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English 8 | Comparative Mythology Stories Booklet (SEVEN Stories)

1. Story Title: THE RAVEN STEALS THE LIGHT (Indigenous) (nine chapters)

Chapter ONE

Before there was anything, before the great flood had covered the earth and receded, before the animals walked the earth or the trees covered the land or the birds flew between the trees, even before the fish and the whales and seals swam in the sea, an old man lived in a house on the bank of a river with his only child, a daughter. Whether she was as beautiful as hemlock fronds against the spring sky at sunrise or as ugly as a sea slug doesn't really matter very much to this story, which takes place mainly in the dark. Because at that time the whole world was dark. Inky, pitchy, all-consuming dark, blacker than a thousand stormy winter midnights, blacker than anything anywhere has been since. The reason for all this blackness has to do with the old man in the house by the river, who had had a box which contained an infinite number of boxes each nestled in a box slightly larger than itself until finally there was a box so small all it could contain was all the light in the universe.

Chapter TWO

The Raven, who of course existed at that time, because he had always existed and always would, was somewhat less than satisfied with this state of affairs, since it led to an awful lot of blundering around and bumping into things. It slowed him down a good deal in his pursuit of food and other fleshly pleasures, and in his constant effort to interfere and to change things. Eventually, his bumbling around in the dark took him close to the home of the old man. He first heard a little singsong voice muttering away. When he followed the voice, he soon came to the wall of the house, and there, placing his ear against the planking, he could just make out the words, "I have a box and inside the box is another box and inside it are many more boxes, and in the smallest box of all is all the light in the world, and it is all mine and I'll never give any of it to anyone, not even my daughter, because, who knows, she may be as homely as a sea slug, and neither she nor I would like to know that."

Chapter THREE

It only took an instant for the Raven to decide to steal the light for himself, but it took a lot longer for him to invent a way to do so. First he had to find a door into the house. But no

matter how many times he circled it or how carefully he felt the planking, it remained a smooth, unbroken barrier. Sometimes he heard either the old man or his daughter leave the house to get water or for some other reason, but they always departed from the side of the house opposite to him, and when he ran around to the other side the wall seemed as unbroken as ever. Finally, the Raven retired a little way upstream and thought and thought about how he could enter the house. As he did so, he began to think more and more of the young girl who lived there, and thinking of her began to stir more than just the Raven's imagination. "It's probably that she's as homely as a sea slug," he said to himself, "but on the other hand, she may be as beautiful as the fronds of the hemlock would be against a bright spring sunrise, if only there were enough light to make one." And in that idle speculation, he found the solution to his problem.

Chapter FOUR

He waited until the young woman, whose footsteps he could distinguish by now from those of her father, came to the river to gather water. Then he changed himself into a single hemlock needle, dropped himself into the river and floated down just in time to be caught in the basket which the girl was dipping in the river. Even in his much diminished form, the Raven was able to make at least a very small magic -- enough to make the girl so thirsty she took a deep drink from the basket, and in so doing, swallowed the needle. The Raven slithered down deep into her warm insides and found a soft, comfortable spot, where he transformed himself once more, this time into a very small human being, and went to sleep for a long while. And as he slept he grew. The young girl didn't have any idea what was happening to her, and of course she didn't tell her father, who noticed nothing unusual because it was so dark -- until suddenly he became very aware indeed of a new presence in the house, as the Raven at last emerged triumphantly in the shape of a human boychild.

Chapter FIVE

He was -- or would have been, if anyone could have seen him -- a strange-looking boy, with a long beaklike nose and a few feathers here and there. In addition, he had the shining eyes of the Raven, which would have given his face a bright, inquisitive appearance -- if anyone could have seen these features then. And he was noisy. He had a cry that contained all the noises of a spoiled child and an angry raven -- yet he could sometimes speak as softly as the wind in the hemlock boughs, with an echo of that beautiful other sound, like an organic bell, which is also part of every raven's speech. At times like that his grandfather grew to love this strange new member of his household and spent many hours playing with him, making him toys and

inventing games for him. As he gained more and more of the affection and confidence of the old man, the Raven felt more intently around the house, trying to find where the light was hidden. After much exploration, he was convinced it was kept in the big box which stood in the corner of the house.

