carried the souls of the brave to paradise. When asked if she would marry the giant king for the hammer, Freya only shuddered and replied, "Never."

Loki had a plan. He would dress Thor like Freya and present him to the giant king as his bride. Thor protested loudly at first, but then he realized that there really was no other way to get his beloved hammer back.

The gods tried not to laugh as they braided Thor's fiery red hair, put a kerchief on his head, covered his great, hairy legs with a long skirt of bridal linen, and hid his face and beard with a bridal veil. They hung Freya's house keys at his belt and her beautiful necklace at his throat. Finally, the Aesir laughed until the tears rolled down their cheeks. Thor did not laugh, which made the situation even funnier, if possible.

He could only roar, "Silence, everyone."

Then he climbed into the bridal carriage with all the dignity he could manage. Loki grabbed the reins, and they were off at such a pace that mountains were split in half and the earth burst into flames.

The giant king heard the bridal cart approach and commanded his servants to prepare a feast. When Loki and "the bride" arrived, they were given a delicious meal in the great hall of the giant's castle. Thor wolfed down the whole feast far too quickly. By himself he ate a whole ox, eight salmon, and all the delicacies prepared for the women, and washed it all down with three barrels of mead.

The giant king looked at his bride-to-be and said, "Never have I seen such hunger in a woman!"

Loki answered, "She has not eaten for many days because of her great love for you."

The giant king pulled back the bridal veil to look at the beautiful Freya's face. He was startled by Thor's fierce red eyes, and exclaimed, "I have never seen such red eyes!"

Loki quickly replied, "Freya has not slept for eight nights, all because of her love for you. However, do not ask me any more questions. I brought the bride; now you bring out the hammer and the wedding will begin."

So the hammer was taken from its hiding place and placed on Thor's lap. When Thor felt its strength, his heart laughed within him. He threw off his bridal clothes and jumped up on the table. The giants were so shocked that they couldn't move. Thor swung his hammer in the air and smashed it down on the table as he wildly bellowed, "You giants must learn a lesson you will never forget. Stealing my hammer is something you will never try again."

Saying this, Thor picked up the giant king and fifty of his servants and threw them against the wall with his hammer. The wall broke into a thousand pieces, and fell, burying the whole giant tribe.

As they drove the bridal carriage with the precious hammer safely back to Asgard, Thor and Loki laughed at the thought of the tough giants' surprise. Thus Thor got his hammer back again after all.

VII

The Death of Baldur

Baldur was the kindest and gentlest god in Asgard. He was the most beloved of the Aesir, and he kept peace in Asgard by keeping the other gods happy.

Amid confusion and struggle of various kinds, Baldur still remained with the Aesir. Because he was the god of innocence and purity, while Baldur survived, evil and violence could not gain supremacy in the universe.

After many thousands of years had passed, the Aesir became very sad. Baldur had dreams with signs and omens. When he asked the meaning of his dreams, the other gods were afraid to tell him. They knew the signs meant danger and death for Baldur.

The Aesir met in the great golden hall, Valhalla, to see if anything could save Baldur. After many plans and arguments, the gods listened to Frigga, Baldur's mother speak.

"Baldur is loved by everything--rocks, animals, trees. I will go to all things in the world and beg them to swear an oath or to promise not to harm him."

The gods were delighted with Frigga's plan. They celebrated by feasting and inventing a new game. They put Baldur in the center of a circle which they formed. One by one, they would throw spears and stones at him. Baldur only smiled, as he could not be even touched by anything that might harm him. The Aesir found this game very amusing.

The only god who did not like this game was Loki, the god of fire, mischief, and evil. Loki was very jealous of Baldur and all the

loving attention that he received from everyone. Disguising himself as an ugly, old woman, he found out from Frigga that everything except the tiny mistletoe bush had promised not to harm Baldur. Frigga had thought that this bush was too small and unimportant to cause any harm.

