

In the Beginning: Creation Stories from Around the World Study Guide

In the Beginning: Creation Stories from Around the World by Virginia Hamilton

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Plot Summary

"In the Beginning" is a collection of twenty-five creation stories from a variety of countries, cultures, and religions from around the world. There are myths that are ancient yet familiar to the modern world such as those from the Greeks including the story of Pandora's Box, the trials of the twins Prometheus and Epimetheus, and the conflict between father and son in the story of Kronos and Zeus. The story of the sun god Ra from Egyptian mythology is another creation story popular in modern times. Many tales are from less familiar sources such as those from Pacific island cultures and remote regions of Africa. The compilation provides insight and understanding into ancient and more contemporary legends that address the mysterious and complex issue of creation.

As each myth and story unfolds, similarities can often be noted among the collection. For example, in each myth, there is generally one central god or being that already existed before any other life form came into being. Another similarity among most of the creation myths is the unexplained origin of the first god.

The twenty-five stories include creation myths from such diverse cultures as the Eskimos, Guinea, China, American Indians, Russia, Australia, and many others. What is readily apparent is that the imaginings of humans are similar no matter from what corner of the world they originate. Many of the stories speak of the separate realms of earth and sky, often referred to as the heavens.

Some stories attempt to unravel the mystery of man and depict how man has struggled with the question of the origin of his own existence over many centuries. That topic is key in many of the myths and the desire for its resolution is common to the many cultures represented in this book. This issue is no more apparent than in the story, "Four Creations to Make Man" when the gods make several attempts at create man before they "get it right." In one iteration, a body made of mud was too weak and watery. Their next attempt was to carve man out of wood. This human version was sturdy and strong but lacked feelings and thoughts, becoming therefore unacceptable.

A thread of recognition runs through the stories about the distinction between animal life and plant life and between that of non-sentient animals and sentient creatures, i.e. human beings. Although many myths are not necessarily religious in nature, a majority of the stories feature the powerful god versus the subservient man who was created to serve the god or gods. Many stories are tales of conflict between god and god and in some cases between god and man.

The collection points to how man has been drawn to the mystery of creation from early times forward and how the same questions are asked but often with very different responses.



Chapter 1: The Pea-Pod Man, Raven the Creator

Chapter 1: The Pea-Pod Man, Raven the Creator Summary and Analysis

A grown man fell from a pea pod that still hung on the vine. The man was a full-formed adult when he pushed his way out of the pod. Moving across the soft ground made him feel uneasy. He was drawn to a pool of cool water and drank from it which made him feel good inside. A large raven that flew around him turned into a man and asked who the man was. The man explained to the raven that he had come from the pea pod that was still hanging from the nearby vine.

The raven claimed that he had made the pea pod. The man commented that he had sipped some wet stuff that was on the ground. The raven assumed it must have been water. He turned into a raven again and flew off. The man waited for him and four days later he returned carrying two raspberries and two heathberries. The man ate the berries and felt better.

The raven took the man to a small creek. The raven took some clay from the bank and molded into two mountain sheep which he then made come alive by flapping his large wings over them. The man was intrigued by the sheep and thought that the other people growing in the pea pods on the vine would like them. The raven made more animals in the same manner which the man viewed with pleasure.

The raven thought he should create something that the man would fear so that he did not eat up all the animals the raven created. The raven went to another creek and made a bear with some clay. Next he thought that the man would be lonely so he made a lovely woman out of clay. The woman became the man's partner and helper. They had a child and as time passed there were many people and animals. The world prospered.

This story is an Eskimo myth that was spread from Siberia to Greenland. The Raven is considered a wily god who travels from heaven to earth and to the sea. He created the first man and instructed him on how to live.



Chapter 2: Finding Night, Quat the Creator

Chapter 2: Finding Night, Quat the Creator Summary and Analysis

Under the light was a huge stone who was the mother, Quatgoro. When she split in half, twelve sons were born. They were Quat the Creator and his eleven brothers. The brothers were all named Tangaro but they were not the same. There was Tangaro the Wise, Tangaro the Fool, and nine others that were named after tree leaves. As soon as Quat the Creator was born, the thought of making men came to him. He also wanted to create animals, plants, and other things.

Quat made the first men from a tree. He made the individual parts of the six people from wood and constructed them into puppets. He beat on his sacred drum to make them dance. Then they began to move on their own. Three of the puppets were men and three were women. They separated into three couples and became husbands and wives.

Quat the Fool copied his brother and made six puppets out of a tree. They began to dance, too, but he threw them all in a hole and covered them with dirt. He came back a week later and all the wooden puppets had rotted. Quat the Fool had created Death. Quat the Creator made other things like pigs, canoes and plants.

To create night, Quat the Creator sailed to the far edge of the sky to the place where he could touch it. He took a piece of Night, or Qong, with him and sailed home where he released Night from his hands. The sky began to darken but he assured his brothers that the sun would return. He told them that they should sleep while it was dark. The brothers became sleepy but thought they were dying. Quat assured them that they would only be sleeping. While the brothers slept, Quat took a red stone and cut a hole in the Night. Red light began to stream through and the birds began to chirp. Quat had created Night, sleep, dawn, and chirping birds to wake sleeping men.

Quat is the solar god of the Bank Islands, north of the New Hebrides in Melanesia. There are many myths about Quat. If his brother, Quat the Fool, had not created Death, man would have lived forever.



Chapter 3: An Endless Sea of Mud, Death the Creator

Chapter 3: An Endless Sea of Mud, Death the Creator Summary and Analysis

Death, who was called Sa, lived in darkness with his wife and daughter. Death used his magic powers to make an endless sea of mud where he could build a house. The god, Alatangana visited, and told Sa that the house he built was too dark for anyone to live in. The god made the mud solid and it was called Earth. But Alatangana thought it was a depressing place so he created plants and animals. Sa was happy with what Alatangana had created and welcomed Sa into his home.

