

## Grade 8 Playlist: How Modern Fiction Draws on Traditional Stories

*Aligns with CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.8.9:*

- Analyze how a modern work of fiction draws on themes, patterns of events, or character types from myths, traditional stories, or religious works such as the Bible, including describing how the material is rendered new.

### Welcome

In order to be a good writer, a person must first be a good reader. A good reader devours all types of works—books, short stories, and poetry—that are both old and new. Writers such as William Shakespeare read myths, traditional stories, and religious books such as the Bible. Centuries later, other great authors such as George Bernard Shaw and the poet John Keats read the works of Shakespeare. Whether intentionally or unintentionally, all of these authors were influenced by other authors whose works they read and enjoyed.

### Objectives

In this playlist, students will learn how to:

- analyze how a modern work of fiction draws on themes, patterns of events, or character types from myths, traditional stories, or religious works such as the Bible.
- describe how material from myths, traditional stories, and religious works is rendered new in modern works of fiction.

### Review

#### Key Terms

- An **analysis** of a text is a close and detailed examination. When analyzing a text, the reader “takes it apart” and studies every detail and its relation to the text as a whole.
- A **theme** is the message the author wants to give readers in a work of literature.

### Watch!

Watch this video to review how to determine the theme of a myth:

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZQtWqTRAa7M>



## Exploring the Standard

Many authors are influenced by ancient myths and religious stories. Some traditional stories are so popular that writers use themes from these stories without even realizing it! Some of the most common themes in literature are listed below. Are any of these recognizable?

- Humans and nature are in a constant struggle.
- The weak can defeat the strong.
- Those who do wrong must face the consequences.
- A quest requires courage and determination.
- Love conquers all; love is the worthiest of pursuits.

### Watch!

Watch this video to learn about four traditional stories that modern authors commonly draw from:

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CruPvvcQcPo>

Consider the example of the following theme: “A quest requires courage and determination.” This theme is especially popular in fantasy literature, such as the *Harry Potter* series, *The Chronicles of Narnia*, and the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy. The quest is also a common theme in the myths of ancient Greece. In one such myth, a brave man named Jason decides to embark on a quest to find the fleece of a golden ram, which was believed to have magical powers. After building a ship, the *Argo*, and hiring a crew of fifty brave men (known as the Argonauts), Jason sets off. But when he arrives at Colchis, where the fleece is located, his test of courage truly begins.



## Teaching Notes: How Modern Fiction Draws on Traditional Stories

The goal of RL.8.9 is for students to be able to analyze how modern fiction draws on myths, traditional stories, and religious works. The following information contains ideas that teachers can incorporate into their classrooms to address this standard.

### Activity

Review the themes discussed in the playlist, and ask students if they have seen any of these themes in contemporary books and stories. Discuss how these themes have been transformed in modern literature. The following chart shows examples of traditional stories and modern fiction that use the same themes.

Theme	Traditional Examples	Modern Examples
Humans and nature are in a constant struggle.	<i>The Odyssey</i>	works by Jack London; <i>Life of Pi</i> ; <i>Robinson Crusoe</i>
Those who do wrong must face the consequences.	the biblical story of Adam and Eve	<i>The Princess Bride</i> , <i>The Count of Monte Cristo</i>
The weak can defeat the strong.	"The Tortoise and the Hare"; many trickster fables	<i>Ender's Game</i> , <i>The Witches</i>
Love conquers all.	the myth of Cupid and Psyche	<i>Twilight</i> series

### Writing Prompts

1. Have students choose a traditional story, such as the tale of King Arthur, or a story from the Bible or another religious work. Then, ask students to write a short story that incorporates themes, patterns of events, or character types from that short story. Students should write a brief introduction to their story that explains how the story draws on the earlier source.
2. Have students choose a movie based on classical mythology, such as *My Fair Lady*, *Clash of the Titans*, or *Hercules*. After watching the movie and conducting research on the tale it is based upon, have students write an analysis of how the themes and character types of the traditional myth are adapted for a modern audience.

### Additional Resources

Consider using these resources when teaching RL.8.9:

- **"Fractured Fairy Tales":** This activity uses fairy tales to teach how authors adapt themes and other elements from traditional stories for modern readers:  
<http://www.tnccurriculumcenter.org/resource/2746/go>
- **"Theme, Symbolism, and Allusion":** This video shows how one teacher helps students identify allusions to myths and religious works in literature:  
<https://www.teachingchannel.org/videos/theme-symbolism-allusion-lesson>

