



U·X·L Encyclopedia of World Mythology

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U·X·L® Encyclopedia of World Mythology

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NEW TITLE  Mythology is more than just a collection of stories and characters. They act as a window into the beliefs and values of ancient civilizations. This new five-volume set from U·X·L will help students with the plot points, the historical context, and the mythological allusions they need to fully understand how mythologies not only reflect cultures of old but also remain meaningful in society today.


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Coverage in *U·X·L Encyclopedia of World Mythology* spans a diversity of cultures, including standard Greek/Roman mythology as well as Native North and South American traditions, Norse mythology, Asian Pacific mythology, Judeo-Christian tradition, Islamic and Hindu mythologies and other ethnic mythologies. Full-color inserts for each volume enhance the reader's understanding of the text.


A

 Character

 Deity

 Myth

 Theme

 Culture

Achilles

Character Overview

Achilles (pronounced uh-KILL-eez) is one of the most important warriors in Greek mythology. He had strength, bravery, military skills, pride, and honor—all qualities that the ancient Greeks prized as manly virtues. Yet his behavior was also shaped by anger, stubbornness, and revenge. The conflict between Achilles' larger-than-life virtues and his all-too-human weaknesses plays an important part in the heroic tragedy of the *Iliad*.

Like many mythological heroes, Achilles was part human and part supernatural being. His parents were Peleus (pronounced pe-LAY-us), a king of Thessaly in northern Greece, and a sea nymph named Thetis (pronounced THREE-tis). According to Homer, Thetis raised both Achilles and his closest friend and companion, Patroclus (pronounced pah-TROH-4dhuhs).

According to legend, Achilles' mother Thetis tried to make her infant son invulnerable (incapable of being wounded, injured, or harmed) by dipping him into the river Styx, which flowed through the underworld, or land of the dead. Afterward, no sword or arrow could pierce Achilles wherever the Styx's water had touched him. However, the water did not touch the heel by which Thetis held Achilles, so this remained the only vulnerable spot on his body. This myth is the source of the term *Achilles' heel*, which refers to a person's most notable weakness.

Nationality/Culture
Greek

Pronunciation
uh-KILL-eez

Alternate Names
None

Appears in
Homer's *Iliad*, tales of the Trojan War

Lineage
Son of Peleus and the nymph Thetis

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Achilles

Achilles was killed on the battlefield when he was struck in his vulnerable heel by an arrow fired by Hector's brother, Paris.

Achilles in Context

The Trojan War in which Achilles fought was a struggle between two different groups—the Greeks and the Trojans—over Helen, who was a symbol of Greek pride as the most beautiful woman in the world. Modern-day scholars do not know for sure just how much of the story of the Trojan War is fiction, but the story reflects the reality of living in a time period when the ancient Greeks were frequently in conflict with nearby regions for control of land and resources. The warrior culture of ancient times arose from the need to protect land used for farming or keeping animals. Warriors also conquered more land when poor farming conditions or conflict with other peoples made moving necessary. Young men were trained in warrior skills as well as in the warrior code of honor and glory. Under the command of Alexander the Great, the Greeks succeeded on the battlefield and spread their empire across much of what is now the Middle East and western Asia. In an oral culture such as ancient Greece, the tales of battles and heroism passed on from generation to generation highlighted the importance of heroic deeds and glory.

The glory Achilles achieves does not make him a perfect example of a Greek man, however. His pride causes him to put himself above that of the army in which he fights, and results in both heavy Greek losses in battle and the death of his own best friend Patroclus. This flaw in the character of Achilles reflects the importance of the group over that of an individual to the ancient Greeks. In ancient Greek society, life was so difficult that people relied heavily on their social relationships in order to survive; one person acting for his or her own interests rather than that of the group could bring about the downfall of everyone.

Key Themes and Symbols

Achilles represents the ultimate warrior, seeking glory through his skills as a soldier. He chooses to die on the battlefield, knowing his heroic deeds will be remembered forever, rather than live a long, unremarkable life away from battle.

Another theme of the story of Achilles is revenge. After having an argument with Agamemnon, Achilles gets his revenge on the king by

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▲ Standard subheads make it easy for students to pick out information and compare across entries.

“Contains such a wealth of information it should rank high on all school libraries’ must have list.”

— ARBA, August 2008

A UNIQUE RESOURCE

U•X•L Encyclopedia of World Mythology is unique for its depth of individual myths, its breadth of cultures covered and its accessibility to middle school students and up. Sample entries include:

- Achilles
- The Aeneid
- Amazons
- Aphrodite
- Arachne
- Aztec Mythology
- Beowulf
- Celtic Mythology
- Chinese Mythology
- Circe
- Cybele
- Cyclopes
- Dragons
- Eros
- Fates
- Fenrir
- Fire
- Genies (djinn)
- Giants
- Gilgamesh
- Hades
- Helen of Troy
- Hercules
- Hermes
- Holy Grail
- Horus
- Huitzilopochtli
- Idun
- Incan Mythology
- Indra
- Ishtar
- Isis
- Izanagi and Izanami
- Janus
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- Kachinas
- Krishna
- Leprechauns
- Loki
- Marduk
- Medea
- Medusa
- Minotaur
- And many more

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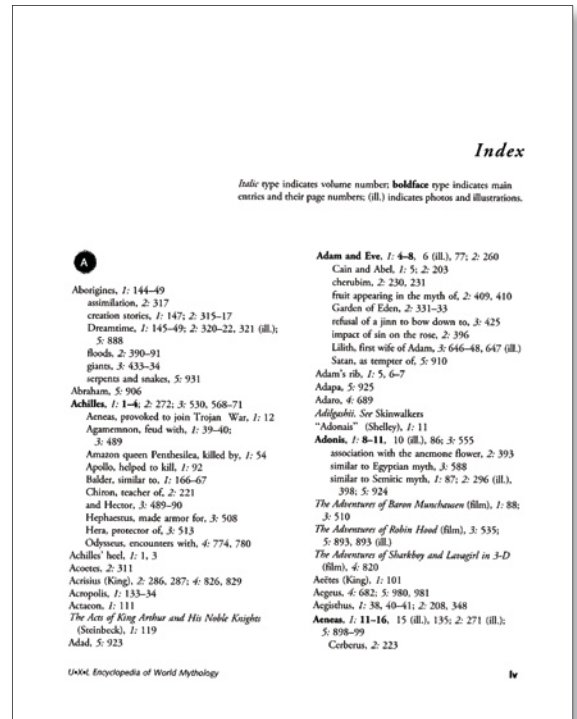
Why do so many cultures have flood myths? What cultures have a god like Pan? Consistent subheads in *U•X•L Encyclopedia of World Mythology* entries make it easy for students to pick out information and compare mythologies across cultures, including:

- Overview
- Context
- Key Themes and Symbols
- Art, Literature and Everyday Life
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▲ **The cumulative index enables students to research common themes in many mythologies and various cultures.**

HELPFUL TOOLS

The following helpful tools direct users to needed information, provide context and spur further research:

- A table of contents (by ethnicity/nationality)
- Research ideas and activities
- Chronology of myths and ancient civilizations
- Glossary
- A cumulative general index (by character, subject, theme)