A short while later, Alatangana asked for Sa's daughter's hand in marriage. Sa was not ready to let go of his daughter yet and stalled the god. But Alatangana spoke privately with the daughter and convinced her to run off with him. They lived in a far corner of the new earth and eventually had seven girls and seven boys. There were three boys and three girls who were black. The children all spoke different languages that Alatangana could not understand. He sought out Sa for help.

Sa told Alatangana he had punished him for taking his daughter away. He would never be able to understand his children. He told Alatangana to have his white children marry only white and their black children marry only black. When the children grew up, they traveled to different areas of the earth, which is why white and black people are everywhere on earth. Since Alatangana stole Sa's daughter, he created a death rattle. When a person heard the rattle, it was his call to death. If Alatangana had not stolen Sa's daughter, there would have been no death.

This myth originated with the Kono people of Guinea. In this legend, Death came before God. Sa's instructions that the children only marry their own kind is an explanation for the separation of the races.



Chapter 4: Bursting from the Hen's Egg, Phan Ku the Creator

Chapter 4: Bursting from the Hen's Egg, Phan Ku the Creator Summary and Analysis

The universe was in the shape of a hen's egg. Inside the egg was a great mass called "no thing." Inside "no thing" was being not yet born called Phan Ku. When he burst from the egg, he was a giant and grew ten feet everyday. He was the Great Creator. He lived for 18,000 years. He had hair all over his body and curved horns on his head. He had a chisel in one hand which he used to carve out the world and everything in it. He separated the earth and the sky and created the stars and sun. Upon Phan Ku's death, the earth was made complete. The dome of the sky was made from his skull and soil was formed from his body. Rain was made from his sweat and wind from his breath. After Phan Ku left, there was room for pain and that was when humans began to suffer.

This story is a Chinese myth that dates from 600 BC. There are many variations of this legend. Phan Ku created the world through sacrificing his own life but his death created human suffering.



Chapters 5 and 6

Chapters 5 and 6 Summary and Analysis

The Old Man traveled everywhere. He created birds, animals, prairies, mountains, rivers and waterfalls. He grew tired and had to rest at times. He also stumbled over some of the terrain but he kept moving and creating. One day he decided to make a mother and a child. He molded them out of clay and told them they were people. He buried them and kept returning each day and each day he found that they had changed a little. On the fourth day, he told them to rise up and walk. The woman asked the Old Man if she and her child would live forever. The Old Man responded that he hadn't thought that out yet. The Old Man threw a buffalo chip in the water. He said if it floated, people would live forever. It floated but the woman wasn't satisfied. She picked up a stone and said that if the stone sunk, they must die. The stone sank and the Old Man said that there would be an end to people.

The Old Man is a folk myth of the Blackfoot American Indian people. The woman he created ruined life for mankind.

The golden Ulgen saw the face of a man on a piece of mud floating on the waters. Ulgen gave the image a spirit and created the first man and named him Erlik. Ulgen and Erlik were friends at first but Erlik tried to emulate Ulgen's powers and create a man. Ulgen became angry and sent Erlik down to be leader of the dead spirits.

Ulgen then created earth. He made seven trees and put a man under each one. He created a golden mountain where he placed another tree with a man under it. The eighth man was named Maidere. After many years, Ulgen asked Maidere why the other men never changed. He responded that they needed women to change. Ulgen ordered him down from the mountain to make women for the men.

Maidere could not finish creating the woman he had formed and he had to seek Ulgen's help. He left Dog to guard the woman and warned him not to let anyone near her. After he left, Erlik came along and tempted the dog, who was hairless, with a warm fur coat. In return for his gift, he only wanted to be able to look at the woman. Erlik took out his flute and played a tune that brought the woman to life. The woman had a terrible temper and was moody.

When Maidere came back, he was carrying the breath of life from Ulgen. But it was too late, the woman already had life. Maidere was angry with Dog who explained that he was tempted by the warm coat. Maidere told him that the coat would grow on his back forever and that people would throw stones at him.

There are many versions of this Russian Altaic creation story. In this version, the first man was made into the Devil and the story explains why dogs have fur coats and why women have bad tempers.



Chapters 7 and 8

Chapters 7 and 8 Summary and Analysis

In the beginning, everything was dark and there was water everywhere. A raft with a Turtle and Pehe-ipe was floating on the water. Earth Starter came down from the sky on a rope of feathers. Turtle asked Earth Starter to create land so he could leave the raft. Earth Starter wanted to create man but did not know how he could get some earth to make dry land. Turtle volunteered to dive down in the water and get some earth from the bottom of the sea.

Turtle was gone six years and when he reappeared he was covered in green slime. The only mud he brought with him was a small amount under his nails. Earth Starter scraped the mud out from under Turtle's nails, rolled it into a small ball and placed it on the raft. The mud ball started to grow and eventually it became as large as the entire world.

The world was still dark so Earth Starter summoned up his sister who was the sun. Earth Starter made the stars and trees. Later he made the animals and the birds and then finally made people. He took the red earth and formed a man and a woman. He was almost finished making them but became so exhausted that he couldn't finish making their hands. Coyote wanted their hands to look like his but Earth Starter insisted their hands be like his. Earth Starter created a lake for the people. As they aged, they could dive in the lake and when they surfaced, they would be young again.

This myth is from the Maidu Indians of California. As the legend goes, the first people were afraid to jump into the water and therefore man did not live forever.

The Great Mother, Nana Buluku, created the world and had twins named Mawu and Lisa. Mawu was the moon and had power over the night and lived in the west. Lisa was the sun and lived in the east. When there was an eclipse, the two came together and had children. Mawu and Lisa were Mother and Father of all gods. There were seven sets of twins. The gods of earth, storm and iron were born first. The other gods ruled over the forest, the seas and birds and beasts. Mawu-Lisa made sure that no one every saw the lesser gods.

This myth is from the Fon people of Abomey (Republic of Benin). This was one of many stories of Mawu and Lisa who partners in the sky.