Loki found a mistletoe bush and carved an arrow out of the stem. He went up to Hodur, Baldur's blind brother, and whispered in his ear, "Why don't you honor your brother by joining in the game?"

Hodur answered, "I am blind and cannot even see where Baldur is standing. Besides, I have no weapon. How can I join the other gods?"

"I'll help you," Loki said smoothly. "I will be your eyes and guide your hand. You should follow the example of the other gods and pay equal honour to Baldur."

Loki put the bow and the mistletoe arrow in Hodur's trusting hands. Loki aimed the arrow toward Baldur for Hodur. The arrow was let loose. The mistletoe arrow struck Baldur's heart. Baldur fell dead.

The Aesir were so sad they did not know what to do. This was the worst thing that had ever happened to the gods and man. When they saw Baldur fall to the ground, they were speechless with fear. Yet no god moved a finger to lift him up. They looked at one another, and everyone was filled with anger.

They knew Loki had done this evil deed, but Asgard was the ground of the gods and they had promised to keep peace there. All they could do was weep bitter tears for the loss of Baldur. They built a great funeral pyre on the boat which had once belonged to Baldur, filled it with fire as was their custom, and sent Baldur's body to Hela, Queen of the Dead.

Odin above all felt the full force of the blow, for he saw most clearly what a loss had befallen the Aesir through Baldur's death.

He sent a messenger to Hela to beg for Baldur's life.

Hela replied in a ghostly voice, "If Baldur is so loved, let tears be shed for him. If all things weep for him, he will return to you. But if one refuses to mourn for him, he will remain here with me."

Because everything loved Baldur, they wept rivers of tears. Deer, flowers, trees, stones--they all cried for Baldur.

However, the gods finally came to a cave in a wall of ice where a withered old hag stood.

"Old mother," the gods said, "Won't you weep for Baldur? Only the tears of all the world can free him from death."

The old hag smiled through pointed teeth and said, "Why should I cry for him? He was not my friend. He did nothing for me. Let him stay in Hela's cold world."

Then she disappeared into the ice cave and would not come out again.

The Aesir knew then that Baldur's gentle face would never again be seen in Asgard. They knew the end of their world was coming, the dreaded Ragnarok. There would be no peace, no happiness and harmony without Baldur. The gods sadly walked slowly home.

When the last god was gone, the birds could hear Loki laughing to himself inside the ice cave.

VIII

The Punishment of Loki

With Baldur gone, life in Asgard became steadily worse. In all of Asgard, only Loki was happy. His evil heart was pleased by the misery he had brought.

The gods knew that the crafty Loki had caused Baldur's death. They also knew Loki could not be punished in Asgard. Odin's word had made it so.

Loki became even more evil because he could not be punished. Finally, Thor could no longer stand his insults.

"Stop!" roared Thor, shaking his fiery red hair with fury. "I have had enough of your evil. Be quiet, Loki, or my hammer will make you quiet." Thor's huge fingers tightened around Mjollnir.

Before Thor could use his hammer, Loki broke loose and ran away. But Loki had made a deadly mistake. The gods did not have to obey Odin's word outside Asgard. They could hunt Loki, catch him and take their revenge.

Loki knew this and changed himself into a salmon. He hid at the bottom of a river. Odin, who could see everything everywhere, saw him and told the other gods.

The angry Aesir came to find Loki. Loki and all his evil could not escape Thor.

Thor caught the jumping salmon and squeezed it with his mighty strength. It slipped through his hand up to the tail. That is why salmon are smaller at the tail.

The gods took Loki, now back in his god form, and carried him to a deep cave in the mountains. They chained him to a huge rock and hung an ugly, poisonous snake over Loki's evil, treacherous head. The gods now had their revenge for Baldur's death.

The snake continually hisses and drops poison on Loki. Loki's wife catches the poison in a silver cup, but when she turns away to empty it, the poison falls on Loki's face.

He twists and jumps so much from the sting of the poison that the whole earth shakes. That is why we have earthquakes today. Earthquakes are the result of Loki's eternal punishment. Thus Loki had to lie until the Ragnarok, the end of the world, the Twilight of the Gods.