Chapter SIX

One day he cautiously lifted the lid, but of course could see nothing, and all he could feel was another box. His grandfather, however, heard his precious treasure chest being disturbed, and he dealt very harshly with the would-be thief, threatening dire punishment if the Ravenchild ever touched the box again. This triggered a tidal wave of noisy protests, followed by tender importuning, in which the Raven never mentioned the light, but only pleaded for the largest box. That box, said the Ravenchild, was the one thing he needed to make him completely happy. As most if not all grandfathers have done since the beginning, the old man finally yielded and gave his grandchild the outermost box. This contented the boy for a short time -- but as most if not all grandchildren have done since the beginning, the Raven soon demanded the next box.

Chapter SEVEN

It took many days and much cajoling, carefully balanced with well-planned tantrums, but one by one the boxes were removed. When only a few were left, a strange radiance, never before seen, began to infuse the darkness of the house, disclosing vague shapes and their shadows, still too dim to have definite form. The Ravenchild then begged in his most pitiful voice to be allowed to hold the light for just a moment. His request was instantly refused, but of course in time his grandfather yielded. The old man lifted the light, in the form of a beautiful, incandescent ball, from the final box and tossed it to his grandson. He had only a glimpse of the child on whom he had lavished such love and affection, for even as the light was travelling toward him, the child changed from his human form to a huge, shining black shadow, wings spread and beak open, waiting. The Raven snapped up the light in his jaws, thrust his great wings downward and shot through the smokehole of the house into the huge darkness of the world.

Chapter EIGHT

The world was at once transformed. Mountains and valleys were starkly silhouetted, the river sparkled with broken reflections, and everywhere life began to stir. And from far away, another great winged shape launched itself into the air, as light struck the eyes of the Eagle for the first time and showed him his target. The Raven flew on, rejoicing in his wonderful new

possession, admiring the effect it had on the world below, revelling in the experience of being able to see where he was going, instead of flying blind and hoping for the best. He was having such a good time that he never saw the Eagle until the Eagle was almost upon him. In a panic he swerved to escape the savage outstretched claws, and in doing so he dropped a good half of the light he was carrying. It fell to the rocky ground below and there broke into pieces -- one large piece and too many small ones to count. They bounced back into the sky and remain there even today as the moon and the stars that glorify the night.

Chapter NINE

The Eagle pursued the Raven beyond the rim of the world, and there, exhausted by the long chase, the Raven finally let go of his last piece of light. Out beyond the rim of the world, it floated gently on the clouds and started up over the mountains lying to the east. Its first rays caught the smokehole of the house by the river, where the old man sat weeping bitterly over the loss of his precious light and the treachery of his grandchild. But as the light reached in, he looked up and for the first time saw his daughter, who had been quietly sitting during all this time, completely bewildered by the rush of events. The old man saw that she was as beautiful as the fronds of a hemlock against a spring sky at sunrise, and he began to feel a little better.

2. Story Title: IROQUOIS CREATION MYTH (Indigenous)

Long before the world was created there was an island, floating in the sky, upon which the Sky People lived. They lived quietly and happily. No one ever died or was born or experienced sadness. However one day one of the Sky Women realized she was going to give birth to twins. She told her husband, who flew into a rage. In the center of the island there was a tree which gave light to the entire island since the sun hadn't been created yet. He tore up this tree, creating a huge hole in the middle of the island. Curiously, the woman peered into the hole. Far below she could see the waters that covered the earth. At that moment her husband pushed her. She fell through the hole, tumbling towards the waters below.

Water animals already existed on the earth, so far below the floating island two birds saw the Sky Woman fall. Just before she reached the waters they caught her on their backs and brought her to the other animals. Determined to help the woman they dove into the water to get mud from the bottom of the seas. One after another the animals tried and failed. Finally, Little Toad tried and when he reappeared his mouth was full of mud. The animals took it and spread it on

the back of Big Turtle. The mud began to grow and grow and grow until it became the size of North America.

Then the woman stepped onto the land. She sprinkled dust into the air and created stars. Then she created the moon and sun.

