

Weather in Mythology

Teacher Directions

The students have been studying weather in science. They recently completed an assignment on clouds; one component required them to find a weather folklore and attempt to explain its meaning. We are now going to look at weather in Norse mythology.

The students are to read the attached passage about Thor, Norse god of thunder and lightning. There are two questions for them to answer and then they will create their own myth. You can ask students to read out loud, partner read, or read silently; please do what is comfortable for you. I do ask that you briefly discuss the reading afterwards and then have students share their answers to the questions.

1. Why do you think weather events are often thought to be controlled by gods in various cultures instead of just random happenings?

It is human nature to find reasoning behind events, especially those beyond our control. Many cultures believe their deities live in the skies or heavens so they might easily associate weather with the activities of the gods.

2. What aspects of Thor's appearance convince us that he is to be feared?

Thor's image was strong and fearsome similar to the power of thunder and lightning. He was believed to be tall, muscular, and unshaven. He wore gloves and belts which strengthened his powers. His hammer was strong enough to create lightning and thunder that could be witnessed from miles away. We are told Thor's hammer was made by dwarfs which could mean he was either feared or highly respected by those who were physically smaller than him. Thor rode on a chariot which was pulled by goats. This could be an indication that he was fast and had power over animals who themselves seemed frightening.

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Human history is full of myths and folklore that try to explain and predict Earth's weather. Before modern weather forecasting technology, farmers, sailors, shepherds, and fishermen studied cloud patterns, animal behavior, and atmospheric events for clues about upcoming weather. Additionally, many cultures throughout history believed the weather was controlled by gods. Japanese Shinto believed Susanowo controlled the storms and the seas. The Aztec had a god of rain called Tlaloc. Zephyr was the Greek god of the west wind. Probably one of the most famous weather deities or gods was Thor, the Norse god of thunder. Here is his story....



In Norse mythology, Thor was the god of thunder. He produces thunder with his hammer, called Mjolnir, which means "The Destroyer". This hammer was made by dwarfs, and would magically return to Thor's hand whenever he needed it. Thor was depicted as a tall, muscular man with red hair and a beard. His magic belt could double his incredible strength, while his iron gloves protected his hands.

The Norse believed that during a thunderstorm, Thor rode through the heavens on his chariot pulled by the goats Tanngrisni ("gap-tooth") and Tanngnost ("tooth grinder"). Lightning flashed whenever he threw his hammer, Mjolnir ("that smashes"). Thor was very well-known for his quick and hot temper. His greatest enemy was the World Serpent, which lived in the ocean surrounding Midgard, the Earth. Thor was the protector of the gods and would often duel with the giants who were seen as the main enemies of the gods. Thor would smash their heads with his might hammer.

Thor was a favorite among the common man and many wore hammer shaped charms in his honor. Thursday on our weekly calendar is a derivation of Thor's Day.

Answer the following questions in your ILL. Write the question and the answer.

1. Why do you think weather events are often thought to be controlled by gods in various cultures instead of just random happenings?
2. What aspects of Thor's appearance convince us that he is to be feared?
3. On the back side, create a myth of your own to explain a weather event. Pick a weather event other than thunder or lightning. (Ex: hail, hurricane, tornado, strong winds, snow, etc.) Be sure to give a brief story explaining cause of your weather event. Once you have written your myth, draw an illustration of your myth.
4. Extension: The legend of Thor was kept alive by Marvel Comics when Stan Lee started including Thor in some of his comic books in 1962. Fifty years later, Thor is still a fan favorite and has since been made into a major motion picture. If you are familiar with the movie, Thor. What similarities and differences do you see in the Norse God Thor and the modern Thor?