

# Introduction

Myths are humanity's earliest imaginative attempts to explain the universe, its creation, and its working. The study of the mythology of a particular culture reveals the way of life and thought of that culture. Since Western civilization traces its roots back to Greek culture, it would seem that a knowledge of classical mythology is essential. Literature is filled with allusions to Greek gods and goddesses. Artists and sculptors throughout the ages have used mythological stories as subjects. The modern world, while seemingly far removed from Greek culture, has only to turn on the television or look at the comic page or watch the latest science fiction movie to see mythology come alive. From an advertisement for Atlas tires to Superman's heroic adventures—mythology lives.

This unit is designed to make students aware of classical mythology, what it says about the culture which produced it, how it compares to other cultures and times, and how it has influenced succeeding generations even to today.

Students today frequently suffer from a dearth of the imaginative. Living in a society in which science and technology reign, students often do not find a need to use their imaginative faculties. In many cases, television has replaced reading. As a "Family Circus" newspaper cartoon has so aptly stated, "TV puts pictures in your eyes, but books put pictures right inside your mind." In addition, fairy tales, once the staple of a young child's literary diet, have been replaced by "real" stories. In the study of mythology, students are forced to acknowledge the need for that "willing suspension of disbelief" so difficult for the modern, rationalistic mind to accept.