The Sky Woman gave birth to twin sons. She named one Sapling. He grew to be kind and gentle. She named the other Flint and his heart was as cold as his name. They grew quickly and began filling the earth with their creations.

Sapling created what is good. He made animals that are useful to humans. He made rivers that went two ways and into these he put fish without bones. He made plants that people could eat easily. If he was able to do all the work himself there would be no suffering.

Flint destroyed much of Sapling's work and created all that is bad. He made the rivers flow only in one direction. He put bones in fish and thorns on berry bushes. He created winter, but Sapling gave it life so that it could move to give way to Spring. He created monsters which his brother drove beneath the Earth.

Eventually Sapling and Flint decided to fight till one conquered the other. Neither was able to win at first, but finally Flint was beaten. Because he was a god Flint could not die, so he was forced to live on Big Turtle's back. Occasionally his anger is felt in the form of a volcano.

The Iroquois people hold a great respect for all animals. This is mirrored in their creation myth by the role the animals play. Without the animals' help the Sky Woman may have sunk to the bottom of the sea and earth may not have been created.

3. Story Title: ADAM AND EVE (the Bible)

This is the account of the heavens and the earth when they were created, when the Lord God made the earth and the heavens.

Now no shrub had yet appeared on the earth and no plant had yet sprung up, for the Lord God had not sent rain on the earth and there was no one to work the ground, but streams came up from the earth and watered the whole surface of the ground. Then the Lord God formed a

man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.

Now the Lord God had planted a garden in the east, in Eden; and there he put the man he had formed. The Lord God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground—trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food. In the middle of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

A river watering the garden flowed from Eden; from there it was separated into four headwaters. The name of the first is the Pishon; it winds through the entire land of Havilah, where there is gold. (The gold of that land is good; aromatic resin and onyx are also there.) The name of the second river is the Gihon; it winds through the entire land of Cush. The name of the third river is the Tigris; it runs along the east side of Ashur. And the fourth river is the Euphrates.

The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. And the Lord God commanded the man, “You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die.”

The Lord God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.”

Now the Lord God had formed out of the ground all the wild animals and all the birds in the sky. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name. So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds in the sky and all the wild animals.

But for Adam no suitable helper was found. So the Lord God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man’s ribs and then closed up the place with flesh. Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man.

The man said, “This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called ‘woman,’ for she was taken out of man.” That is why a man leaves his father and mother and

is united to his wife, and they become one flesh. Adam and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame.

4. Story Title: THE FALL (the Bible)

Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden'?"

The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, but God did say, 'You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.' "

"You will not certainly die," the serpent said to the woman. "For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.

Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden. But the Lord God called to the man, "Where are you?"

He answered, "I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid."

And he said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?"

The man said, "The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it."

Then the Lord God said to the woman, "What is this you have done?"

The woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate."

So the Lord God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this, "Cursed are you above all livestock and all wild animals! You will crawl on your belly and you will eat dust all the days of your life. And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel."

To the woman he said, "I will make your pains in childbearing very severe; with painful labor you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you."

To Adam he said, "Because you listened to your wife and ate fruit from the tree about which I commanded you, 'You must not eat from it,' cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat food from it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return."

Adam named his wife Eve, because she would become the mother of all the living.

The Lord God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them. And the Lord God said, "The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil. He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and also take from the tree of life and eat, and live forever." So the Lord God banished him from the Garden of Eden to work the ground from which he had been taken. After he drove the man out, he placed on the east side of the Garden of Eden cherubim and a flaming sword flashing back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life.

5. Story Title: ROMULUS AND REMUS (Birth of Rome)

A long time ago, Numitor was the king of a small country called Alba Longa. One day, Amulius, Numitor's evil brother, decided to become king himself. He staged a coup and sent Numitor to exile. After claiming the throne successfully, Amulius turned his focus on Rhea Silvia, Numitor's daughter.

Amulius was not afraid of Rhea Silvia. But he was afraid of the children she could have when she married. He thought the children would be a big threat. They could seek revenge and overthrow him. As Amulius pondered a solution, a great idea came to mind. He could make

his niece a priestess to the goddess of Vestal. As a priestess, she could never get married and have children. Without the children, he would have nothing to worry about. Pleased with the idea, he saw to it right away. He forced Rhea Silvia to take a vow and become a priestess to the goddess of Vestal. He had her living in a temple.