IX

Ragnarok: The Sun Sets on Asgard

(The Twilight of the Gods)

The skies of Asgard grew dark with signs and omens. Ragnarok, the Day of Doom which had been foretold, was near. The giants, trolls and other creatures of the dark were strengthening and would soon rise against Asgard.

Without Baldur to keep the Aesir together, brother fought brother and father fought son. War broke out all over the earth. Men were no better than wolves, eager to destroy each other. A winter like no other fell on Asgard--a winter without a spring. Yggdrasil, the aged Tree of Life, trembled from its roots to its top branches under the weight of the dark, heavy sky. Mountains crumbled and split.

Even as Odin called for the gods to prepare for the battle soon to come, the Day of Doom began. The hound of Hel howled; the armies of evil stormed out for war. The dreaded Twilight of the Gods had arrived.

The wolves, led by the fierce Fenris Wolf, rose from deep in the earth. The slimy Midgard Serpent rose furiously thrashing gigantic waves from the overflowing sea. Loki broke from his chains and rode with the fire giant. The Fenris wolf accompanied him. Fire spurted from the beast's eyes and nostrils; from his gaping jaws dripped blood. His upper jaw touched the heavens and his lower jaw brushed the earth. All the forces of evil, the ugly frost giants and the trolls, gathered on a place called the Vigard Plain. Here they met the Aesir.

Odin, in a golden helmet plumed with vast eagles' wings, was the first to strike with his good spear Gungnir. Like a hurricane he flew in the forefront of his warriors who swarmed endlessly from the

gates of Valhalla. Around him, like a winged crowd, flew the warrior Valkyries on their dazzling chargers. Odin caught sight of the Fenris wolf and, sword raised, fell upon him. But the monster's gaping jaws were so vast that they swallowed up the father of the gods then and there. Thus Odin perished, the first victim of this titanic battle.

Loki and Heimdall, enemies of old, killed each other in battle.

Thor triumphed over the Midgard Serpent with his mighty hammer, but soon fell dead himself, poisoned by the Serpent's poison. He was able to walk only nine steps after the struggle was over, but then sank to the ground, overcome by the venom spewed over him by the serpent.

The battle raged on for centuries. Many were killed on both sides. Yggdrasil, the Tree of Life, was split and burned to ashes. The sun and the moon were eaten by wolves, and the stars fell from the sky. Finally, the fire that devoured the world spread to the Aesir as well as to the forces of evil. All the world lay in darkness. The sea rose up to cover it. All was finished.

And now all was about to begin again. From the wreckage of the ancient world a new world was born. Slowly the earth emerged from the waves. Mountains rose anew and from them sprang singing mountain streams. Above the gradually increasing torrents of water the eagle again began to hover, ready to swoop suddenly down on the fish which played in the waters. As of old the fields became covered with soil. Ears of corn grew where no human hand had scattered seed. A new sun--the son of the old one which a wolf had once devoured--shone in the sky.

And a new generation of gods appeared. On the field of peace where formerly the Aesir had assembled the new gods gathered in their turn. Who were these new gods? Had they no connection with the

gods of olden days? None at all. They had already been in existence, but having never shared the quarrels, or the evil, of the former gods, having never committed the crimes of the former gods, they had not been destroyed. To them it was reserved to renew the world. These four gods who had remained were two sons of Thor and two sons of Odin.

As it had been foretold, the seas divided and Baldur, the fairest and most beloved of the gods of former days, returned from Hel with Hodur, his blind brother. They occupied the great festival hall where Odin had once sat.

Of all mankind, only one man and one woman remained. Lif and Lifthrasir had hidden from the great battle in the wood of the great ash tree Yggdrasil. Their only nourishment had been the morning dew. They lived at Gimli in a hall thatched with gold and brighter than the sun. From these two, a new and better race of men would come to live on the earth--a good and happy race of men. The evil of the old world had been destroyed.

