

“Myths, Legends, and the Art of Storytelling”

Legends and Myths story book

Rebecca J. Buglio

Stories of Old and New: Campfire and Bedroom Fort Scenes

For this piece, there is no myth or legend from a specific culture fueling the design. In these pieces, I wanted to represent the idea of the old and new forms of storytelling through two scenes that some may be able to relate to or recognize.

The campfire scene follows the idea of the Native Americans and the countless stories that have been told by the fire side to generations. In contrast to that is the little boy who made a tent in his bedroom, lying down with his flashlight, reading with his dog.

These two scenes show how far we have come as human beings from telling stories orally to reading them on paper that was made by a machine. No matter the method, storytelling has lived on and will continue to do so, so long as people continue to take an interest in stories, culture, history, and their past.

Not all cultures survive, Many have been lost and still, today, others are being threatened with extinction. Storytelling isn't just a fun activity, it can be a way of preserving something so unique that future generations can look back upon and understand as a way of life for some.

Malaika: Eastern Africa

In Africa there are spirits known as the Malaika. These spirits are believed to be created from light and appear transparent when around human beings.

The Malaika sit on people's shoulders and whisper advice into their ears that is wise and kind. They are incapable of doing evil and are similar to the notion of angels in popular culture.

They are known to be protectors of the heavens and people in Eastern Africa. When the heavens are under attack the Malaika can be seen in the night sky in the form of shooting stars going to defend it against the enemy. When death occurs, the Malaika come and have the special job of carrying souls to heaven.

A Closer Look:

There are very few artistic references of what the Malaika look like in African Art. I took it upon myself therefore to attempt to make them look as much like little warriors and stars as possible. If these figures were to stand, toes pointed, arms extended, their bodies would appear to look star-shaped. Their helmets have small constellations carved in them that I would like to think represent where they came from in the skies when they shoot across it.

Izanami & Izanagi: Japan

In Japanese culture, the creation of the Japanese islands occurred when three gods formed man and woman out of chaos and nothingness. In the Plain of High Heaven, the two divine immortals were summoned and named Izanagi and Izanami. These two beings were given the task of bringing the world into existence.

The three gods bestow a gift upon the couple, giving them a Naginata, a spear-like weapon. They are told to walk out on the Floating Bridge of Heaven and plunge the spear into the waters until they strike mud. When the male, Izanagi, pulls the spear out it is believed that the mud that was on the tip of the naginata dripped and formed an island for them to live on. The couple then descends upon the island and builds a great pillar in the center, and a palace. After building this they decide to start the world by having offspring. The pair walk around the pillar in different directions until they meet. The woman greets the male and they produce two children who have abnormalities. They seek the gods help and learn that instead of the female greeting the male, the male must be the first to greet the female. They do this the next time they walk around the pillar and are successful in having eight children which are believed to be the islands of Japan and countless deities to rule the land.

A Closer Look:

On the island you will notice Japanese characters. The pillar and palace in the story are

represented here by the character for 'creation' while the characters for 'female' and 'male' are represented as the two smaller figures walking around the island.

Weaver Girl: China

The tale of the Weaver Girl is closely connected with the Qixi Festival in China, which is sometimes called The Night of the Sevens, as it falls upon the seventh day of the seventh lunar month of the

Chinese calendar. The Qixi is a festival of love, during which young women demonstrate their proficiency in domestic arts and offer up wishes for loving future husbands.

The Weaver Girl is thought to be the daughter of the Jade Emperor who weaves colorful clouds in the heavens. She is the reason for the pinks, yellows, blues, and purples of the sky every day and the colors in the night sky that form various astronomical color formations. Amongst her most fabulous creations is the Milky Way, or Silver River.

Every day once she finishes her weaving, she descends to earth in order to bathe in a stream. One day, a lowly cow herdsman by the name of Niu Lang comes across the Weaver Girl as she bathes and falls in love with her instantly. After consulting the Great Ox, about what he should do to win her love in return, Niu Lang grabs the Weaver Girl's robe causing her to become trapped in the stream, unable to return to the heavens. Niu Lang apologizes to the Weaver Girl and explains to her that the talking ox had told him that if he stole her robe she would have to marry him. The Weaver Girl, seeing the cleverness in this trick, spends time with Niu Lang. In time, they fall in love with one another and marry happily, bearing two children.