Chapters 9 and 10

Chapters 9 and 10 Summary and Analysis

In the beginning, there was only darkness. Karora was asleep at the bottom of the deep ground of Ilbalintja. He was covered in soil, flowers and grass. A great decorated pole rose up from the ground above him towards the sky. Large rats, called bandicoots, came out of his navel and from his armpits. Then there was a dawn and the sun rose and flooded the world with light. Since there was light, Karora burst out of the earth and left a great gaping whole in the ground that was filled with water. It was called the Ilbalintja Soak. When the sun went down and Karora fell asleep, the next day a young man had formed. It was Karora's first son who came to life at the sound of the vibrating sound of the bandicoot call.

Each night after Karora slept, more sons would appear each morning. Karora and his growing number of sons had eaten all the bandicoots in the area. He sent his sons out in search of more rats but they came back exhausted and empty-handed. After hearing a loud noise, the sons saw that a wallaby had been roused from his hiding place. The sons injured the wallaby, called Tjenterama, who limped away. Later the sons dove into the Ilbalintja Soak and became the rocks and stones of the soak that lie on top of a round stone that is Tjenterama's body. Karora lies asleep forever at the bottom of the soak. Those who want to drink the water of the soak must bring green boughs and place them at the edge of the water which makes Karora smile in his sleep.

This myth is from the Australian Northern Aranda aborigines of the Bandicoot Totem. It is an example of the imperfect creation story.

In the beginning, God was Wulbari and he was in heaven. He was upset because there was not enough room between him and earth. He was so close to earth that he was poked by an old woman stirring food in a pot outside her hut. Wulbari lifted the sky a bit but it still did not give him enough room. Finally, he lifted the sky up high enough to be out of everyone's way. He set up a court of animals that was guarded by the spider, Ananse.

Ananse asked Wulbari for a corncob. He promised he would go to earth with the corncob and bring Wulbari back a bushel of corn. He found a place to stay and asked where he could hide Wulbari's corncob. He was shown a safe place to hide the corncob but when everyone was asleep, he fed the corncob to the chickens. The next day, he complained about the missing corncob and the people gave him a bushel of corn to replace it. Ananse was known for tricking people. He began to think he was smarter than Wulbari.

Wulbari heard about his boasting and ordered him to bring him something, but he did not say what that something was. Wulbari told him that if he was as smart as he thought he was, he would know what to bring him. Ananse went to earth and made a



robe of bird feathers that he put on. Disguised as a bird, Ananse heard Wulbari tell the others that what he wanted Ananse to bring him was the sun, the moon and the darkness. Ananse went out, found them and brought them back to Wulbari. When Ananse brought out the darkness, no one could see. When he brought out the moon, everyone could see slightly. When he brought out the sun, those who directly looked at it went blind. This is how blindness came to be.

This myth is from the Krachi people of Togo in West Africa. Ananse is known as the great trickster throughout Africa.



Chapters 11 and 12

Chapters 11 and 12 Summary and Analysis

In the beginning, there was only water and water animals. A divine woman fell from the sky. A turtle carried the woman on his back. The turtle decided that the woman needed to live on earth and told the other animals to dive down into the water and bring up some earth. The toad brought up some dirt which the woman put on the turtle's shell. It was the beginning of the earth and dry land soon grew around it.

The woman had twin boys—one good and one bad. One was born the normal way but the other broke out of his mother's side and caused her death. When the divine woman was buried, all the plants of the earth sprung up in the earth covering her.

The bad brother, Tawis-karong, created terrifying beasts. He made wolves, bears, snakes and panthers - all of terrifying size. An enormous toad he made drank up all the water of the earth. The good brother, Tijus-keha, made proper animals—the dove, the mockingbird and the partridge. The partridge flew to Tawis-karong's land seeking water. Tijus-keha followed the bird and discovered all the large beasts his brother had made and beat them down and made them smaller, more normal in size. Tijus-keha knew that he and his twin brother could not live on earth together and challenged him to a duel. Tijus-keha was ultimately victorious.

This is a myth of the Huron Indians. This is similar to the Earth-Diver myth in that earth was brought up from the sea to make land.

Nyambi lived on earth with his wife, Nasilele. As a god, he made all the birds, animals and fishes. He made man and the first one was named Kamonu. Kamonu tried to copy everything Nyambi did. Kamonu made a spear and began slaying animals. Nyambi told him to stop because he was killing his brothers. Kamonu asked for some of Nyambi's magic powers but he would not give them to him.

Nyambi kept moving away from Kamonu but Kamonu kept finding following him. Spider spun a web from the sky and lowered a thread for Nyambi so he could escape Kamonu. A seer told Nyambi to put out Spider's eyes so he couldn't see where he went and tell Kamonu. But Kamonu knew that Nyambi was up in the sky and chopped down trees and stacked them so he could reach the sky but the pile of trees kept falling down and he wasn't able to follow Nyambi.

This myth is from the Lozi people of Zambia and is called the Divine Myth.



Chapters 13 and 14

Chapters 13 and 14 Summary and Analysis

In the beginning, there were two realms. Muspell was in the south and was fiery and full of light. Niflheim was in the north and was full of fog, ice, and snow. In between the two regions, was the Yawning Gap where the two regions came together in a thaw. The dripping water started life and created a giant named Imir. He was a frost giant and he was evil. As he laid sleeping in the Yawning Gap, a man and woman grew from his armpit and a son from his leg. They represented the first family of frost giants.

Ancestors of Imir were the gods Odin, Vili and Ve. They hated the evil Imir and the growing population of frost giants. The gods killed Imir and his blood drowned all the frost giants except two that escaped. The gods made the world from Imir's body. They made the oceans from the blood that was left in Imir.

The gods traveled to Muspell and used sparks and embers to make the sun, moon and stars. They made a man and woman from two trees that were floating in the sea. Odin breathed life into them, Vili gave them emotions and Ve gave them hearing and sight. All men of the earth came from this man and woman who were named Ask and Embla.

This myth is a small portion of the Prose Edda, an Icelandic epic written in 1220.