Let us hope mankind will live happily ever after.

Chapter V
RECOMMENDATIONS

This thesis sought to construct a unit based on old Norse mythology which was suitable for children at the grade four-to-six level. From among the major myths, those judged as most appropriate for young readers were selected and then adapted to suit the children's interest and understanding.

The experience of writing this thesis has produced two kinds of recommendations. The first recommendations and observations are for the benefit of anyone contemplating similar research. The concluding recommendations are for teachers using the materials provided in this thesis.

Recommendations and Observations for Anyone Contemplating Similar Research

After completing the selection and adaptation of these myths, the difficulty of this process could be fully appreciated. Priorities had to be established so that the selection of the mythology was comprehensive, and yet contained the essence of this ancient mythology. This selection had to meet all the requirements of children's reading interests at the grade four-to-six level and still could not lose "the dignity of the gods" or "the significance of the story".¹ The selection and adaptation of these myths was a slow, painstaking process.

However, this exercise was thought to be valid and worthwhile when children who heard this adaptation were enthusiastic about reading more. One recommendation for further study would be to test student response and interest in this unit of mythology using

¹ Zena Sutherland and Mary Hill Arbuthnot, Children and Books (Illinois: Scott, Foresman and Company, 1947) p.189.

pre-tests and post-tests on an average grade four, five or six classroom. The teaching procedures could also be tested for effectiveness and modifications could be suggested.

Similar units could be constructed for other mythologies. Perhaps the interest of teachers as well as that of students would be alerted to the value of mythology.

Recommendations for Teachers Using this Mythological Adaptation

Teachers who use the material provided in this thesis should be aware that the teaching procedures are suggestions only. The teacher can assess the individual requirements of his classroom and proceed accordingly. All or none of the questions, activities and pronunciation guides could be utilized. The teacher's main goal should be an awakening of student enjoyment and appreciation of mythology and consequently of literature in general.

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APPENDIX

Criteria for Individual Myth Selection

The myths were written as a unit with a distinctive beginning (The Creation) and an ending (Ragnarok: The Sun Sets on Asgard), a structure that students could quickly utilize and refer to for purposes of discussion and classroom activity. Apparently difficult concepts such as literary devices, character development or humour could be simplified in this structure. This would be at the discretion of the teacher who, ultimately, is the only person qualified to judge the capabilities of his class.

This is one of the advantages of mythology as a teaching tool. Not only does it provide a firm foundation of classical references and literary skills, but also it entertains. Each teacher must assess the ability of his class in order to determine how the myths should be presented.

If the class were academically ready only to view these myths as fairy stories about people and events simpler and larger than life, then this is how they should be presented. If the students were ready, the teacher could discuss the value of the myths as an important insight into the culture and values of their creators. The more intelligent or mature students would be capable of realizing that the myths provide universal insights into the nature of man, of good and evil and of life and death.

Even though students are not ready for any more than the superficial story line of the myths, they have still been exposed to these stories. Ideally, they will be stored away in the child's mind for later use. The same child, in high school, would have had some simple experiences with literature to which he could constantly encounter parallels in many other literatures and literary studies. Any mental activity into the realm of the literary abstract is good mental gymnastics for a young, growing mind.

Very perceptive older students could distinguish parallels between the myths and the Bible, thus giving them new scope with which to approach the concept of religion. Other than the very obvious comparison of the stories of "The Creation", Baldur in, "The Death of Baldur," could be compared to Christ. Loki has devilish qualities. The Ragnarok is reminiscent of the Biblical end of the world.

The Ragnarok could be viewed as the triumph of good over evil or it could be understood as something brought about by a steadily increasing awareness among the pre-Christian Norsemen of the gradually approaching Christian faith and civilization.

Professor Haraldur Bessason, in his article "The Myth of the Flaming Sword" observed that,

Indeed the numerous flaws of the heathen gods eventually brought about their demise. However, it must be borne in mind that on the part of the gods neither their frailty, which in itself could be regarded as a human trait, nor their reduction to the level of mortal men would entitle the gods to join the ranks of heroes. Having entered upon their path of decline, these gods could not be merely demoted to a lower plane of existence; their downward journey could only lead to destruction.¹

"The Creation" was the natural choice for the first myth as every child asks his parents how the world began. Thus, this was considered a provocative topic to interest the child in reading this mythology. Although Norse mythology gives different accounts of the world's beginning, this version was chosen for its simplicity and appeal to children.

¹ Haraldur Bessason, "The Myth of the Flaming Sword", Logberg-Heimskringla, 5 December 1980, p. 2.

"The Creation" was also intriguing because of its explanation of natural phenomena. An example of this was how the earth was formed from the giant Ymir's body. The idea of the rainbow as the gods' bridge between heaven and earth would be an appealing idea for children at the grade four-to-six level. Something from reality would seemingly verify this fantasy story.

Because children like nature stories at the grade four-to-six level, they would enjoy "Yggdrasil", the tree of life. Even read at a very superficial level, this myth would be of interest because of the three astonishing roots of this giant ash tree.

"Yggdrasil" could help the child think symbolically or learn to deal with symbols when he hears Yggdrasil is the "tree of life". He would have to change his way of thinking about a simple, every day thing like a tree. The concept of the Norns or the three Fates is also mind expanding.

The more advanced student would enjoy the nature symbolism contained in the references to Odin's eye being seen in the well of Mimir. Professor Haraldur Bessason commented that

these allusions have been explained as nature symbolism, i.e., the reflection of the sun on the lakes and waters must have given rise to the story about the eye of the supreme god being seen at the bottom of a particular well.²

Professor Bessason goes on to note that, having established this connection between the mighty Odin and the sun, a further mythological reference describes Thor, the god of thunder, as "jardar burr", which means "the son of mother earth". This mention of Thor as the son of "mother earth" must be explained on the basis of an early and primitive stage in northern mythology when Odin's wife was not yet Frigga but Jord, or "mother earth".

² Ibid., p. 2.

Myth three, "The God's Meeting", acquainted children with the characteristics of some of the major gods of Norse mythology. What child would not find Odin's eight-footed horse Sleipnir or Thor's hammer Mjollnir interesting?

Remnants of these gods are present in our culture today. For example, the names for the days of the week come from these gods and goddesses. Children should be aware that Wednesday or Woden's Day reminds us of Odin, as Woden was the southern form of Odin. Friday probably comes from Freya's Day. (Freya was Odin's daughter.) Thursday was Thor's Day. Tuesday was Tyr's Day.

This myth contains some slight character development as well as providing details of the central figures. Parallels to characters in other literatures could be observed.

The gradual decline or corruption of the gods is distinguishable in "The Gods' Meeting" of the gods as the student hears Thor's thunderous temper and Loki's mischief. The concluding myth, "Ragnarok: The Sun Sets on Asgard" becomes inevitable.

Myth four, "Thor's Journey", added details and characteristics of the god Thor. Thor's goat-drawn chariot, his magic hammer Mjollnir and the way his hammer could revive the bones of his eaten goats are all intriguing details peculiar to Thor. Although Thor becomes angry and impatient very quickly, he also displays compassion. He took the pitiful Loki with him to giant land; he forgave Thyalfi for breaking the goat's bone.

"A Meeting with a Giant" encouraged children to think metaphorically, even if they were not aware that they were doing so. Thor had fought not an old nurse but Old Age, not a cat but the Midgard Serpent and had attempted to empty not a drinking horn but the sea.

"The Theft of Thor's Hammer" develops Thor's character further as well as clearly defining a symbol. Thor's hammer, Mjollnir, was symbolic of the strength of Asgard and the gods. They could not afford to lose it.

However, the great value of this myth was its rollicking, absurd humour. The description of the gods stifling their laughter as they dressed a disgruntled Thor in bridal attire is a concept that has been repeated for centuries in literature and today in movies and television.