After a period of several years, the gods demand that she return to the skies and not spend all her time with such a lowly mortal. the Weaver Girl ascends to heaven, and the gods move the Silver River far away from earth so that Niu Lang cannot follow her. Seeing how heartbroken this leaves the Weaver Girl, however, the gods agree that once a year, on the seventh day of the seventh month of the lunar calendar, the two lovers can meet upon a bridge across the Silver River. The bridge is said to be formed by all the magpies in the

world flying up into the heavens on the appointed night to help weave a bridge.

Today, during this time on the lunar calendar, the two lovers are seen in the night sky as the stars of Vega, the Weaver Girl, and Altair, Niu Lang. The Silver River grows dim at this time of the year, making it appear as though it no longer separates them. Their two children can be seen as two stars shining beside Altair. It is believed that if it rains on the seventh day of the seventh month of the lunar calendar this is the Weaver Girl crying as the magpies have failed to arrive to build a bridge across the Silver River.

Pandora: Greece

Ancient Greek Mythology has many gods and goddesses that play important roles in everyday life. To the Greeks, the gods were the reason for chaos, order, and everything in between. One role the gods had a hand in was the creation of Pandora. According to Greek mythology, she was the first woman created from clay by Hephaestus, the god of craftsmen and sculptors. Hephaestus was instructed by Zeus to create her since he was angered that Prometheus had stolen the gift of fire and given it to mankind. Zeus had formed a plan to get back at Prometheus by using Pandora in an evil way. Zeus instructed all other gods and goddesses to give her traits and characteristics that could go on to make mankind's life harder. He wanted this to be completed before giving her to Prometheus' brother Epimetheus as a gift.

Famously, Pandora goes on to open the box that contains all demons known to the gods that are then unleashed upon mankind. All that remains in the box is Hope, which she keeps inside by resealing the lid at the last moment. It is thought that the box was a gift from the gods as a wedding present when she married Epimetheus. In early versions of the myth the box was actually a jar or jug and the word box seems to have been introduced in the story as a result of mistranslation.

A Closer Look:

Take a look inside, Hope is in fact still there as the myth states. The demon may appear grotesque and startling, but Hope is not meant to be fully pleasant. False hope is as much of

a demon as any of the others released by Pandora and its appearance is a reminder of this.

Mawu-Lisa: Africa

The Fon people of Benin attach great importance to the female deity Mawu and the male deity Lisa, who are often referred to jointly as 'Mawu-Lisa'. They are the twin offspring of the supreme deity Nana Buluku, with Mawu representing the moon and Lisa representing the sun. Mawu is also associated with the West and Lisa being associated with the East. Together they are believed to have created the world and all that it contains in a period of four days.

The act of union between Mawu and Lisa is said to have occurred at the first solar eclipse, and in time the deity produced offspring. Mawu-Lisa gathers their offspring together and gives them all roles in the world. To their first born twins they give the world and all its riches. Their next child remains in the sky as it has both male and female forms, like Mawu-Lisa. The next set of twins they give the oceans, and their next child gets command of all the animals. Their next son is given the task of teaching humans how to live happily, and their next becomes the air.

Each of the offspring is given a language to speak, but the language of the gods is taken away from them. The very last child that Mawu-Lisa have is Legba, who stays with Mawu-Lisa and is the only one who can speak all of the languages, plus the language of the gods. In other myths, Legba is seen as the messenger between all the siblings and connects them all in the world.

Lintukoto: Finland

Finnish mythology believes that the world is made up from a bird's egg. When this egg exploded at the beginning of time, the top of the egg shell became the sky supported by a pole stretched between it and the Earth, known to us as the North Pole. Around the edges of the egg dome, birds have a special land called Lintukoto, or the Milky Way.

In Finnish mythology, the reason birds fly around the world during different periods of the year is because they are traveling between earth and Lintukoto, which is believed to be a warm escape for them during cold winters.

Because of their ability to make such long journeys, birds are believed to be spirit carriers. All people on earth are inhabited by spirits that the birds bring and take away by carrying them between the heavens and earth when we are born and when we die. This may be where the tale of the stork comes from as birds bring life in the form of babies to families while the chest rising for the last time in death is symbolic of a bird lifting the spirit from the body and pulling it free.

A Closer Look:

If you know your star formations then the top of this eggshell will have caught your eye. The little dipper and big dipper are formed with the help of the northern star, which then allows for other formations to branch off around it. Each circle makes up these formations in the top of the shell, and when looked at from below, form the dipper's in the night sky above the village.

Banshee: Ireland (Celts)

The word banshee comes from the Irish phrase 'bean sidhe' meaning 'woman of the side' or 'woman of the fairy mound'. These female spirits are believed to be sent from the underworld as omens of death.

