

Directions:

A. Each group member will read a different creation story. After you read, answer these questions:

1. Who created the earth in this story?
2. How was the earth created in this story?
3. How were humans created in this story?
4. Is the creation of the earth and humans violent in this story?

B. Each group member will summarize their creation story for the other group members.

C. As a group, talk about and answer the following questions:

1. What are some major differences between the stories?
2. What similarities do you see among the stories? List similarities that you discuss and which stories have those characteristics.
3. What are the major differences between the Christian creation story and the other three?

Shinto Creation Story

According to Japanese Shinto Mythology, at the beginning of time, the heavens and the earth were mixed together in a great cloud. Slowly, the clearer, lighter parts of the cloud rose up and became heaven. The heavier parts of the cloud descended and became an ocean of muddy water. Between the heavens and the earth, a pale green sprout began to grow. It grew swiftly and was extremely strong. When the plant's flower burst open, the First God emerged. This First God then created Izanagi, is the god of all that is light and heavenly. Izanagi, whose name means "the male who invites", and his wife and sister Izanami, whose name means "the female who invites." The First God gave Izanagi the task of finishing the creation of the world.

Standing on rainbow called Ama-no-ukihashi (the floating bridge of the heavens), they plunged a jewel crested spear into the ocean. When they pulled it free, the water that dripped from the spear coagulated and formed the first island of the Japanese archipelago. Izanagi and Izanami went down to this island and settled down on it. Together, on this island, they made the islands of Japan.

When Izanami died giving birth to the god of fire, Izanagi went to the underworld to retrieve her, but she refused to come back with him and they parted forever. When Izanagi returned from the underworld, he started the first cleaning rites. He washed his left eye and thus created the sun goddess Amaterasu. When he washed his right eye, the moon goddess Tsuki-Yumi came forth. From his nose he created Susanowo, the god of the seas and the storms.

Later, Izanagi created the first people and animals of the island.

Izanagi gave Amaterasu authority to rule the land. Amaterasu had children and grandchildren. In consultation with other senior kami she decided that Japan should be ruled for ever by an Imperial family.

She sent one grandchild, Ninigi, from heaven to rule Japan. He took with him a mirror (symbol of Amaterasu) and a sword. His grandson, Jimmu Tenno, is regarded as the first Emperor of Japan from whom all the Emperors right up to the present day have been descended.

Christian Creation Story (abridged)

In the beginning there was nothing. And then God spoke in the darkness: "Let there be light!" And right away there was light, scattering the darkness and showing the infinite space. God saw that it was good. "From now on, when it's dark it will be 'night'" and when it's light, it will be 'day'." That was the first day.

On the second day, God separated the sea from the sky. God saw that this was good, and the second day was over.

The next morning God all the water in one place and all the dry land in another. When He had finished that, God made plants to cover the land. God saw that it was good, and that was the end of the third day.

On the fourth day, God made the sun to light the sky during the day and the moon and stars to add a bit of sparkle to the night. He hung them in the sky and stepped back to look at his work. That was the fourth day.

The next day, God turned his attention to the water he had collected in the oceans. "I want these waters filled with life!" As soon as He said it, it was so. In no time, there were millions of small fish darting through the shallow water and huge fish swimming in the ocean. God made birds, too. He sent them soaring through the air. God saw this was good. The dusk fell over the water and the sky grew dark and that was the end of the fifth day.

On the sixth day, God added creatures to the land. He made lions and tigers and bears. He made rabbits and sheep and cows. He added everything from ants to zebras to the land. But He still felt something was missing. So God added humans to enjoy and take care of all that He had created.

God took some clay from the ground and made the shape of a man. Then He breathed gently into the shape. The man's eye's opened and he began to live. God called him Adam. God had made the man in His image to keep Him company and look after the world.

But God felt sorry for Adam. None of these animals were really like Adam. He needed someone to share his life. Someone who cares for him and who he can care for.

That night, God took a rib from Adam's side and made a woman. When Adam awoke the following morning, he found a wife, Eve, lying asleep beside him. Adam was so happy. He took her hand and she woke up. She looked up at him and smiled.

After six days, the whole universe was completed. On the seventh day God had a nice long rest and enjoyed looking at all He had made.

Aztec Creation Story

In the beginning was the void. It was at some ancient time in the Aztec creation story that the dual god, Omecihuatl, created itself. This god was good and bad, chaos and order, male and female. Omecihuatl had four children, which represent the four directions of north, south, east and west. The directions were very important to the Aztecs, since they believed their empire was at the very centre of the universe.

These four gods began to create. They created water, and other gods, and the sea monster Cipactli. Cipactli was part fish and part crocodile, a massive creature as big as all things that now are. This was a monster made to consume things, a jaw at every joint.

As the gods continued to create, they had a problem - their creations would fall into the water and be eaten by the dreadful Cipactli. So it was time for war - the four gods attacked the sea monster, pulling her in four directions. She fought back, biting Tezcatlipoca (west) and tearing off his foot. But at last Cipactli was destroyed.

From this enormous creature the universe was created. All the 13 heavens stretch into her head. The earth was created in the middle, and her tail reaches down to the underworld (nine underworlds, to be exact).

In the Aztec creation story the world is on the back of this sea monster, floating in the water of space.

To complete the world, the great source of energy had to be created - the sun. But the sun is so powerful, it can't just be created. It can only come into being through the sacrifice of a god. There were several fights between the gods and several suns. The world was destroyed and restarted several times. The final sun is the fifth sun. (The sun we have now.) According to the Aztecs, it will be destroyed by earthquakes.

In the darkness between the suns, Quetzalcoatl (east) descended into the underworld to bring up the bones of the dead. Quetzalcoatl then dripped his own blood onto the bones. The bones transformed into living, breathing people, the Aztecs.

In order to show their gratitude towards Quetzalcoatl for giving them life, the Aztecs sacrificed people on special holidays.

West African Creation Story

Long ago, well before there were any people, all life existed in the sky. Olorun lived in the sky, and with Olorun were many gods. There were both male and female, but Olorun transcended male and female and was the all-powerful supreme being. Olorun and the other gods lived around a young baobab tree. Around the baobab tree the gods found everything they needed for their lives, and in fact they wore beautiful clothes and gold jewelry. Olorun told them that all the vast sky was theirs to explore.

Olorun agreed to send Obatala to the watery world below. Finally he told Obatala to prepare a chain of gold, and to gather sand, palm nuts, and maize. He also told Obatala to get the sacred egg carrying the personalities of all the gods.

Obatala went to his fellow gods to ask for their gold, and they all gave him all the gold they had. He took this to the goldsmith, who melted all the jewelry to make the links of the golden chain. When Obatala realized that the goldsmith had made all the gold into links, he had the goldsmith melt a few of them back down to make a hook for the end of the chain.

Obatala hooked the chain into the sky, and he began to climb down the chain. For seven days he went down and down, until finally he reached the end of the chain. He hung at its end, not sure what to do, and he looked and listened for any clue. He took the sand from his pack and poured out the sand into the water below. The sand hit the water, and to his surprise it spread and solidified to make a vast land.

Finally Obatala let go of the chain and dropped to this new land, which he called "Ife", the place that divides the waters. Soon he began to explore this land, and as he did so he scattered the seeds from his pack, and as he walked the seeds began to grow behind him, so that the land turned green in his wake.

After walking a long time, Obatala grew thirsty and stopped at a small pond. As he bent over the water, he saw his reflection and was pleased. He took some clay from the edge of the pond and began to mold it into the shape he had seen in the reflection. He finished that one and began another, and before long he had made many of these bodies from the dark earth at the pond's side.

Before long, Olorun checked on Obatala's progress. Then he created a fireball and sent it to Ife, where it dried the lands that were still wet and began to bake the clay figures that Obatala had made. The fireball even set the earth to spinning, as it still does today. Olorun then blew his breath across Ife, and Obatala's figures slowly came to life as the first people of Ife.