Please read the following selections from this book:

Introduction
Creation; Four Ages; Lycaon; Flood
Phaethon
The Rape of Proserpina
Tiresias
Echo and Narcissus
Erysichthon
Semele
Actaeon
Arachne
Bacchus & Pentheus
Midas
Pyramus and Thisbe
INTRODUCTION & THEORY

Mythic literature has an air of familiarity about it. It is like a song whose tune leaps to mind after hearing just a few notes, even if the lyrics are forgotten. Like music, myths float across great distances of time and place to awaken memories we didn't know we had. To read them in the great poetry of their own era brings them alive in their time, and brings them into ours. Ultimately, myths are reflections of ourselves, our world, and our cultural heritage.

It is vital to study these myths for cultural literacy. Ted Hughes’ translation of Ovid’s Metamorphoses provides the foundations for the classical (ancient Greek) epics and plays we will read this year. They introduce the great gods as characters, and provide important landmarks referred to in other works. They will ground us in the mythic landscape of those epics, and will help us find our way through the cultural imagination of their time.

The tales themselves, like all great myths, can be read on a number of levels. Joseph Campbell in The Power of Myth locates four functions of myth and the domains they explain to a culture. In a nutshell, the four levels are the:

**Mystical:**

The Mysteries, the unknowable and unknown; Death, God, Creation

**Cosmological:**

The shape of the Universe, observable natural phenomena, the realm of the senses, the present-day realm of science

**Sociological:**

The structure of society and our place in it

**Pedagogical:**

Individual, personal instruction on how to be a successful and fulfilled human being

On the most basic pedagogical level, these myths can be seen as cautionary tales, where the actions or attitudes of a character are punished (or occasionally rewarded) by a fitting transformation. A little more deeply, they provide metaphors for an individual’s psychology, and show how a person’s passionate adherence to certain priorities can transform his life permanently.

On a sociological level, these stories display the values of ancient Greek and Roman culture, and pass judgment on individual behavior in transformations that correspond with their crimes. This is where the reader derives a sense of Poetic Justice, with the authority of the culture’s unwritten rules behind it.
On a **cosmological level**, the myths reveal the structure of the ancients’ universe as they saw it. On a concrete level, the transformations can explain nature as Kipling’s *Just So Stories* explain how the elephant got his trunk; *Metamorphoses* explains why the Narcissus grows by springs in the forest. But more profoundly, the gods themselves can represent the domains of sky, earth & sea, and the underworld; the powers of nature, and the ethical purpose behind them; and the powers of the human body and mind.

On a **mystical level**, these tales address the mystery of transformation itself, in all its forms and rites; physical and spiritual, old life to new life, life to death, death to memory. That humans are capable of transformation lends an air of mystery to human existence, seemingly supernatural and inexplicable in its suddenness and power.

**STUDY QUESTIONS**

For each of these stories, use following patterns of questions:

**Plot:**

1. Define the gods and their domains (what the god is in charge of, what the god values).
2. Define the characters and their relationships with the gods.
3. Locate the inciting event that starts the conflict between the character and the god.
4. Locate the character’s transformation.
5. Explain why the transformation fits. Is the character successful or a failure, and why?

**Analysis:**

1. Evaluate each story using the four functions of myth. Which function does each story predominantly address?
2. Play with interpretation.
   
   A) First, try to explain the story on the simplest cautionary level, or as the most concrete “Just So Story”.
   
   B) Then, move to a psychological level, and show how the individual character bears responsibility for his transformation.
   
   C) Discover what motivates these characters. What do you feel in response to their suffering?
   
   D) Then try to articulate the Greek cultural rules and societal values the story displays. Do those values still apply today?

**Appendix:** See the attached chart as a guide to the gods and their domains.

**Work Cited:**

## Greek and Roman Gods

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Greek Name</th>
<th>Roman Equivalent</th>
<th>Cosmic Domain</th>
<th>Human Domain</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Zeus</td>
<td>Jupiter/Jove</td>
<td>King of Gods, the sky, lightning and Thunderbolts</td>
<td>Hospitality, protector of suppliants, signs, and omens</td>
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<tr>
<td>Poseidon</td>
<td>Neptune</td>
<td>Sea and Earthquake</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hades</td>
<td>Pluto</td>
<td>The Underworld, Death</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Demeter</td>
<td>Ceres</td>
<td>Fertility, plants &amp; grain, the harvest, seasons</td>
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<tr>
<td>Phoebus Apollo</td>
<td>Apollo</td>
<td>Light, The Sun (also Helios)</td>
<td>Music, reason, justice, archery</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hephaestus</td>
<td>Vulcan</td>
<td>Volcanoes</td>
<td>Metal-smithing, craft</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hera</td>
<td>Juno</td>
<td></td>
<td>Women and marriage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aphrodite</td>
<td>Venus</td>
<td></td>
<td>Love and beauty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eros</td>
<td>Cupid</td>
<td></td>
<td>Lust and attraction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ares</td>
<td>Mars</td>
<td></td>
<td>War, combat, and battle-lust</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Artemis</td>
<td>Diana</td>
<td></td>
<td>Chastity, maidens, the hunt, archery</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pallas Athena</td>
<td>Minerva</td>
<td></td>
<td>Wisdom, tactical warfare, strategy (Metis), Weaving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dionysus</td>
<td>Bacchus</td>
<td></td>
<td>Wine, ecstasy, dance, theatre</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hermes</td>
<td>Mercury</td>
<td></td>
<td>Messenger, trickster, protector of thieves</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hestia</td>
<td>Vesta</td>
<td></td>
<td>The hearth and home</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Adapted from: [http://www.theoi.com/greek-mythology/greek-gods.html](http://www.theoi.com/greek-mythology/greek-gods.html)