

Worksheet 1. Ovid's creation story: Book I (teacher version)

Directions: As you read the creation story told in *The Metamorphoses*, Bk I: 1–88, answer the following questions. Use evidence from the text in your answers.

1. What is an invocation? What is Ovid asking of the gods?

An invocation is a prayer to the gods from the poet, asking for their help. It is a convention in epic poems. Ovid is asking the gods to inspire him as he writes about metamorphoses (changes).

2. How does Ovid describe the world at the beginning?

Nature is chaos, "a raw, confused mass" of inert matter. Land, sea, and air are unstable and not clearly separated from one another.

3. Look up the identity of the following figures and relate what part they play in the creation story.

Titan is one of a generation of elder gods, eventually overthrown by Zeus.

Phoebe is one of the original Titans, often associated with the moon.

Amphitrite is a sea goddess who became the wife of Poseidon.

4. What are the four elements? How were they separated?

Fire, air, earth, and water, according to Ovid, were separated from each other by an unnamed god.

5. What shape did the god make the earth? Does it strike you as odd that this fact appears in a poem which was produced around the time of Ovid's exile in 8 CE? What might account for the image of an earth shaped like a sphere showing up here?

Round like a ball—the Romans had an understanding of the earth being round. They derived this concept from the Greeks.

6. What are the five zones? How well does this reflect the actual climate zones of the earth as we know it today? Similar to the question above—what accounts for this information appearing in this work?

The equatorial zone, the two polar regions, and the temperate areas between. This is similar to our designation of the North Frigid Zone, the North Temperate Zone, the Torrid Zone, the South Temperate Zone, and the South Frigid Zone.

Classification of climate zones, like the notion the world was round, was derived from the Greeks.

Ovid's Metamorphoses: A Common Core Exemplar

7. What does Ovid mean when he says the winds are like “the discord between brothers”? How does the god solve this problem?

Although the winds are similar, they are blowing in different directions. The god assigns each wind to a different region of the earth.

8. What two explanations does Ovid give for the creation of humans?

Either the creator god seeded the earth with a divine seed or the earth that had just been separated from the skies still had fragments of the divine that Prometheus molded into an image of the gods.

9. How are humans different from other animals?

While other animals look down, humans are upright and look at the stars. There was no other animal “capable of higher thought that could be ruler of all the rest.”