Olorun was the Owner of the Sky and the Highest Being and lived in the sky with other spirits. The earth was a watery and a marshy place. The gods knew that there could be no men on earth until there was solid ground for them to live on. Olorun ordered that solid ground be created on earth. Great God slid down a spider's spread and threw a small amount of earth on the marsh. He placed a pigeon and hen down on the earth and their scratching and pecking soon caused the earth to spread and grow and become solid.

Olorun sent down Chameleon to see if the land was suitable for man. Chameleon found that the earth was formed but it was still soft. The second time Chameleon went down to earth he reported back that it was wide and dry. Olorun sent Great God back to earth to create trees, to feed humans and to give them goods. Olorun sent the first people to earth from heaven. Great God was jealous of Olorun and wanted to make people himself. But Olorun knew of Olorun's plans and placed him in a deep sleep. When he woke, all the people had been created.

This is a primal myth of the Yoruba of Nigeria in Africa. There are many myths about Olorun that explain the origins of the world and of human beings.



Chapters 15 and 16

Chapters 15 and 16 Summary and Analysis

In the beginning there was Apsu the begetter, the fresh and sweet-water sea and Tiamat, the salt-sea waters. They mingled as a single body and soul. Apsu and Tiamat created the gods Lahmu and Lahamu and next the gods Anshar and Kishar. More gods were created whose noise and laughter bothered Tiamat who some said was a dragon. Apsu offered to kill the noisy gods but Tiamat did not want to destroy what they had created. One of the gods, Ea, knew that Apsu was plotting to destroy them. Ea cast a spell on Apsu that put him in a deep sleep. While he slept, Ea killed him.

Ea and his wife, Damkina had a son, Marduk, known as the majestic god. Marduk had four eyes and four ears. Fire blazed from his lips. He was fearless and radiant. He was the best and tallest, boldest and brave. The god Anu created the four winds which disturbed the waters of Tiamat. In anger, she gave birth to monster serpents. Anyone who looked upon the dragons she created would perish. Among the monsters she created was Kingu the chief of the monsters who would lead a battle against the fairer gods.

The only god that could stand against Tiamat was Marduk who vowed to slay Tiamat but only if he were made supreme king. Marduk was given all the tools of king of the universe. He created a net to trap Tiamat. He brought on evil winds and rode his terrifying chariot of rage. After a vicious battle, Marduk killed Tiamat and all her beasts. Marduk used half of Tiamat's body to create the sky and the other half to create the land. He created the planets, moods of the moon and the constellations of the gods and finally created man who was born to serve the gods.

This world-parent myth is taken from the Babylonian creation verse narrative, Enuma elish which represents unity and praises Marduk, the main god of Babylon.

The Word began long ago in Quiche where the Maker and Former resided. The Book of Wisdom described how heaven and earth were formed from four creations. Before the first creation, there was only sky and sea. Only the Maker and the Feathered Serpent existed who came together to create the earth. Through their magic, mountains and valleys and trees emerged. Next animals and plants were created.

In the second creation, man was made from the wet earth out of mud. But this creation failed. It was too watery and weak to stand up. In the third creation, the gods made a sturdier man carved from a tree. These men were strong and walked alone and multiplied but the gods were not happy because these wooden men had no hearts or minds. But there were so many wooden dummies that the gods had to destroy them by creating a massive flood. Some escaped to the forest and are now the present day monkeys and it is why monkeys look like man.



In the final creation, the gods were led by animals to Broken Place where yellow and white corn grew in abundance. The gods used the corn to make the flesh of the first humans and used other food to make their limbs. They made four original humans who were not born of a mother or father but formed by Maker and Feathered Serpent. The four humans were handsome and bright. They had super sight and hearing and knew everything. But since they were not gods and should be subservient to them, Maker and Feathered Serpent decided to take some of their strength away so they would be satisfied sowing and reaping.

This myth is part of the Popol Vuh, the sacred history of the Quiche Maya, the people of the Guatemalan highlands. This myth illustrates that gods can fail in their creations.



Chapters 17 and 18

Chapters 17 and 18 Summary and Analysis

Ta-aroa lived alone in an egg-shaped shell that revolved in the dark and empty space for ages. Finally, Ta-aroa broke out of the egg and, not wanting to be alone, he made the god, Tu who became his companion and helper in the creation of the other gods, the universe and all the lands and creatures. Man was their last creation. The first man was called Ti-i who was made out of earth. Ti-i's wife, Hina, was created as half-mortal and half goddess. Hina was good and had a face in both the front and back of her head.

Ti-i was cruel and sent out a white heron to cast a spell over the entire earth. Soon there was unease and the gods started warring with one another. To punish them, Ta-aroa and Tu cursed the stars and they blinked. They cursed the moon and it faded. Hina, who was good, made it so that the stars twinkled and the moon faded but returned. The gods cursed the sea and created a low tide but Hina created a high tide to follow it. They cursed the rivers and the water hid underneath the soil. But Hina made it come back in the form of bubbling springs on the ground. The gods cursed mankind and the people cowered in fear. Hina tried to save the people but Ti-i used magic to cause their deaths. That is why the Tahitians believe that man and not woman caused the end of eternal life.

This Tahitian myth is from French Polynesia is one version of the myth that is also found in Samoa.

In the beginning, there was only ocean. The God Lowa came down and created the Marshall Islands. The god sent down four men who went in all four directions - west, east, south and north. The man in the east brought light—he was the Sun. The man in the west created all living things—he was Life. The man in the north commanded the wind—he was the Wind. The man in the north killed life—he was Death.

A fifth man was dispatched by the God Lowa to arrange the islands properly in the ocean. While placing the islands, the man let the island Namorik slip out of his hands. It landed out of alignment and is still like that today. All creatures on earth were given a name and a tattoo that identified them. Souls that die rose from the dead and had to travel to the islet, Nako. To get there, they had to leap across a fish channel. If they could not make the leap, they were considered to be full of sin and were eaten by the fish. The people without sin were able to make it across the channel to Nako.

This myth is from the Republic of the Marshall Islands of Micronesia. It expresses the dual world of heaven and earth and the creator Lowa.



Chapters 19 and 20

Chapters 19 and 20 Summary and Analysis

Ra was the first being. His father, Nun, was the waters. Ra set himself under the horizon every night and crossed the Underneath Sky in his boat. It was a dark and terrible place where the dragon, Apophis, lived. Ra had to fight the dragon every night. Ra created all gods and beings. He created Shu, the god of the air and Tefnut, the god of moisture. Ra had only one eye but use it to watch the activities of the gods. Shu and Tefnut brought him another eye called the Golden Eye.

Shu and Tefnut created two gods called Nut, the sky, and Geb, the earth. Ra created animals from the tears of his eye. Geb and Nut created the lesser gods, Osiris, Isis and Horus and many others. Since these gods were charming and could destroy enemies with their words, Ra sent them out to slay Apophis. The dragon was finally destroyed and Ra rejoiced promising to come up shining each morning.

The myth of Ra is Egyptian and is part of a temple ritual. It is thought to have originated with the ancient Thebes.

The earth was the woman, Sedi, and the sky was the man, Melo. When they married, there was fear that they would crush what lay between them. Between the earth and sky were men and animals who gathered together to discuss how they could save themselves. Sedi-Diyor, leader of the middle-realm people, captured Melo and beat him. Melo fled to the heavens, leaving Sedi behind.

Sedi-Diyor found a nurse to help raise Sedi's children. The little daughters flourished under her care. Brightness came from them, lighting everything. Each day, the light was brighter. But when their nurse died, the daughters were so grief-stricken that they died and the light went out. The world was surrounded in darkness. The men and animals dug up the nurse to see if she had stolen the daughters. They found two large shining eyes which they washed in a stream and made them shiny and eventually turned back into the daughters.

Bomong, the oldest daughter, dressed in bright clothes and with light surrounding her walked away across the hills and never returned. Her sister, Bond, tried to find Bomong. When she left her house, the light surrounding her was so bright that it caused men to faint. The men and animals decided the sisters put out too much light and one would have to be killed. A frog laid in wait for Bong and shot and killed her with an arrow. The light and the heat decreased and life was more comfortable for the men and animals. Bomong found her sister's dead body and feared that she, too, would be killed because of the light that shined from her. She placed a large rock on her head which caused the world to be in a dark shadow. The men and animals wanted Bomong to come back and bring her light. She would only come back if they brought her sister back to life. They

constructed a new, smaller Bong and Bomong returned to share her light with the people and animals.

This is a creation myth of the Minyong, a tribal group in northeastern India. It illustrates man's need for sunlight.



Chapters 21 and 22

Chapters 21 and 22 Summary and Analysis

When Yahweh, the Lord God, made the earth and heavens, there was not a single man, plant, or herb. The Lord God made a man out of dust and breathed life into him. The Lord God created the Garden of Eden where he placed the man. He made the tree of life in the garden and the tree of knowledge of good and evil. He made four rivers that flowed from the garden: the Pishon, the Gihon, the Tigris and the Euphrates. He warned the man not to eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil. If he did, He told him, he would die. God then made the animals and the birds. He took a rib from Adam and created a woman for Adam, called Eve.

This version of the sacred creation is taken from the Holy Bible Old Testament, Genesis, Chapter 2.

In the beginning, there came Nothing. It was sometimes called Chaos or the Void. After that, Earth appeared so that the gods had a place to stand. Tartarus, the underworld, and Eros, love, also came into being. Eros was the strongest and most handsome and he made all the other gods weak. Next came Night and Erebus, another part of the underworld. Soon Day and Space were born.

Earth created Heaven and the Sea. Heaven covered the sky with stars. Mt. Olympus was created for the home of the god son Earth. Heaven and Earth created the Titans, their children. Kronos was their youngest child. Kronos hated his father, the Heaven. Earth gave birth to three Cyclopes. Each was born with one eye in the center of his forehead. They were to make thunder for Zeus. Monsters with hundreds of arms and fifty heads were also created. Heaven was ashamed of his creations and forced them to hide and never see the light of day.

Earth was upset how Heaven was treating their children and wanted vengeance against Heaven. She made a huge flint sickle and taught her children how to use it. Kronos volunteered to kill his father. He slayed his father's love which fell on the sea and created the goddess, Aphrodite. Heaven cursed his children causing Kronos to eat his children as soon as they were born. He didn't want his own children to seek vengeance on him one day as he had done to his own father. His wife, Rhea, wrapped up a large stone and told Kronos that it was their son, Zeus. Kronos ate the stone not realizing that Zeus was safe and in hiding. Zeus grew to be the greatest of gods and eventually defeated Kronos.

This myth is the Greek account of the origin of the gods and man.



Chapters 23, 24 and 25

Chapters 23, 24 and 25 Summary and Analysis

Prometheus, brother of Kronos, was said to be the wisest of all gods. His name means forethought. He helped Zeus in his war against Kronos who was eventually defeated. Atlas, who fought with Kronos, was punished by Zeus by making him hold the world and sky on his shoulders. Epimetheus, also a brother of Prometheus, always second-guessed himself. His name means afterthought.

Prometheus and Epimetheus were ordered by Zeus to make men and animals. It was decided that Epimetheus would make them and Prometheus would put the finishing touches on them. Epimetheus made animals first and then planned to make men. But Epimetheus had not thought out a plan to create men so Prometheus had to help him. Prometheus designed men so they would be smarter than animals. He gave man fire so they would be more powerful than animals. The wisdom that Prometheus gave men enabled them to create tools and objects. Zeus saw the Prometheus was favoring man over him. He punished him by creating woman in heaven and sending her down to earth.

The story of Prometheus and Epimetheus is part of Greek mythology.

Pandora was born in heaven. Before she left heaven, Zeus made the other gods give her a box with a surprise inside. Zeus said she would not be able to keep from looking in the box. Apollo delivered it to Pandora and whispered in her ear that she should never open the box. Pandora was shy and a good person. Her one weakness was her curiosity. Venus warned her to keep the box shut.

Pandora was sent to stay with Epimetheus who was floored by her beauty. He asked what was in her box and she answered that she didn't know. He told her to be cautious of anything that Zeus had given her. Epimetheus took the box and hid it so she wouldn't be tempted to open it. Epimetheus fell in love with Pandora. When Prometheus came home, he was angered having warned his brother to never accept anything from Zeus, even a beautiful woman. Zeus sent Pandora, Prometheus claimed, so that the two brothers would fight each other.

One day when both brothers were gone, Pandora snooped around the house until she spotted the box. She stood on a chair and reached for it but it slipped out of her hands and the lid went sailing through the air. Suddenly, she heard growls, screams and howls. To her horror, out of the box came the gifts of Zeus—crawling things, winged monsters, slithering and creeping creatures. The box unleashed poverty, misery, plagues, sorrow and pain into the world.

Pandora tried to get the lid back on but it was too late. All the monsters and miseries went out of the house into the town and the world. There was one small, injured bird left



in the box. It was harmless and Pandora wanted to keep it as a pet but he said it must go. If he didn't go, the bird said, what what the humans do. Pandora asked who he was and he told her he was "Hope."

This is one of the most famous of the Greek myths. It is the explanation for all the suffering on earth but it has a positive turn since it ends with hope being unleashed.

In the beginning, Elohim, God, created the heavens and earth in seven days. The earth had no shape and there was only darkness. God created light which He called day and the darkness He called night. God created heaven and then the waters and dry land under heaven. Next, He ordered that the earth produce plants and trees bearing fruit. He created the sun and the moon and the stars. Then God created living creatures in the water and flying birds in the sky and every living creature on earth. On the sixth day, God created man and woman in His own image. On the seventh day, God rested.

This is creation story is taken from the Holy Bible, in the book of Genesis.



Characters

Pandora

The story of Pandora is told in the myth entitled, "Pandora - Zeus the Creator." According to the legend, Pandora is the name of the woman made in heaven. Her name means "all's gift" or gift for everyone. In other words, Pandora or Woman was a gift that Zeus gave to the world. However, when Zeus sent the beautiful young Pandora down to earth, he gifted her with a box. He slyly told her that she would not be able to resist opening it. But other gods warned her against opening the box. Apollo pleaded with her not to open it. Venus told her to never look inside the box.

Zeus sent Pandora to live with the brothers, Prometheus and Epimetheus. When she arrived, Prometheus was not present. Epimetheus immediately fell in love with the beautiful young woman. She told him about the box and the warnings not to open it. To protect her, Epimetheus hid the box where he thought she could not find it. When Prometheus appeared, he scolded Epimetheus for falling for Pandora. Zeus was a tricky god and was up to mischief. Prometheus told his brother that Zeus had sent Pandora to cause a conflict between them.

Pandora was nice and shy and had only one flaw. She was curious. When the brothers were away, Pandora looked around the house and found the box. It was on a high shelf and when she tried to reach it, the box slipped off the shelf and the lid went flying off. She immediately heard horrid sounds of growling, barking, and howling. Out of the box came terrifying monsters and creatures. Also from the box came plague, sorrow, misery, envy, and poverty. Pandora tried to put the lid back on, but it was too late. One creature, a small wounded bird, was left in the box. Pandora wanted to keep the bird as a pet but he wanted to escape. She let him go. The little bird was hope.

The Frost Giant

Imir, the Frost Giant, was brought to life in the area between the two realms of the earth. Muspell, which fiery and bright, was in the south and Niflheim, cold, icy, and snowy, was in the north. The area between the two realms was called the Yawning Gap. It was a region where the cold and warm winds blended. And it was there that the drips of drops from thawing ice created life. The first form of life was a great frost giant who was named Imir. Imir was born evil.

After he was created, he laid down to sleep since the process of being created was very exhausting. He fell into a deep sleep and while he slept, a woman and a man grew from his armpit. Next a son was born from Imir's leg. Imir was the creator and, in his deep sleep, he had created the first family of frost giants who were evil like Imir. The good and powerful god brothers Odin, Vili and Ve hated the evil Imir and the horrid ice giants that he spawned. Imir was killed by the brother gods and his blood was used to



drown all the other frost giants, except two that escapes. The brothers used Imir's body to make the world and the earth was made from his flesh. Mountains were formed from his bones.

The god brothers gave the humans the land of Midgard as their home. The land was protected by a large wall that was made from the eyebrows of Imir.

Raven the Creator

In "The Pea-Pod Man," Raven the Creator is the god-like creature who made the vines that grew the pea pods that ultimately created man.

Quat the Creator

In "Finding Night," Quat the Creator was born from Quatgoro the mother who was a large stone that had split in half. Quat was one of twelve sons and became the creator of man who he made from trees.

Death the Creator

Death the Creator in "An Endless Sea of Mud," is depicted as the creator of the earth, or mud, where he built a house for him and his wife and daughter. After Death created mud, the god Alatangana created solid ground from it.

Phan Ku The Creator

The explanation for Phan Ku's existence in "Bursting from the Hen's Egg," was that the entire shape of the universe was that of a hen's egg and within that egg Phan Ku was developed and burst forth.

Ulgen the Creator

In "First Man Becomes the Devil," the god Ulgen created the first man who was called Erlik who angered Ulgen by attempting to equal him in power. Ulgen commanded him down to the depths to be the leader of dead spirits.

Earth Starter the Creator

In "Turtle Dives to the Bottom of the Sea," Earth Starter the Creator, depends on a turtle diving below the sea and bringing up mud from the bottom of the sea in order to make land.



Mawu-Lisa the Creators

In the legend, "Moon and Sun," the Great Mother, Nana Buluku, had the twins, Mawu and Lisa. Mawu was the moon and had power over the night and Lisa was the sun who resided in the east. During an eclipse, they came together and had children.

Karora the Creator

Karora the Creator, in "Bandicoots Come from His Body," creates life from his own body. Karora was deep asleep under the earth. The first animals, rat-like creatures, grew from his navel and armpits and leaped out of the ground and burst into life.



Objects/Places

The Pea-Pod

In the "The Pea-Pod Man," creation story, the first man was born from a large pea-pod. After lying inside five days, he pushed out the bottom of the pod and fell to the ground.

Quatgoro, the Stone

Quatgoro, was a huge stone and the mother of twelve sons. The stone split in half and the sons were born including Quat the creator of man.

Sea of Mud

In "An Endless Sea of Mud," Death, who was called Sa, created a sea of mud on which he built a house. The God Alatangana made the mud into solid ground.

Sea of Mud

In "Bursting from the Hen's Egg," Phan Ku, the Creator, is born from the universe which was in the shape of a huge hen's egg.

Prose Edda

The creation legend called "The Frost Giant," is one of the stories of the Prose Edda, an Icelandic epic written down in 1220.

Enuma elish

The creation story entitled, "Marduk, God of Gods," is a myth taken from the Babylonian creation verse narrative, Enuma elish, which is considered the most famous of the Near Eastern texts.

Robe of Feathers

In the creation myth entitled, "Spider Ananse Finds Something," the tricky spider, Ananse, disguises himself in a robe of feathers so that he can eavesdrop on the god Wulbari who told the spider to bring him "something" but refused to tell him what it was.



Man of the Third Creation

In "Four Creations to Make Man," it took several attempts to make man before the gods got it right. In the third iteration, man was made of wood but was deemed unsuitable since he had no intelligence or feelings.

Fire

In the story called, "The God Brings Fire to Man," it was the wise Prometheus who went up to heaven and when Zeus was not looking, lit his torch on the sun's chariot. He returned to earth and gifted man with fire.

Pandora's Box

In "Pandora's Box," Zeus gives Pandora a box but tells her not to open it. Her overly curious nature compels her to open the box that unleashes all the sufferings of man upon the world.



Themes

Similarities

Similarities

One overall theme that is obvious after reading the twenty-five creation legends in the book, "In the Beginning" is the fact that many have similar elements. Even though the myths stretch across the ages and originate from diverse cultures, religions and locations, it is remarkable to note the similarities that exist among the stories. These similarities illustrate that despite the origin of the myth, the human mind thinks along some of the same lines regardless of time, location or culture.

The book describes the struggle that all men and women have had in understanding their origins. One of the similarities among the various creation myths is that man sees a connection between himself and the sky, land and sea. There are virtually no myths where these elements do not play an important role in the imaginary legends that are created to explain them. Also very important to those who created these legends are the sun and moon and stars. In some cases, they are gods to be worshiped and in other stories they were objects created by gods for the purposes of man.

There is also a sense of blame in some of the stories. A woman is blamed for creating death in one story. In another story, a man is given the same blame. Pandora is credited with unleashing all the ills of the world at the same time she released hope into the world. The element of guilt is an underlying thread that connects many of these legends.

The myths seem to struggle the most with how man himself was created and secondarily why he was created. In one story, man drops from a pea-pod, in another he is made from the body of a god and in still another he is made from trees. Quite a few of the legends depict man being made from clay. In many of the stories man was created to serve god, a sentiment that has remained intact even in modern times.

The Cause of Human Suffering

In many of the creation myths in "In the Beginning," there are explanations for human suffering that were wrought in the process of creating earth and man. For example, in "Bursting from the Hen's Egg," Phan Ku, the creator, completes the creation of the earth through personal sacrifice. He sacrifices his skull in order to create the sky and uses the vermin that are created from his body to make man. However, as the legend plays out, mankind is doomed to eternal suffering because the world lost the great and good Phan Ku and will suffer forever.

In "Traveling to Form the World," a woman who throws a stone in the water. The stone sinks to the bottom of the water which is the reason that man was destined to suffer and die. Famously, in "Pandora's Box," it was another woman who unleashed the suffering



upon the world. Because Pandora was overly curious, she opened the forbidden box that allowed sickness, death, envy and hate to enter the world. There was one redeeming aspect to Pandora's actions. She also freed a small bird from the box who represented "hope."

In "The Angry Gods," the goddess Hina tried to save mankind from the cruel god Ti-i who used magic to lure man to death. Ti-i was bowing to a greater god, his master, Taroa, who loved to kill. This is a Tahitian creation legend which places the cause of human suffering upon man. The goddess Hina, tried but failed to stop Ti-i from cursing man. The curse caused man to lose eternal life.

Man's Relationship to Nature

One theme that emerges through "In the Beginning," is man's recognition that he has a connection to nature through the skies or heavens and the earth or land are mentioned throughout and in many instances the myths tie man as directly being created by these entities. Throughout these myths of creation, the reader can detect a similar struggle among all ages, cultures and religions in man's attempt to understand his relationship with the world and, even a larger challenge, how everything, including himself, had been come to be. In these legends, it is quite apparent that man has tried to be logical in some cases to explain existence and in many other examples, has shown his creative talents.

In "Moon and Sun, Mawu-Lisa the Creators," the legend says simply that Nana Buluku, the Great Mother, "created the world." The larger issue of how she created the world is ignored. In "The Woman who Fell from the Sky," a "divine woman" simply drops from the sky. There are animals on earth at the time who go on to create land for her to live on. In the "Pea-Pod Man, Raven the Creator," man is simply created from large pea-pods that were created by a large god-like raven.

These myths and legends are ancient and were created long before the sciences of physics and biology existed. Although man has come a long way from these ancient times in providing explanations for his existence, modern man, while he understands nature in a much deeper level, still struggles with the larger questions of man's relationship to nature and to the entirety of the universe.



Style

Perspective

"In the Beginning," a collection of creation myths, is written in the third-person narrative. The legends are recounted in a straightforward and unbiased manner as though they are depicting real events even though many are beyond implausible. The author shows absolutely no bias in that she treats each legend as though it was credible.

At the end of the narration of each myth, the author provides a comment about the origin of the legend including the cultures from which they stemmed. An example of this additional commentary is "Traveling to form the World, Old Man the Creator," which is a folk myth of the Blackfoot Indian people.

In these comments, there are a some editorial remarks but they are offered in a measured and kind manner. For example, "The Pea-Pod Man, Raven the Creator," author Hamilton refers to the story as "wonderful, dramatic." The author also points out the symbolism that is represented in some of the legends. In "Spider Ananse Finds Something, Wulbari the Creator," the author explains that Ananse symbolized weakness and the sky god, Wulbari, represented strength. She makes note of those stories that are connected to religions.

Tone

The various creation myths are told in a straightforward manner without a trace of sarcasm or disbelief no matter how unfathomable the legend may be. There are very vivid examples. In "Bandicoots Come from His Body - Karora the Creator" when the god Karora falls asleep, the first living beings that resemble rats come from his armpits.

In another example, the turtle in "Turtle Dives to the Bottom of the Sea - Earth Starter the Creator" dives to the bottom of the sea to obtain a bit of soil. Since the surface of the earth was completely covered in water, Earth Starter the Creator, needed the soil to create land above the water. When the turtle returns to the surface six years later, the god scrapes the soil from the turtle's claws and causes land to grow from the small ball of mud. The author merely provides the legends without any editorial remarks or judgments.

There is no detectible bias between the stories that are told. Each story is given as much credence as the next. When she recounts the story of Christian creation from the Holy Bible in the story entitled, "In the Beginning - Elohim the Creator," it is not presented with any more credence than the legend in "The Pea-Pod Man," in which man was born from pea-pods. Author Virginia Hamilton gives equal respect to all legends and makes no disparaging comments about any of them. She is more a "reporter" of the legends in this book than she is a true author with opinions. Sshe does her reporting without any bias - just as a good reporter should do.

Structure

"In the Beginning" is a compilation of twenty-five myths and legends about the creation of the heavens and earth and of man. Each of the twenty-five myths have a main title and a sub-title. For example, the first story is based on Eskimo lore and is entitled, "The Pea-Pod Man - Raven the Creator." Another example is the Christian story of creation which is entitled, "First Man, First Woman - Yaweh the Creator" and comes from the Old Testament of the Holy Bible.

Each of the stories of creation is illustrated with beautiful color renderings by Barry Moser. Prior to the first story, is a short section entitled, "A Note from the Author" in which Virginia Hamilton discusses the topic of creation in general and the different approaches that are taken in describing and understanding the creation of the universe and of all the beings.

After the final story, there is a section entitled, "More About These Myths," which focuses on the similarities found in many of the legends. In the final section of the book entitled, "Useful Sources," the author lists the sources and references she used in writing this book. This list also references pertinent reading material for those who would like to learn more about creation myths.

Quotes

"In the beginning, there was light. It never dimmed, this light over everything. It was bright all-light everywhere, and there was no rest from it" (Chapter 2, pg. 9.)

"What he found there had rotted. He was forced to leave his puppets buried, they smelled so bad. So this, then, was the beginning of Death. That is the way Death came to the world, when Tangaro the Fool buried his wood figures and they rotted" (Chapter 2, pg. 11.)

"Phan Ku was the size of a giant. He grew ten feet a day and lived for eighteen thousand years" (Chapter 4, pg. 22.)

"Ulgen commanded Erlik down to the depths. Now Erlik is the leader of dead spirits. He is the devil" (Chapter 6, pg. 29.)

"Mawu and Lisa were Mother and Father of all the other gods. And there were fourteen of these gods, who were seven pairs of twins. The gods of earth, storm and iron were born first" (Chapter 8, pg. 43.)

"At last, Ananse brought out the sun. Those who looked went blind. Those who had been looking somewhere else were blinded only in one eye...So you see, that is how blindness came into the world" (Chapter 10, pg. 56.)

"When the divine woman was buried, all of the plants needed for life on earth sprang from the ground above her. From her head came the pumpkin vine. Maize came from her chest. Pole beans grew from her legs" (Chapter 11, pg. 60.)

"Imir was a frost giant. He lay down to sleep and...a woman and a man grew from his armpit. A son came forth from his leg. From Imir came the first family of ice-crusting frost giants" (Chapter 13, pg. 70.)

"Marduk had four eyes and four ears. When his lips moved, the fire blazed from within. His eyes scanned everything. He was fearless and radiant. He was best and tallest, boldest and brave" (Chapter 15, pg. 80.)

"Many were the beings that came out of my mouth. This was before there was heaven, before earth came into being, and before the ground and creeping things were created" (Chapter 19, pg. 112.)

"You may freely eat of every tree of the garden. But from the tree of knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for the day you eat from it, you shall die" (Chapter 21, pg. 124.)

"There were plagues of sorrow and pain. There was misery, holding its dripping head. Envy took hold of Pandora and tried to tear her hair out. Poverty slid hungrily across the floor and melted into the air" (Chapter 24, pg. 144.)



Topics for Discussion

What Russian myth describes the first man being made into the Devil and explains why dogs have fur coats and women have bad tempers?

Who was "Sa" in the myth called, "An Endless Sea of Mud?" Who wanted to marry his daughter? How were the daughter and her husband punished by Sa?

In the myth called, "The Coming of All Things," how were Zeus and Kronos related? Why did Kronos eat his young? How did Zeus escape death when he was a baby?

In the myth called, "Marduk, God of Gods," describe Marduk's appearance. Who did Marduk slay and why? What did Marduk make out of Tiamat's body?

In the myth, "Sun, Life, Wind, and Death," who created the Marshall Islands? How did the island Namorik get out of alignment? What were the souls of the dead required to do?

What did Prometheus' name mean? What did his brother's name, Epimetheus, mean? What traits did each man have?

What was in Pandora's Box? Who gave it to her? How did it impact the world?