For a while, the plan seemed to be working as Amulius had hoped. Then, an unexpected thing happened. Mars, the god of war, visited Rhea Silvia in the temple. The two fell in love. Several months later, Rhea Silvia gave birth to twin boys. When Amulius heard the news, he was very mad! To control the damage, he gave out two orders. The first was to put his niece in a prison. The second was to put the babies in a basket and throw the whole thing into the River Tiber.

Unknown to him, the babies did not die. The current washed the basket ashore. Once it reached dry land, a she-wolf (female wolf) came and nurtured the two boys with her milk. She stayed and looked after them for quite some time. Then, a shepherd named Faustulus found the two boys. He brought them home. He and his wife adopted them. They named the twins Romulus and Remus

Years went by. The twins grew up healthy and strong. They became shepherds like Faustulus. One day Remus had a fight with another group of shepherds. He lost and was sent to face those shepherds' boss, Numitor. When Numitor saw Remus, he noticed how unusual the young man was. He asked him a lot of questions. Before long, Numitor realized that this young man was not an ordinary shepherd. He was his grandson! After a tearful reunion, he told Romulus and Remus what had happened all those years ago. Upon hearing of Amulius's devious acts, Romulus and Remus were very mad. They vowed to seek revenge and overthrow their great uncle. True to their words, they did exactly that. They killed Amulius. And they restored Numitor as the rightful king of Alba Longa.

Romulus and Remus stayed with their grandfather in Alba Longa for a while. But they got bored. They decided to go back to the place where Faustulus had found them and build a city there. As the construction was underway, Romulus and Remus argued over the height of the city walls. Romulus thought the walls were fine. Remus disagreed. He insisted that they were too low. The two bickered and fought. In the midst of argument, Remus jumped over the walls to prove his point. Romulus was furious. He did not like to be mocked or teased. He charged toward his twin brother and killed him on the spot! With Remus gone, Romulus became the sole ruler of this new city that stood over seven hills. He named it after himself. He called it Rome. The year, according to the legend, was 753 B.C.

6. Story Title: PROMETHEUS (Greek)

Two of the Titans had turned from their own people to side with Zeus in the war of the gods. They were not banished like their brothers, but were given one of the most important and honoured tasks that the victorious Olympians had to offer.

To these two, the brothers Prometheus and Epimetheus, were entrusted the duty of creating living beings to inhabit the world. The younger brother, Epimetheus, set himself immediately to the task, and made an interesting variety of creatures. In typical fashion, however, (for his name meant "Afterthought"), he blithely gave away all the best gifts first. To some creatures he gave warm fur, to others, colourful feathers; some received majestic wings which enabled them to soar above the clouds, and others were given fins which allowed them to probe the depths of the ocean. To some animals Epimetheus gave great strength, to some he gave great speed, and to some, great beauty. Then, when the time came to create man, there was nothing left.

The elder brother, Prometheus (whose name meant "Forethought"), considered the plight of this poor helpless creature made in his own form, and wondered what he could do for him. No fur covered the shivering body. There was not much strength in the puny limbs. Since he walked on only two legs, man could not move very quickly. Most important of all, he did not even have any natural protection such as Epimetheus had given the other animals. To help the poor creature at all, Prometheus would have to resort to unusual means. What one gift could he find for man, to save him and even make him superior to the animals?

Prometheus had seen the sacred fire, kindled by the sun-god, which burned on Mount Olympus. He realized that if mankind could obtain this unique possession, he would not only survive but would be able to raise himself far above the animals and eventually develop the civilizations which Prometheus foresaw.

In the depth of the night, when all the gods were asleep, Prometheus crept to the shrine on Mount Olympus; stealthily, he lighted a hollow reed at the sacred fire, and quickly made his way down the mountainside to the place where the frightened men awaited him.

Zeus was furious to see so powerful an instrument of progress in the hands of unworthy mortals, for this would allow man to warm his house, to cook his food, and to shape his weapons and utensils out of metal. But his fury knew no bounds when the Titan deceived him a second time.

