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**THIS IS NOT YOUR FOREFATHER'S THOR:**

**USING COMICS TO MAKE MYTHOLOGY MEANINGFUL**

BY NICK KREMER

**A Call to Adventure**

It was my first year of teaching, and as part of a fourth-quarter Mythology unit in my 9<sup>th</sup> grade Language Arts class, we were reading aloud adapted versions of the old Norse tales from Snorri's *Prose Edda*. This particular class period witnessed the contest between Thor, god of thunder, and the giant-king Utgard-Loki. Our hero was not faring well – he had already failed to empty a normal-sized drinking horn and lift up a mere cat, and was currently struggling mightily in his wrestling match with, of all competitors, a crippled old nurse. Suddenly, one of my “free-thinking” students blurted out a “question”:

“Why do we have to read this stuff?”

A true believer in the Socratic arts, I responded, “Why *do* we read this stuff?” in the hopes that sparks of allegory would magically begin to ignite behind the glassy eyes of my students, as they would think their way into the not-so-obvious recognition that Thor was metaphysically putting up a fairly commendable showing against the fury of nature, the laws of physics, and the inevitability of mortality – battles still relevant to any human in any culture today.

To be fair, something *did* ignite in my students.

“Because he has to teach it, stupid! It’s in the curriculum.”

“There’s like a list of stories that like everybody reads, and if you don’t know them, people, like, think you’re dumb.”

A hearty discussion followed about whether such a list does indeed exist, and who makes that list if it does, and whether or not we mere mortals can argue with those decisions. Finally, I interjected: “So somebody put this story on *their* list. Why?”

“Because it’s really hard to understand. Y’know, it’s...deep.”

“Because it was important back then, so that makes it important now.”

“It tells you something about the people who told it.”

There was the “aha!” moment I was looking for. Feigning incredulousness, I asked, “You mean literature can tell us about *culture*?” Despite the lackluster response to my (obvious) wit, here was the springboard into full-fledged, authentic cultural analysis I had been looking for, ironically all started by the off-hand comment of one less-than-enthusiastic stu...

“But who cares about other people’s culture?”

Socrates be damned.

He had a point, though. The stand-by response, something to the tune of “because many different people inhabit this earth, so it’s important to learn to respect values that are different from your own,” [my secondary-school version of Mary Louise Pratt’s influential Contact Zone pedagogy, a philosophy that espouses learning to identify with the ideas and attitudes of foreign cultures] seemed to carry less weight than usual here, since the Norse ceased to be a civilization centuries ago. Actually, most of the classical myths included in our textbook, were, in fact, remnants of cultures no longer recognizable in our contemporary world. Certainly there is value in historical inquiry and anthropological preservation, and as Pratt would argue, classrooms can

be used “as social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other” (1991, p.34), but with an endless amount of cultural source material available, how *had* the selection process been determined that resulted in such a predominately archaic (not to mention European) narrative set? I was quickly becoming a skeptic myself...

Why choose one “dead” mythology over another? Why choose a dead mythology at all? Instead, why not interpret the myths of a present-day culture, so there could be immediate relevance in that study? In fact, if identifying, analyzing, and discussing cultural values is such an important endeavor, why wasn’t any time being spent in the classroom doing the same thing for my students’ own contemporary society and the many sub-cultures found within? How could the myths of other civilizations be more important than the myths of one’s own?

No wonder I wasn’t getting any buy-in! And then the epiphany hit me: to justify incorporating a mythology unit into my Language Arts classroom, I needed to find a way to consciously link discussions of selected classical myths to my students’ own present-day cultural experiences. That is not to say that I intended to eliminate multicultural texts from my curriculum – far from it, since my very rationale for studying mythology was to embrace a Contact Zone pedagogy – I simply realized that in order for my students to effectively engage with other societies’ cultural narratives, they needed to first practice modeling those skills within texts from their own rich mythology, and thus *I* needed to add narratives to our reading list that came directly from those “local” experiences.

## Supernatural Aid

This second task – finding present-day mythology – proved more difficult. Contemporary mythology is hard to define, especially within a society as media-saturated as our own. Though famous comparative mythologists such as Joseph Campbell and Northrop Frye attempted to find common ground among the past and present, other scholars point out important distinctions. Mircea Eliade, Roland Barthes, and others point out that elements like the alienating modern spirit; the emphasis on science/logic; the availability of recordable, instantaneous communication technology; and the effects of globalization all add new dimensions to present-day existence that make it impossible to examine our mythology through exactly the same lenses that mythographers use to view those of ancient cultures. Thus, it is extremely difficult to say what makes a myth a myth in contemporary American society. Is it form: does it have to have Campbell's famous hero's journey and archetypal symbols? Is it content: does it need to teach a lesson, a "higher purpose?" Is it popularity: must a majority of people invest a substantial amount of time in its proliferation?

Unfortunately, the answers to these questions are not easy to discern. But real-world decisions had to be made, so philosophical inaction was not an option. With Thor on my mind, I decided that a good starting place would be to examine the recurring hero narratives that have flourished in our own country over the past half-dozen decades. Extremely rich source material for this exercise, I knew, was contained in the American comic book, a medium that is arguably our country's most original literary form. The super-heroes of my youth – indeed, of my

parents' and grandparents' youth – were still alive and well on the bookshelves and TV screens of America, making them prime candidates for my initial inquiry.

Before exploring mythology in comics, though, I had to come to terms with using them in the classroom, thanks to a lifetime's worth of authoritarian voices proclaiming their intellectual inferiority and academic unsuitability. Texts like Scott McCloud's *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art* and Will Eisner's *Comics and Sequential Art*, however, brought me pedagogical peace of mind and newfound respect for the medium I myself used to love as an adolescent. Eisner, McCloud, and many more, assert that images, like words, can be intentionally juxtaposed to create meaning, and that readers must use context clues, inferences, and background knowledge in order to comprehend the messages contained within such multimedia texts. As such, comics are not alternatives to reading – they are the gateway to an entirely new facet of literacy. They offer a multitude of unique possibilities for education, including student opportunities for interdisciplinary growth, multiple modes of learning, engaging vocabulary development, and critical deconstruction of a designer's intentions through visual media.

Better yet, the more I learned about comic books, the more amazed I became at how insulated they were from the modern mythology problems stated above. Between the shadows of two World Wars in the 1930s, when the rest of American literature began to plunge into the spirit of modernism – a worldview that truth is relative, meaning is ambiguous, communication is faulty, and social groups are doomed to deteriorate into isolated individuals – a new medium, comics, was born in idealistic opposition. Superman and a legion of equally heroic comic book characters became symbols of resilience, optimism, patriotism, and moral fortitude to a

population mired in the depths of depression. They offered an alternative to the cynicism and isolation of modernity.

As Campbell points out, heroes (like Superman) have always united. Myth is religious in that sense; it aspires towards the spiritual side of humanity, asking us to champion the metaphysical, to understand truth through metaphor and story, to desperately attempt to create common identity and experience. In the ancient cultures whose narratives make up our classroom Mythology textbooks, religion and culture were inherently intertwined: Thor was both hero and god. But in recent civilizations, the cold, concrete logic of modernism/nihilism has always been the direct antithesis of myth. So when Captain America punched Adolf Hitler in the jaw on the cover of his debut issue in 1941, he might as well have been throwing a right hook at an ideology, too. Mainstream America would not wholly accept the pessimism of modernity, and as a counter-culture, a mythological Golden Age of Comics reached its height.

Of course, it was only a matter of time before the modern spirit did, indeed, creep its way into this young medium (as it has all others), but by the rise of anti-heroes and psychological realism in comics of the 1980s, there were already decades of rich cultural history to buffer its effects. The characters, the conventions, the community of readers – all had already been established through ongoing, interconnected episodes through the years; so ironically, modernizing comics only served to make the mythology found within these narratives *more* popular and encompassing, not less.

Indeed, it is this serialized nature of super-hero comics that makes them more like the myths of ancient cultures than any other medium in our society. From the moment a human first discovered the ability to write language down and record it for future audiences, mythology

changed forever, because there was no longer the need for oral tradition within a community to perpetuate it. Stories could now be told (read) in isolation by oneself, and could be preserved without being retold by subsequent storytellers. It wasn't until the invention of Gutenberg's printing press, though – with its ability to easily mass-produce recorded texts – that oral tradition truly began to be replaced by the written word, and myths gave way to literature.

That is not to say that literature can't be mythic; it just means that trying to define what constitutes a myth in literature-based societies is more difficult than for cultures that relied upon oral tradition. Because members in those communities had to actively work to preserve their narratives, the stories that survived “the test of time,” that outlived their own cultures, were clearly the tales held with the highest popular regard. Furthermore, the organic, “living” act of retelling those narratives within the community with each passing generation ensured that a vivid mark of that generation's cultural values would be found within the continuous mythology.

Today, though, while parents, teachers, and community leaders certainly influence the literature read by the youth in their charges and often require them to read the texts that had the most profound effects on their own upbringings, stories are no longer retold with the passage of time. Instead, they are preserved exactly as the original author intended the story to be told. This is mythically problematic in that it freezes the narrative in a certain time period in a culture's history, rather than allowing it to evolve as society does. The stories become literature instead of real myths; they become artifacts of a given time and author. Readers outside that tradition can still meaningfully interact with these texts, but not in the authentic, organic manner that communities which utilized oral tradition experienced.

Furthermore, this preservation has made it possible for a vast number of stories to coexist instead of compete for viability, as they would have had to do in societies that relied upon oral tradition. Technology and the increased leisure time that accompanies its development has led to the creation of a money-making entertainment industry with a mass quantity of texts that often appeal to values that will yield the greatest profit margins. Technology has allowed for an overabundance of narratives, because every piece of literature is recorded in physical form, be it a book, a DVD, or a data file. These texts are easily accessible to future generations and to the rest of the world. Due to radio, then TV, and now the Internet, individuals have essentially instantaneous contact with any “myth” they wish to examine, from anywhere or any era. And because participants can read literature in the isolation of their homes, without the interaction of their local communities, the possibilities for consensus-building that are essential to myth-making have become increasingly scarce. Perhaps these two factors – a lack of community engagement in continually reshaping myths and an overabundance of multicultural narrative material – are why the vast majority of myths contained in mythology textbooks like the one in my classroom are limited to ancient cultures.

American super-hero comics, however, have presented a unique alternative to this modern dilemma. While the individual books themselves are published literature - artifacts of a given moment - the characters and worlds found within are timeless. The episodic nature of comic book publication has had two important effects: it has created a community of fans with ritualized behavior and a public gathering place (buying the monthly issue at the local comic shop, discussing the latest plot developments, etc.) and has allowed for the source material, the heroes’ sagas, to be expanded or reinvented within each of the last seven decades. Series have

been re-launched for contemporary appeal; characters have been revived from cancellation or death itself; alternate realities have been created (from “what if” scenarios of the past to dystopian nightmares of the future); content has been made both more mature and more “kid-friendly” in simultaneous publications of the same storylines for different audiences; and the original medium of comics itself has expanded as popular narratives have been adapted for film, television, video games, music, toys, clothing, and other merchandise. In this sense, Superman, or Spider-Man, or any of the other colorful cast of characters in American comic book history have transcended recorded literature: they are not owned by any one author, their stories not confined to any one publication. They are constantly re-told and re-imagined, year after year, generation after generation, a living manifestation of the culture that gives them value. They have become genuine mythology, once again trumping the confines of a skeptical modernity that suggests the impossibility of that achievement in such an era.

### **Crossing the Threshold**

That was the revelation. Now came the challenge: finding which comics to incorporate into my curriculum and how to teach them.

My first foray into using comics in the classroom was as bumpy as Thor’s failed contests with Utgard-Loki. With no curriculum, no modeling, no resources, and a constant fear of criticism from being a young, progressive teacher in a conservative community, I haphazardly tried a few lessons with my first class, but ultimately came to the conclusion that the only way this would work was if I was “all in.” So, during the following summer, I put my best arguments

forward and applied for a National Education Association mini-grant to purchase a classroom set of graphic novels – and received it. Now, there was no turning back...

### **The First Trial: Contemporary Literature**

I spent the rest of the summer immersing myself in as many graphic novels as possible, researching and reading the best writers and artists the medium had to offer. There are many great stories well-worth the relatively short amount of time one needs to invest in them. Finding the right text to use with students, though, is not entirely the same feat. Some of comics' finest – Alan Moore's *Watchmen*, Neal Gaiman's *Sandman* series, Bill Willingham's *Fables* - are best left out of a K-12 mythology unit, not because of their relevance, but because their mature content is likely to cause legitimate obstacles for inclusion. Conversely, there is a plethora of titles that do work, but with considerably smaller thematic scope and literary gravitas.

Luckily, I found several titles that fit comfortably between these two extremes; ones that possess maturity without risk and are ripe for mythological dissection. Furthermore, they draw from iconic characters that are easily recognizable in popular culture today, and thus have the potential to be extremely engaging for adolescents. I have provided a brief plot synopsis, a list of the cultural themes contained within the text that can easily become the basis for classroom dialogue, and a short discussion of how each text can be applied in a mythology unit. With these aims, I present the following texts for curricular consideration:

**\*] Ultimate Spider-Man: Power and Responsibility [Vol. I] - Brian Michael Bendis, Mark Bagley (2000)**

- Synopsis: The origin story of Spider-Man “rebooted” for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.
- Cultural Themes: American teenage experience: peer pressure, search for identity, self-control / responsibility vs. reckless egoism, confronting adversity, emotional growth / balance, loss of innocence
- Discussion: This volume contains the first issues of Marvel’s *Ultimates* line, an extremely successful effort to recreate its popular characters as if they existed for the first time in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It will thoroughly engage a wide teenage audience (of both genders) due to its faithful portrayal of the contemporary American “coming-of-age” story and its allusions to (fairly) recent pop culture. What is especially interesting, from a mythological point of view, is to compare this book to the original Spider-Man origin comic of the 1960s to identify elements/themes that have been retained versus those that have been adapted to fit the interests of a slowly evolving American readership. A conversation that is sure to arise is the difference in aesthetic quality of the two works – the hand-drawn, faded look of the original versus the vivid, computer-generated images of this text – and this presents an excellent opportunity for discussing the dual-edged nature of technology in society. The novel also follows the archetypal Hero’s Journey template outlined by mythologist Joseph Campbell (and the outline of this article), and can serve as a contemporary model if one wants students to utilize this methodology in classic texts.

\*] **Batman: The Dark Knight Returns** - *Frank Miller* (1986)

- Synopsis: Batman returns from retirement to bring order to a dystopian Gotham City that has collapsed into reckless egoism and paralyzing fear.
- Cultural Themes: Paranoia of foreign assault on civilians, media oversaturation, polarization of two extreme political ideologies, celebrity worship, nature of leadership, desensitization to violence, alienated youth culture, vigilantism
- Discussion: This text is unbelievably relevant despite being over twenty years old; replace “Soviet” with “Al Qaeda” and the script needs no further refreshing. It is a fascinating look at the real psyches behind the masks of our public heroes and villains, the love/hate relationship that accompanies them when thrust in the media spotlight, the delicate balancing act that must exist between security and civil liberties, individualism and civic virtue, and the need for community activism and “everyday” heroism. Though Christopher Nolan’s recent award-winning film *The Dark Knight* features many variations on the same themes, this text works well as a supplement to, not a proxy for, the extensive subject matter experience that students will bring with them to class. This novel also serves as an excellent illustration of the effects of modernization on literature, especially when compared with *Ultimate Spider-Man* or older Batman texts (including the campy 1960s TV series).

\*] Marvels - Kurt Busiek, Alex Ross (1994)

- Synopsis: Adopting the premise, “What if the events of the Marvel Universe really happened, when they happened, in reality” this is the story of Phil Sheldon, an ordinary journalist as he tries to live an ordinary life within a world of “marvels.”

- Cultural Themes: Common vs. extraordinary existence, ownership vs. entitlement, celebrity worship, prejudice and mob mentality, family vs. work, fear of the unknown
- Discussion: This novel is a great experiment in iconic abstraction - the beautiful, hyper-realistic world painted by Ross immerses readers in the concrete experience of realism so that they become awe-struck spectators like the story's cast of common characters. It ironically questions the role that "super" heroes play in a society by showing this fictional America's devolution from a "scrappy country" of the 1930s, tackling a World War and Great Depression with vigor and confidence (and without superheroes), to a lost and powerless people of the 1970's, paralyzed in times of crisis, jealous in times of prosperity, and full of excuses for and entitlements from the super-hero celebrities that have come to dominate an essential component of their lifestyle. Easy parallels are made within student discussions to the larger-than-life politicians, musicians, athletes, actresses, etc. in contemporary experience.

Due to time and budget constraints, I *ultimately* chose *Ultimate Spider-Man* to incorporate into my own classroom. Of the three titles, it had the best chance of most directly speaking to my students' experiences as contemporary adolescent Americans and getting them to "feel" mythology in-the-moment. Ideally, I would also have liked to get *The Dark Knight Returns* in the hands of my students, to juxtapose Miller's darker worldview with Bendis' idealistic take on the various aspects of American heroism, but I settled on using the (then recent) film *The Dark Knight* as a quicker and cheaper alternative means to the same end.

The \$300 in grant money allowed me to purchase half of a class set of the novel. I was initially worried that this lack of books would be problematic, but it turned out that this perceived shortcoming was actually one of my unit's biggest strengths (see below).

This time, as I prepared to begin my "new and improved" mythology unit, I left Thor and company in Asgard. In fact, I left all my literature shelved, and started with a simple student homework assignment: bring in a picture that represents modern-day life in America. My intentions were not so subtle – to get students thinking about culture and to bring them to the realization that images, too, can convey meaning. The small group discussions of flags and churches and sports and shopping malls that followed achieved these aims marvelously. The class used the pictures as a springboard for coming up with a list of American values, and I used particular images as a way to illustrate basic visual principles of denotation and connotation.

I followed the next two days with an interactive power-point lecture illustrating basic visual literacy principles as they are applied to comics (inspired largely by the McCloud and Eisner texts mentioned earlier). We discussed sample pages from a variety of different artists and genres as I introduced students to the ideas of visual abstraction (the subliminal effect of cartoon representations versus realistic ones), paneling (the layout of pictures on the page), closure (readers' inferences between panels), encapsulation (the influence that perspective, framing, and posture have on perception), and color. It was probably the most successful lecture, in terms of engagement, that I gave all year, to the point that students were begging to borrow the *Spider-Man* text over the weekend before we would read it as a class the following week.

Begging to read was not something I was used to in my mythology unit. It made me feel extra guilty that I did not have individual copies of the text to give each student - that is, until

they started reading in pairs. What I had dismissed as a moderate inconvenience became a major asset: due to necessary collaboration, students were stopping to discuss visual literacy concepts as they read. Yes, junior high school students were willingly, enthusiastically, engaging in literary discussion using specific textual evidence to support their opinions. I eavesdropped on conversations ranging from the mechanical (one student helping another understand the order in which the panels on a page were intended to be read) to the metaphorical (why does this version of the Green Goblin look demonic?), to the meta-cognitive (a heated debate over the artist's intended effect on readers by depicting Peter Parker in the manner he did in a certain panel).

Such in-depth reading of the text made full-class mythology discussions authentic and substantive. Using our previously-generated list of American values as a guide, we talked about what it means to be a hero in our society, the trials of "coming of age" in America, and the way our values have changed over the last fifty years (prompted by my inclusion of the 1962 Spider-Man origin comic, which I read aloud to the students while projecting the pages on the classroom Smartboard, a technique I also used when I wanted to discuss visual literacy concepts regarding a specific page of *Ultimate Spider-Man*).

We spent an entire five-day week on Spider-Man, alternating between partner reading and full-class discussion. The next week we watched *The Dark Knight*, followed by a day-long "Socratic seminar" (student-led discussion) negotiating the somewhat contradictory worldviews presented in these two modern myths. Students' newly-acquired visual literacy skills helped in dissection of the film's cinematography and the ensuing discussion thereafter, one that Joseph Campbell would have been proud to hear. In totality, we spent twelve class periods discussing contemporary mythology.

## **The Second Trial: Classical Literature**

After the overwhelmingly unanticipated success of the unit's introduction, now came the bigger challenge: getting students to take their newfound knowledge out of their comfort zone and into the Contact Zone. It was time to bring Thor back.

Since my first experiment went so well, though, I afforded myself some liberty in toying with another idea I had been pondering: student choice. While *I* enjoyed the exploits of violent, hairy Norsemen, I realized there were some students for whom Thor would always be a hard sell. Rather than force the square peg, I looked back at my unit objectives, and decided that my ultimate goal was to get students to be more aware of other cultural perspectives through literature, but not necessarily more aware of Icelandic Viking culture. I gambled that students would be more likely to apply themselves with an open-mind and a hearty work ethic if they had some stake in the culture they would be studying – and that once they learned how to be appreciative of the mythology of one foreign culture, they would be much more likely to willingly sample the mythology of others.

That bet paid off. We spent the next week of the unit in our school's Media Center, where students were charged with learning as much as they could about a self-selected society from a different time period and geographic location than our own. They were required to find secondary-source research that discussed the history, values, and way-of-life of their chosen culture, but they also had to read at least three short myths from the civilization. