

MYTHS: PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

What is a myth?

A myth can be considered a “religious story,” and will involve the existence and activities of a supernatural being. Certain themes, truths, and elements of myths can often be compared to myths from other cultures. In order for a story to be classified as a myth, it must contain all of the following specific characteristics:

- The story must demonstrate the existence and activities of gods and demigods.
- It will seek to explain at least some aspect of the origin or manner of things: where people came from, how rainbows first came to be, why whales have blowholes, why people and animals feel hunger, etc.
- It is not an isolated tale but connects in some significant way with other similar stories within a culture.
- Mortals will have direct access to and communication with the gods of their cultures.

Pandora’s Box

Epimetheus, the Titan who had been put in charge of naming the animals and caring for the Earth, asked Zeus one day to give him a companion because he was lonely. “Wolves run in packs, and birds fly in flocks; and yet I have no one!” he said. Zeus felt sorry for Epimetheus, so he created a woman to be his companion. All of the other gods gave this woman very special gifts. Artemis gave her courage, Athena gave her wisdom and kindness, and Aphrodite gave her beauty. The gods called her Pandora, which means “every gift.”

Epimetheus was so pleased with his new wife that he wept with joy at the sight of her. He spent the first day with her showing her their home. “Everything I own is now yours,” he lovingly said to her. As he said this, Pandora noticed a box in the corner of the room that he did not show her or even mention.

“What about that box? What is in there?” she asked.

“It is nothing that you ever need to worry about,” Epimetheus kindly replied. “It does not concern you.” He then made Pandora promise that she would never open or even go near the box. Although she was confused, and somewhat frightened, she agreed to his wishes. But in the back of her mind she always wondered what was in the box. She never touched the box, and in fact, she seldom even looked at it. Yet, she could not keep her curious mind from thinking about it night and day.

One day while Epimetheus was away, Pandora was sweeping the house when she heard something calling to her from the box. "Pandora, help me, let me out!" the voice from inside the box called out to her. Because Pandora had been given kindness from the gods, Pandora rushed to the box and opened the lid to help whoever was yelling from inside.

The lid flew off with such a great force that it knocked Pandora to the ground. A swarm of creatures flew from the box and attacked Pandora, and as quickly as they had appeared, they flew away. When Epimetheus came home he found Pandora lying, bruised and scraped on the floor. She explained what she had done and was filled with shame.

"Do not be ashamed," said Epimetheus. "I should have told you what was in the box. It is my fault. After I gave gifts to all the animals, there were horrible things left over that I felt no one deserved to have. Their names were Sorrow, Disease, Misery, and Despair. I put these things in the box in hopes that I could hide them forever. I should have known that I could not keep them, and now the world will be plagued by these evil things forever." What Pandora and Epimetheus did not realize is that lying in the box was Hope. Hope remained with the two of them, and it is Hope that we all carry with us today in order to fight against the evil things in this world.