This myth also showed the custom of feasting in a great hall, as did myth three, "The Gods' Meeting".

Myth seven, "The Death of Baldur", embodies the struggle between good and evil which is basic to every good story children read. Loki's evil character had degenerated even further until he killed the Christ-like Baldur. The ascendancy of evil suggested that the end, the Ragnarok, was imminent.

This myth revealed the ancient Scandinavian belief in dreams and omens; Baldur had been troubled by dreams of his death.

One society's concept of death and the customs surrounding death, are also noted in this myth. Baldur's ship and his body were set on fire and sent to Hela, Queen of the Dead.

Evil must traditionally be punished, and this was accomplished in myth eight, "The Punishment of Loki", and in myth nine, "Ragnarok: The Sun Sets on Asgard". The gradual degeneration of Asgard was complete. Parallels to the Ragnarok are interesting when compared with literatures of other cultures.

Suggestions for Class Presentation

These myths would create the best initial impact if they were presented orally to the students, as this is how they were first preserved. A written copy of the myths and a pronunciation guide should also be provided for purposes of discussion.

Mythology justified existing social systems and accounted for the traditional rites and customs of other societies and cultures. However, the most important use of mythology is that it answers the sort of awkward questions that children always ask. Examples of these are the following questions. Who made the world? How will it end? Who was the first man? Where do souls go after death? The teacher could use these questions as an introduction to mythology.

To introduce the term Norsemen, or ancient people of Scandinavia, the teacher could show the students where the Scandinavian countries are on a world map. The teacher could ask the students if the cold climate would produce stories or myths as happy as those from a warm climate such as that of Greece.

Although the Norse mythology conceived the universe as a somber place compared to the perpetual spring on Mt. Olympus, the Norse myths, like the Greek myths, reflected a view of life as courageous, adventurous and hopeful. The students should understand that the only hope offered to the Norse gods and humans was the prophecy that after the forces of evil destroy all of the present creation, a new world had to be created where happiness would reign forever. Meanwhile, the present inhabitants of the universe must accept constant suffering and certain defeat and do so bravely. Only then would they be triumphant.

Teaching Procedures

I

The Creation

Vocabulary

Aesir (ī'sir)	- the family name of the gods
chariot	- two-wheeled cart drawn by horses
myths	- imaginative stories, created by people out of their own experiences, in order to satisfy their curiosity about themselves and the world they live in
Norsemen	- ancient people of Scandinavia
Odin (ō'din)	- ruler of the gods
Ymir (ē'mir)	- The first Frost Giant, who was created by a spark in the ice

Questions

1. Who was the first frost giant?
2. What was there before the gods created the universe?
3. Why was Ymir important in the Norse creation?
4. Who created the universe?
5. What parts of Ymir's body were used by the Aesir to make the world?
6. What was made from each part?
7. What else did the Aesir create?
8. Why was Odin unhappy?
9. What did he do about it?

Activities

1. Students could draw their ideas of the Norse creation. They could choose from such scenes as the fire and ice, Ymir, the great hornless cow licking away the ice to reveal the golden-haired giant, the battle between the Aesir gods and Ymir, the formation of heaven and earth or the creation of man from the ash trees.
2. Students could write a continuation of this myth, telling what the trees who became humans thought, how they acted, and what happened to them.
3. Students could research the creation myths of other cultures and write them in their own words. For example, they could read from a book by Charles Clay called Swampy Cree Legends (Bewdley, Ontario: Pine Ridge Publications, 1964).

II

Yggdrasil

Vocabulary

Asgard (az'gard)	- home of the gods
Mimir (mē'mir)	- the wise frost giant to whom Odin gave up one eye in exchange for wisdom
Niflheim (niv'al hām)	- the third root of Yggdrasil is in this place of mist, ice and constant fog
Nithhog (nith'hog)	- the enormous serpent who gnaws at the roots of Yggdrasil
Norns	- Fates, three ugly hags who know everything about the past, present and future
Ragnarok (rag'nə rok)	- the day of doom for the gods and all creation
Yggdrasil (ig'drə sil)	- the great ash tree that stood in the middle of all that the Aesir had created

Questions

1. What horrible thing did Odin have to do to acquire wisdom when he visited Mimir's well?
2. Name the three worlds to which the roots of Yggdrasil extend.
3. What frightening fact does Odin learn when he visits the Norns' well?
4. How is the serpent damaging Yggdrasil?
5. If you were Odin, and the Norns told you that your kingdom would be destroyed by evil, what would you do?
6. What is a symbol? Of what could Yggdrasil be a symbol?

Activities

1. Students could draw their impression of Yggdrasil, its three roots and their three different worlds. What would the three Norns look like? Would the serpent Nithhog be vicious? Would he resemble the snake in the Garden of Eden?
2. Students could discuss superstition and the superstition surrounding the number three. How many things occur in threes in this myth?
3. Students could discuss how they think the legend of Odin's eye in the well began. What part would water reflection play in this legend?

III

The Gods' Meeting

Vocabulary

Baldur (bol´der)	- god of joy and light; the favorite of all gods
Frigga (frig´ə)	- goddess of the clouds and the sky; the wife of Odin
goddess	- the female counterpart of a god
Heimdall (hām´däl)	- watchman of the gods; wore white armor and, around his neck, carried the trumpet that will call the gods to Ragnarok
Hodur (hō´der)	- the blind god of darkness; Baldur's twin
Lidskjalf (lid´skyalv)	- Odin's high throne from which he could see everywhere
Loki (lō´ke)	- the handsome god of fire and mischief
Mjollnir (myödl´nir)	- Thor's magic hammer
Sleipnir (släp´nir)	- Odin's eight footed horse, the fastest in the world
Thor (thôr)	- god of rain and thunder
Tyr (tēr)	- god of war and victory

Questions

1. Why does Odin call the gods to a meeting?
2. Is Odin satisfied with the results of the meeting?
3. Describe what you know about Odin and his magical possessions.
4. Describe Thor and what he does. What weakness does he have?
5. What is Loki like? Do you admire him? Why or why not? Does he remind you of Lucifer in the Bible?
6. Who was Heimdall? What does he do?
7. Who was Tyr?
8. How does Frigga comfort Odin?

Activities

1. Teachers could choose students to dramatize "The Gods' Meeting". Such scenes as Thor's disagreement with Loki, Heimdall's making Loki angry or Loki's disagreement with Tyr could be improvised and expanded.
2. A mural could be painted of the various gods and the articles associated with each of them. The students could be divided into groups and each group could be responsible for one god. Each group could also discuss whether or not their particular god reminds them of any other characters they know.

IV Thor's Journey

Vocabulary

- Jotunheim (ya'ton hām) - the land of the giants
Thyalfi (thy al' fe) - the farmer's son

Questions

1. How do we know that Thor knows how to be compassionate and forgiving?
2. What means of transportation does Thor use?
3. What was special about Thor's goats?
4. When do you think the farmer and his family realized that their two visitors were gods? Explain.
(There may be a variety of answers).
5. If you were Thyalfi and Thor had invited you to go along with him to the land of the giants, what would you take with you?

Activities

1. The students could draw a map of Thor's Journey. They could include Thor and Loki in the goat-drawn chariot.
2. Students could improvise the humorous scene where Loki had his lips sewn shut by a dwarf. What had Loki said? How did the dwarf manage to sew Loki's lips shut? Did Loki try to escape or speak?

V

A Meeting with a Giant

Vocabulary

Skrymir (skrē'mir) - the king of the giants

Questions

1. Who was Skrymir really?
2. In what "building" did Thor, Loki and Thyalfi spend the night?
3. Why could Thor not untie the knot on the food bag?
4. Why had Thor's hammer blows not hurt Skrymir? What had they really done?
5. Imagine that you have just arrived in the land of the giants. You are told that you must do something better than anyone else in the hall in order to be able to stay. What would you do? Do you think you would win?
6. What was Loki really trying to out-eat? (After this has been answered, discuss how fire eats things.)
7. What was Thyalfi racing?
(After this has been answered by "thought", discuss how long it takes someone to have a thought about something.)
8. What was in the drinking horn?
9. What was the cat?
10. What was Elli the nurse? (After this has been answered by "old age", discuss other stories the students may know that tell about characters who try not to grow old, or who find magical ways to stay young. Very good students could discuss metaphor and how it is used in this myth.)

Activities

1. How do you think Thor, Loki and Thyalfi felt when they tried as hard as they could and couldn't succeed? Have students volunteer to improvise a private conversation between the three travellers after the contests.
2. Students could choose one event in the story and illustrate it.
3. Students could write a class adventure about the day, years later, that Thor decides to go back to giant land and fight the giant king.

VI

The Theft of Thor's Hammer

Vocabulary

Freya (frā'ya) - the beautiful daughter of Odin

Questions

1. When you read the title of this myth, who did you think stole Thor's hammer?
2. What is a symbol? Of what was Thor's hammer a symbol? What other symbols do you know?
3. What part of the story do you think is the funniest? (Discuss)
4. Who was Freya? What did she do?
5. How do you think the giant king felt when he saw who his bride really was? (Discuss)

Activity

1. Volunteer students could improvise humorous drama depicting the events of this myth. A wig, a skirt and a veil would help "Thor" play his bridal role.

VII

The Death of Baldur

Vocabulary

Hela (hē'la)	- Queen of the Dead
omen	- a sign of what is to come in the future, usually a bad thing
Valhalla	- a glittering, golden hall where heroes who fell on the battlefield were taken to be honored by Odin

Questions

1. What object did not take the oath not to harm Baldur? (Discuss what kind of plant the mistletoe is--a parasite).
2. Why had Frigga not bothered to get an oath from this one thing?
3. Why do you think Loki was jealous of Baldur?
4. How did Loki manage to harm Baldur?
5. What were the burial customs of the ancient Norsemen?
6. Why do you think that Aesir didn't follow the hag into the ice cave? (Discuss)
7. How has the character of Loki gradually been changing?
8. How did this myth show the Norsemen's belief in dreams and omens?

Activities

1. The class could discuss how this myth shows the constant struggle between good and evil basic to every good story as well as life.
2. Could Baldur be compared to Christ? To whom could Loki be compared? Discuss.

VIII
The Punishment of Loki

Questions

1. When Loki was escaping the punishment of the gods, what was his one mistake?
2. According to this myth, why are salmon smaller at the tail today?
3. What was Loki's punishment?
4. According to this myth, why do we have earthquakes today?
5. Do you think Loki's wife should have helped him? (Discuss)

Activities

1. Draw a picture of Loki and his eternal punishment. Has evil been victorious?
2. The ancient Norse people did not have scientific explanations for why things like earthquakes and rainstorms happened. Instead they used their imaginations for reasons for natural phenomena.

The students could write a myth, using Norse or Greek gods, or other characters, explaining the origin of a tornado, a cloudburst, a volcano, a snowstorm or a hurricane.

IX

Ragnarok: The Sun Sets on Asgard

Questions

1. Is this a happy or a sad myth?
Why or why not? In what way is it hopeful?
2. Describe the events of the Day of Doom?
3. Baldur returns. In what way does Baldur's character and story parallel that of Christ?
4. How might the forces of evil have destroyed Asgard without destroying themselves also? (Discuss)

Activities

1. Students could draw a mural depicting the events of the Ragnarok.
2. The class could research other cultures in order to learn if their society also had written of a "Ragnarok". What were these last days called in the literatures of other countries?
3. The students could write a composition telling what happened to the remaining four gods and the remaining man and woman.
4. Which myth and character did each student like the best? Why?
5. Which myth and character did each student like the least? Why?