**Mythology – What Is It?**

* **Extends from early Greek and Roman times up to today**

**Folklore, fairy tales, myths, and legends are sometimes used interchangeably, but there are differences.**

* **Myths refer to early humanity’s seeking of explanations for natural phenomena; precursors of scientific investigation; sometimes used to explain customs or rituals**
* **Legends are usually true stories exaggerated; involve heroes who may or may not have accomplished great deeds (Did Davy Crockett really kill a bear at age three?)**
* **Folktales or fairy tales are pure fiction used to entertain or teach**

**By studying myths we can learn how different societies or cultures have answered basic questions about the world**

**Myths vary according to climate, custom, or social system**

* **Greeks, who lived in a warm climate, saw humans as created from the mud of a river bank**
* **Farther north, the first humans were said to have come from frozen stones**

**Theories of the Origins of Myths**

**Euhemerus’ Theory (ancient Greek scholar; late 300s to early 200s B.C.)**

* **All myths based on historical facts**
* **Scholars had to strip away the supernatural elements to reach the facts**
* **He felt Zeus was an early king who possessed great power**
* **However, it is impossible to know if mythical figures ever existed**

**Muller’s Theory (German born British language scholar of the late 1800s)**

* **All gods and mythical heroes were representations of nature divinities**
* **Heroes were originally a symbol for the sun in one of its phases**
* **People eventually forgot the symbolic purpose and came to believe in the divinities themselves**

**Tylor’s Theory (English anthropologist of the 1800s)**

* **Myths began through man’s efforts to account for unexplainable occurrences in dreams**
* **While the body slept, the soul would wander freely and have many adventures**
* **Adventures appeared to man in his dreams**
* **Eventually came to believe that everything in nature had a soul and could be called upon for protection or special favors**

**Malinowski’s Theory (Polish born British anthropologist of the early 1900s)**

* **Disagreed with Tylor**
* **Psychological conditions lead men to create myths**
* **All people recognize that a frontier exists between what man can and cannot explain logically**
* **Man creates myths when he reaches this frontier**
* **Had to create myths to relieve the tension brought on by not knowing why something happens**

**Frazer’s Theory (Scottish anthropologist of late 1800s and early 1900s**

* **Myths began in the great cycle of nature – birth, growth, decay, death, and rebirth**
* **Societies around the world wanted to keep the world from decaying and dying**

**What Does Mythology Tell Us About People**

**Collective Representations – every society establishes certain social institutions and values which are reflected in religion; most myths simply reflect what a society views as important**

**Personal and Collective Unconscious – each individual’s personal unconscious is formed by his experiences in the world; his collective unconscious is inherited and shared by all members of his race; all collective unconscious is organized into basic patterns called archetypes of which myths are one kind**