Usually thought of as ugly old hags, banshees can take many forms including that of a beautiful, young, seductive woman, which is the common take on them in Irish culture. Banshees can also take a host of animal forms, mostly a crow or a hare. They are also associated with washerwomen, and are sometimes seen washing the blood from clothes or armor in the river before a large battle as an omen of the death to come.

Banshees have long hair that they brush with a silver comb and dress in cloaks of grey and sometimes red, black, or green. It is said that if you find a comb on the ground in Ireland you should never pick it up, as it may have been left by a Banshee attempting to trap you.

Perhaps more terrifying than the sight of a Banshee is the sound of one. The howl of a Banshee is legendary in its spine-tingling mournfulness. Banshees are reported to be most

commonly heard during the night, and in the proximity of woods and forests. While usually screeching in tone, in some parts of Ireland the Banshee's song is described as having a beautiful lilting sound, though it is still perceived to be a lament. Not all Banshees lure their prey in to a gruesome death though. In some instances Banshees are seen as spirits that help guide mortals to the afterlife, howling and calling for those preparing for death and letting their voice be heard as a warning to the family of the loved one getting ready to pass on.

Damayanti & Nala: India (Hindu)

In Indian culture the story of Princess Damayanti and King Nala is one of the best love stories ever told. Damayanti hears about King Nala from a golden swan and falls in love with him instantly. The gods however think that Damayanti is the most beautiful woman that man and god alike has ever set eyes upon. They disguise themselves as Nala and force Damayanti to choose between them because of this.

All seven replicas of Nala sit in a circle while Damayanti makes her decision. They inform her that whoever she picks is her husband from then on even if it is not her beloved Nala. Damayanti, knowing that her decision is one that will change her life, puts the lei of lotus flowers around her chosen Nala. As soon as she chooses the gods change back into their forms and are enraged. They ask how she knew which the correct Nala was and she informs them that King Nala has imperfections and those imperfections are the ones she has noted and is in love with. The gods all made themselves look perfect, which in her eyes is not what any mortal can be.

A Closer Look:

Colors play a significant role in Hindu culture. Red is the symbol of love and fertility as well as the sign that one can overcome evil,. Yellow is the symbol of happiness, knowledge, and meditation. White is the symbol of peace and purity. Purple is the symbol of the crown chakra which symbolizes pure consciousness, wisdom, spiritual growth, and independence.

Rhiannon & Pwyll: Wales (Celtic)

Rhiannon, in Welsh mythology, is thought to be a form of the goddess Epona. Epona is the protector of horses and goddess of fertility in Celtic mythology. In this myth, Rhiannon is seen on a white horse by Pwyll, King of Dyfed. Having just defeated the king of the underworld's enemy, he comes across her while riding home. He sends his horsemen to catch up with her but they can never accomplish this task. Pwyll, guessing that magic is being used, decides to ride to her himself. She allows him to approach and the two fall in love instantly.

Pwyll asks her for her hand but she says that she is to be married to a man named Gwawl. Pwyll asks what he can do to change this and the two form a plan. Pwyll visits Rhiannon's father on the 12th night of the month with an army to impress him. This changes the father's mind on the marriage instantly, as Rhiannon said he would.

Full of joy, Pwyll sits down to a feast and sees a young man running errands and asks him to sit a while and enjoy the festivities. The man however says he cannot until he finishes his errands. Pwyll tells him that he will give him whatever he needs to finish his errands later. The man's errand was to retrieve Rhiannon for himself though, as he is Gwawl. Pwyll promised to give him whatever he needed before learning this and could not go back on his word. Rhiannon learns of this news and is enraged. She gives a magic bag to Pwyll that will shrink and trap anyone inside. Pwyll is to trap Gwawl inside until he retracts his hold on Rhiannon.

While in the bag, Gwawl undergoes torture, holding to his greed for wanting Rhiannon and all she owns, until he finally agrees to release his betrothal to her and allows the two lovers to be together.

Frog and Ox: Greek (Aesop's Fables)

Aesop is known for his children stories that have a moral lesson to be learned through the animal characters he creates. In one story in particular there is a young frog who goes on an adventure and stumbles upon a large ox. The young frog had never seen such a great animal before and rushed home to tell everyone. He hopped over to his father and told him that he saw a large frog that day that was bigger than him. The father, trying to prove himself, said he could be bigger than the ox and tried to puff out his throat. He asked the son if it was that big but the son said no, so the father continued to puff out his throat. Eventually though the father frog puffs out so much that he explodes. Leaving the saying, "Self-conceit may lead to self-destruction" as the moral of the story.