Prometheus had been asked to decide which portions of sacrificial bull should be taken by Zeus and the Olympians, and which should be retained by the sacrificers. He decided to trick Zeus by having him choose between two portions. One appeared to be rich, nourishing meat, but was really only a pile of bare bones covered by deceptive fat; the other seemed a mess of disgusting entrails, but under it was hidden the good meat. Zeus greedily chose the attractive, glistening fat. He realized his mistake almost at once, but the decision was binding and he could do nothing about it. For all time, man was to keep the tasty parts of a sacrifice for himself, and give the gods only the useless bones.

The third and final outrage came when Prometheus refused to give Zeus the one secret which he desperately wanted to know—the secret of the Fates, the three sisters who spun, drew out, and cut the thread of life. The sisters had informed Prometheus that one day Zeus would have a son who would overthrow him. When Zeus realized that Prometheus would never acknowledge his authority by revealing the secret to him, he devised the most horrible punishment conceivable for the renegade. The king of the gods banished Prometheus to the far off, craggy Caucasus mountains, there to be stretched on the highest rock, chained for eternity. Every day he was to suffer terrible torment, for Zeus sent an eagle to tear interminably at the Titan's liver. His torture was to be endless, for nightly the parts the eagle had torn away from his body were renewed.

Prometheus' beloved mankind lived on to benefit from the gifts of the suffering Titan.

7. Story Title: PANDORA (Greek)

If Zeus had not heaped bitter revenge upon Prometheus and the race of mortals he had befriended, the world might still be a happy place.

Zeus perceived that he could best hurt the Titan rebel by inflicting suffering upon the race of mortals he loved. He knew, too, that Prometheus had tried to protect mankind forever by catching all the evils and spites which could exist on the earth and imprisoning them in one great jar. They could never escape from this jar by themselves, and it was guarded by

Prometheus' brother Epimetheus, who, although not wise like his brother, had been carefully warned to keep the jar tightly closed forever and was faithfully keeping watch over it.

The scheme of Zeus was to send a woman to Epimetheus to be his companion and wife. Hephaestus, the smith of Olympus, fashioned her, and made her features and form lovely as those of any goddess. Each of the other Olympians gave her a special gift to make her attractive, and when the Winds finally breathed life into her, no more beautiful and desirable woman had ever graced the earth. She was named Pandora, which means "gifts of all", as a reminder of the beauties and talents she had been given by all the gods.

Epimetheus had been warned by his brother never to accept any gift from Zeus, but he could not resist the lovely creature sent from heaven, and made her his wife.

Hidden among her gifts, however, was one quality which Zeus had mixed liberally into her nature-curiosity. The king of the gods had planned wisely, for as soon as Pandora laid eyes upon the great jar which Epimetheus guarded, she was seized by an irresistible desire to know what was inside.

"Epimetheus," she said, "what harm could it do if you just took one little peek? After all, you are entitled to know what you're guarding!" But Epimetheus refused to listen.

"Perhaps there is a treasure inside," Pandora continued. "It must be something wonderful, or your brother would not be having you guard it so carefully!" Epimetheus shook his head, but Pandora would not be silenced.

"If we only knew, then we could guard it better," she said. "Who knows, perhaps there is nothing in there at all, and your brother is just trying to keep you from spending your time in any other way! Couldn't we take just one look?"

For a long time she pestered her husband, but Epimetheus would not budge. Pandora at last stopped asking, but her thoughts were filled, night and day, waking and sleeping, working or at play, with the mystery of the contents of the jar. Finally she could stand it no longer, and one day when her husband's back was turned, she swept the lid from the jar.

Pandora screamed as dozens of cruel, stinging little spites flew from the jar. In a great cloud they swarmed out, stinging her and Epimetheus in all parts of their bodies before they flew off

in all directions. Illness was there, and vice, and fury, labour, madness-all the troubles which have beset the world since that time.

After all the troubles had stung the unhappy Pandora and Epimetheus, one small form fluttered gently from the jar. It was Hope, who alone is able to live with any of the evils. In her soft voice she whispered dreams of the future which were the only balm to help the anguished couple bear their pain.

From the top of Olympus, Zeus laughed gleefully to see the success of his plan, for through the curiosity of one woman he had succeeded in tormenting the race of mortals for all time.

8. Story title: Creation of Japan (Japanese)

Long ago all the elements were mixed together with one germ of life. This germ began to mix things around and around until the heavier part sank and the lighter part rose. A muddy sea that covered the entire earth was created. From this ocean grew a green shoot. It grew and grew until it reached the clouds and there it was transformed into a god. Soon this god grew lonely and it began to create other gods. The last two gods it made, Izanagi and Izanami, were the most remarkable.

One day as they were walking along they looked down on the ocean and wondered what was beneath it. Izanagi thrust his staff into the waters and as he pulled it back up some clumps of mud fell back into the sea. They began to harden and grow until they became the islands of Japan.

The two descended to these islands and began to explore, each going in different directions. They created all kinds of plants. When they met again they decided to marry and have children to inhabit the land. The first child Izanami bore was a girl of radiant beauty. The gods decided she was too beautiful to live in Japan, so they put her up in the sky and she became the sun. Their second daughter, Tsuki-yami, became the moon and their third and unruly son, Sosano-wo, was sentenced to the sea, where he creates storms.

Later, their first child, Amaterasu, bore a son who became the emperor of Japan and all the emperors since then have claimed descent from him.

9. Story Title: Creation of World (Greek)

In the beginning there was an empty darkness. The only thing in this void was Nyx, a bird with black wings. With the wind she laid a golden egg and for ages she sat upon this egg.

Finally life began to stir in the egg and out of it rose Eros, the god of love. One half of the shell rose into the air and became the sky and the other became the Earth. Eros named the sky Uranus and the Earth he named Gaia. Then Eros made them fall in love.

Uranus and Gaia had many children together and eventually they had grandchildren. Some of their children become afraid of the power of their children. Kronus, in an effort to protect himself, swallowed his children when they were still infants. However, his wife Rhea hid their youngest child. She gave him a rock wrapped in swaddling clothes, which he swallowed, thinking it was his son.

Once the child, Zeus, had reached manhood his mother instructed him on how to trick his father to give up his brothers and sisters. Once this was accomplished the children fought a mighty war against their father. After much fighting the younger generation won. With Zeus as their leader, they began to furnish Gaia with life and Uranus with stars.

10. Great Serpent and the Great Flood (Indigenous, Ojibway or Anishinaabe)

One day when Nanabozho returned to his lodge after a long journey, he missed his young cousin who lived with him. He called the cousin's name but heard no answer. Looking around on the sand for tracks, Nanabozho was startled by the trail of the Great Serpent. He then knew that his cousin had been seized by his enemy.

Nanabozho picked up his bow and arrows and followed the track of the serpent. He passed the great river, climbed mountains, and crossed over valleys until he came to the shores of a deep and gloomy lake. It is now called Manitou Lake, Spirit Lake, and also the Lake of Devils. The trail of the Great Serpent led to the edge of the water.

Nanabozho could see, at the bottom of the lake, the house of the Great Serpent. It was filled with evil spirits, who were his servants and his companions. Their forms were monstrous and terrible. Most of them, like their master, resembled spirits. In the centre of this horrible group was the Great Serpent himself, coiling his terrifying length around the cousin of Nanabozho. The head of the Serpent was red as blood. His fierce eyes glowed like fire. His entire body was armed with hard and glistening scales of every color and shade.

Looking down on these twisting spirits of evil, Nanabozho made up his mind that he would get revenge on them for the death of his cousin.

He said to the clouds, "Disappear!"

And the clouds went out of sight.

"Winds, be still at once!" And the winds became still.

When the air over the lake of evil spirits had become stagnant, Nanabozho said to the sun, "Shine over the lake with all the fierceness you can. Make the water boil."

In these ways, thought Nanabozho, he would force the Great Serpent to seek the cool shade of the trees growing on the shores of the lake. There he would seize the enemy and get revenge. After giving his orders, Nanabozho took his bow and arrows and placed himself near the spot where he thought the serpents would come to enjoy the shade. Then he changed himself into the broken stump of a withered tree.

The winds became still, the air stagnant, and the sun shot hot rays from a cloudless sky. In time, the water of the lake became troubled, and bubbles rose to the surface. The rays of the sun had penetrated to the home of the serpents. As the water bubbled and foamed, a serpent lifted his head above the centre of the lake and gazed around the shores. Soon another serpent came to the surface. Both listened for the footsteps of Nanabozho, but they heard him nowhere.

"Nanabozho is sleeping," they said to one another.

And then they plunged beneath the waters, which seemed to hiss as they closed over the evil spirits.

Not long after, the lake became more troubled. Its water boiled from its very depths, and the hot waves dashed wildly against the rocks on its banks. Soon the Great Serpent came slowly to the surface of the water and moved toward the shore. His blood-red crest glowed. The reflection from his scales was blinding--as blinding as the glitter of a sleet-covered forest beneath the winter sun. He was followed by all the evil spirits. So great was their number that they soon covered the shores of the lake.

When they saw the broken stump of the withered tree, they suspected that it might be one of the disguises of Nanabozho. They knew his cunning. One of the serpents approached the stump, wound his tail around it, and tried to drag it down into the lake. Nanabozho could hardly keep from crying aloud, for the tail of the monster prickled his sides. But he stood firm and was silent.

The evil spirits moved on. The Great Serpent glided into the forest and wound his many coils around the trees. His companions also found shade--all but one. One remained near the shore to listen for the footsteps of Nanabozho.

From the stump, Nanabozho watched until all the serpents were asleep and the guard was intently looking in another direction. Then he silently drew an arrow from his quiver, placed it in his bow, and aimed it at the heart of the Great Serpent. It reached its mark. With a howl that shook the mountains and startled the wild beasts in their caves, the monster awoke. Followed by its terrified companions, which also were howling with rage and terror, the Great Serpent plunged into the water.

At the bottom of the lake there still lay the body of Nanabozho's cousin. In their fury the serpents tore it into a thousand pieces. His shredded lungs rose to the surface and covered the lake with whiteness.

The Great Serpent soon knew that he would die from his wound, but he and his companions were determined to destroy Nanabozho. They caused the water of the lake to swell upward and to pound against the shore with the sound of many thunders. Madly the flood rolled over the land, over the tracks of Nanabozho, carrying with it rocks and trees. High on the crest of the highest wave floated the wounded Great Serpent. His eyes glared around him, and his hot breath mingled with the hot breath of his many companions.

Nanabozho, fleeing before the angry waters, thought of his Indian children. He ran through their villages, shouting, "Run to the mountaintops! The Great Serpent is angry and is flooding the earth! Run! Run!"

The people caught up their children and found safety on the mountains. Nanabozho continued his flight along the base of the western hills and then up a high mountain beyond Lake Superior, far to the north. There he found many men and animals that had escaped from the flood that was already covering the valleys and plains and even the highest hills. Still the waters continued to rise. Soon all the mountains were under the flood, except the high one on which stood Nanabozho.

There he gathered together timber and made a raft. Upon it the men and women and animals with him placed themselves. Almost immediately the mountaintop disappeared from their view, and they floated along on the face of the waters. For many days they floated. At long last, the flood began to subside. Soon the people on the raft saw the trees on the tops of the mountains. Then they saw the mountains and hills, then the plains and the valleys.

When the water disappeared from the land, the people who survived learned that the Great Serpent was dead and that his companions had returned to the bottom of the lake of spirits. There they remain to this day. For fear of Nanabozho, they have never dared to come forth again.

11. Story of the Flood (Indigenous, Pacific Northwest)

In the beginning Kwattee created the animals of the earth. Then by the union of some of these animals with a star which fell from heaven, came the first human beings. And from these sprang the various races of men.

Years came and went and all was good. Then Chief Thunderbird attempted to destroy all the good whales of the ocean. Kwattee then interfered, and a terrible drawn battle was fought between him and Thunderbird.

Enraged, that bird caused the waters of the great deep to rise. For four days the sea continued to rise. It rose till it covered the very tops of the mountains.

Again Kwattee joined his adversary in battle, and while the conflict was in progress, the waters receded. This engagement, too, was a drawn battle, and following it the waters again rose. The water of the Pacific flowed through what is now the swamp and prairie westward from Neah Bay on the Strait of Juan de Fuca to the Pacific, making an island of Cape Flattery. Again Kwattee and Thunderbird engaged in terrible conflict, and again the waters suddenly receded, leaving Neah Bay, the Strait of Fuca, and Puget Sound perfectly dry. For four days the water ebbed out, and numerous sea monsters and whales were left on dry land.

The battle was again indecisive. Then without any waves or breakers the waters again rose till they had submerged the whole country. Then Kwattee killed Chief Thunderbird. The waters were then four days receding. And since then there have been no great floods on the earth. Also each time that the waters rose, the people took to their canoes and floated off as the winds and currents wafted them, as there was neither sun nor land to guide them. Many canoes also came down in trees and were destroyed, and numerous lives were lost. And the survivors were scattered over the whole earth. One segregation of the Quileutes found themselves at Hoh [Rainforest in Washington State], another at Chemakum (near the present Port Townsend), and a third succeeded in returning to their own home here on the Pacific.

Introduction: FLOOD ARCHETYPES MYTHS (Three stories)

A) THE TORAH (1300 BCE)

Only one man, Noah, found favor in the Hebrew God Yahweh's eyes...

And God said to Noah, "I have determined to make an end of all flesh, for the earth is filled with violence because of them... Make yourself an ark of cypress wood... And of every living thing, of all flesh, you shall bring two of every kind into the ark... they shall be male and female." ...

The rain fell on the earth forty days and forty nights... At the end of forty days Noah opened the window of the ark... and... sent out the dove... and the dove came back... and there in its beak was a freshly plucked olive leaf; so Noah knew that the waters had subsided from the earth...

Then God said to Noah, "Go out of the ark... Bring out with you every living thing that is with you... I establish my covenant with you, that... never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth."

B) THE EPIC OF GILGAMESH (2150 - 1400 BCE)

In this Mesopotamian legend, Utnapishtim, like Noah, escapes a worldwide flood by building an ark. Ea, the god of wisdom, warns Utnapishtim of the coming catastrophe in a dream.

O man of Shuruppak, son of Ubara-Tutu; tear down your house and build a boat, abandon possessions and look for life...

I loaded into [the boat] all that I had of gold and of living things, my family, my kin, the beast of the field both wild and tame...

For six days and six nights the winds blew, torrent and tempest and flood overwhelmed the world... When the seventh day dawned the storm from the south subsided, the sea grew calm, the flood was stilled; I looked at the face of the world and there was silence, all mankind was turned to clay... I opened a hatch and the light fell on my face. Then I bowed low, I sat down and I wept, the tears streamed down my face, for on every side was the waste of water.

The Fish Incarnation of Vishnu (1000 BCE - 1000 CE)

The Hindu god Vishnu, in his first earthly incarnation, took the form of Matsya, the fish, and saved humankind.

One day, as the sage Manu was praying at the river Ganges, a small fish asked for his protection. Manu put the fish in an earthen jar, but soon the fish was too big for the jar. So Manu put it into the river, but soon it outgrew the river. So Manu put the fish in the ocean...

The fish told Manu there would be a great deluge [flood]. He advised Manu to build a large boat and take... the seeds of various kinds of plants, and one of each type of animal. When the deluge came, the fish said, he would take the ark... to safety.

Sure enough, when the deluge occurred, the fish was there. Manu tied the boat to the horns of the fish... The fish then pulled the boat through the waters until it reached a mountain peak.

Answers the following questions in full sentences:

1. Do you notice a pattern of plot features in these Flood myth archetypes? What are some similar characteristics in ALL THREE of these floods? There are multiple features.
2. What is characteristic that is similar in TWO stories (look for multiple answers with different stories)?
3. What is characteristic that is unique to just ONE of the stories?
4. What might these myths be meant to explain to their contemporary audiences (people who lived during the time of these stories)

5. There are thousands of miles of land that separate the geographical locations of these stories, and they are written thousands of years apart from one another. What explanation is there for the similarities that exist in all of these stories?