Valkyries and Valhalla: Norse

Valhalla is known as the hall of heroes or the slain in Norse mythology. Norse mythology covers the areas of Denmark, Norway, Iceland, Sweden, and Finland, among other areas.

When a Norse warrior dies in battle it is believed that a Valkyrie, a lady clothed in feathers and armor sent by Odin, is taken up to Valhalla to await the final battle of Ragnarök. Upon entering Valhalla, the Norse Warrior sees the great tree Glasir which has golden leaves that the stag Eikþyrnir and the goat Heiðrún both stand atop to eat from the foliage of the tree Læraðr which is nearby. After entering into the hall, looking up, the warrior finds a roof made of golden shields, pillars made of spear rods, and a long table with more food to eat than can be imagined.

The Valkyrie that transport the slain from battle to Valhalla are seen as beautiful women that can take the form of horse, swan, or crow. They wear feathers along their body and choose the warriors that will live and die. They only take the strong to Odin in Valhalla and if a warrior is spared from death, they sometimes come back telling stories of how they rode on the wings of a beautiful woman before coming back to life.

Fairy Ring: England

In British and European cultures whenever one would see a mushroom growing in their lawn or nearby forests in a circle formation, they would accredit it to fairies. It is believed that if there is a mushroom ring spotted that fairies spent the night dancing in merriment there and their magic made the ground sprout the fungus rapidly over night.

Many families tell their children that if they see a fairy ring that they should never step inside of it because if they do then the fairies will be able to trap and enslave them forever. Once someone steps inside a fairy ring they lose all track of time and bodily control. The fairies may do as they please with you and in some cases that means death. If you do find yourself within a fairy ring don't eat their food for if you do you must always remain in their land.

These sorts of tales were told to children so as to keep them in bed or away from the curious fungal formations, but spread all over the world and are one of the more common myths still known today in various places. Fairies have been seen in cartoons, books, and people even report seeing them on occasion. One of which being the famous "Cottingly Fairy" story, where photographs were taken by two young girls in which fairies were present. Whether it was a hoax or not, people seem to be drawn to these creatures in myth and lore.

Elephant Woman: Africa (Kamba)

In African mythology, the elephant plays a central role in most stories due to the size and interesting nature of the creature. They are seen as kind, intelligent, and trust worthy animals that are often mistreated and the victim in most myths and legends among the tribes of Africa. One story in particular that gets this message across tells of the first elephant ever to be created.

It is believed that a man was so greedy and hungry for wealth that he went and acquired a magic ointment from Ivonya-Ngia, 'He that feeds the Poor'. He was told by Ivonya-Ngia to rub this ointment on his wife's upper teeth and when the teeth grew to a big

enough size he was to pull them out and sell them. The man did this over and over to the wife, who was obedient and did not want to leave her husband, hoping that each time would be the last.

Seeing that her husband would never be satisfied, she decides one night to leave him. She goes into the wild and her teeth grow so much that she hunches over and begins to grow larger and larger to carry the weight of her teeth. The weight becomes so much that she walks on all fours and eventually turns into what we now know as the elephant.

During her time as an elephant however, the woman was pregnant with a son. This son, conceived while still a human, is born with the intelligence of mankind but the body of an elephant. To the African people, they believe this is why elephants are so trusting, intelligent, and kind. They all come from a trusting woman who was so kind for her own good, and in the end was smart enough to leave greed behind.

Three Feathers: Germany (Grimm Brothers)

The Grimm Brothers are known for their countless tales throughout all of Germany. One in particular is of a King who had three sons. Two were clever but the third was shy and reserved. When the King had become old and weak, and lay upon his death bed, he did not know which of his sons should inherit the kingdom.

He called them all into his chamber one evening and told them that whoever brings him the most beautiful rug shall be King after his death. Now the King did not want the brothers to fight so he took three feathers and blew them into the air outside the castle. He instructed them to follow their feather and wherever it lands is where they must retrieve the rug from. One feather flew to the east, the other to the west, but the third flew straight up and then down.

The two older brothers made fun of the youngest as his feather did not go far from the castle wall. He sat down and was sad until he spotted a trap door nearby. He raised it up, found some steps, and went down them. When he came to the bottom he saw a great, fat toad sitting, and around her a crowd of little toads. The fat toad asked what he wanted so he

answered that he would like the most beautiful rug in the world.

The large frog called a young one over and told it to bring her the great box. The frog opened it, and gave the youngest brother a rug of the finest quality he had ever seen. He thanked her, and went back to his father. The two others had, however, looked on their youngest brother as so stupid that they believed he would find and bring nothing at all. They had simple cloths to present but the rug the youngest brother had was the winner. The two brothers were infuriated and asked for another chance.

The father having no peace from them sent them out on another task. This time they were to retrieve a ring. The feathers were blown and the same situation occurred. The youngest brother went to the fat frog and she went to her great box and pulled out a ring. The King approved of this ring as the brothers did not bring back rings half as nice as the youngest one. The brothers tormented the father until he agreed to one more task. The brothers were to bring him the most beautiful woman they could find. The feathers were sent out and the youngest brother went to visit the toad one last time.

She had no women for him to have but instead gave him a hollowed out turnip, mice, and one of her younger frogs. The youngest brother, being in a rush, put the frog inside and watched as it transformed before his eyes into a lady in a coach with horses. The other brothers of course did not think twice and simply brought the first peasant women they met.

When the King saw them he declared the youngest King after his death. The oldest ones complained though and wanted their newly found wives to go through a task. They needed to jump through a single hoop and the winner who came out unharmed would be the heir to the throne. The brothers thought the peasant women would finish the task with ease but both hurt themselves by cracking legs and arms in the fall down to the ground again. The youngest brother's wife jumped with ease through the hoop and became Queen to the youngest brother, the King.

Psyche: Rome

Psyche was one of three daughters whose beauty was so immense that people neglected to worship Venus, the goddess of love and beauty. This made Venus jealous and causes her to call upon her son, Cupid, the god of love, to shoot an arrow at her so that she falls in love with a hideous beast. Cupid, upon seeing her beauty, falls in love with her however and cannot go through with his mother's plan. He pricks himself with the arrow instead enraging his mother. He refuses to shoot any more love arrows until she agrees to let him marry her. Venus allows this under the condition that Psyche may never see him.

Psyche is taken to a palace tower and kept there where Cupid visits her at night when the lamps are out. Her sisters visit and convince her that her husband is a monster and she should turn the lamp on one night to see for herself. Upon doing this she sees Cupid sleeping next to her on the bed but this causes him to vanish. She realizes that her sisters lied to her and convinces them to jump out of the tower to their death leaving her to find her true love. She sees his quiver of arrows and feathers on the bed and pleads with Venus to help her find the owner of them. Venus knowing all along what has happened agrees to help Psyche under the condition: that she passes a set of tasks.

The first task is to separate grain into baskets before nightfall. Psyche is able to accomplish this with the help of ants. The second task is to pluck golden wool from golden sheep that are vicious when approached. She is able to accomplish this with the help of the river god who informs her that the sheep sleep deeply at noon under a tree in the shade. Her third task is to retrieve water from a cleft of poisonous serpents which she does with the help of an eagle who shows her the safe path.

The last task is to go into the underworld and steal the queen's jewelry box which contains beauty. Psyche accomplishes this but is curious and opens the box upon leaving. In doing this she falls into a permanent sleep. Cupid, having been looking for her this whole time, finds her outside the entrance to the underworld with the look of death upon her face. In his sadness he kisses her only to find that his love has brought her back to life.

In midst of the curse Venus put on the two, Cupid seeks the help of Jupiter to lift it and in doing so Psyche is granted immortality and the two live happily, able to see each other without the threat of vanishing or death.

Rudabeh: Persia

In Persian mythology Rudabeh was the daughter descended from the serpent king, Zohak. Zohak was feared by many because of the two snakes that sprang from his shoulders and fed off the brains of their victims. Rudabeh was nothing like her father however. She is described as being as beautiful as the moon with dark hair that falls long past her ankles and eyes with lashes drawing their blackness from the raven's wing.

Zal, raised by a mythical bird after being abandoned by his parents hears of this beauty and travels to see for himself. He consults her handmaids and a meeting is arranged. Their unlikely romance includes a moment when Rudabeh offers to let down her hair so that Zal can use it as a rope to climb into her tower, where her father keeps her as protection from those that would steal her away.

This leads to the two falling in love. Their marriage takes place on the very balcony that Zal climbed through to meet Rudabeh for the first time. Their union brings about a child name Rostam who fulfills a prophecy and is the main hero of the Shahnama, which is a long epic poem that describes the mythical and historical past of the Islamic conquest of Persia.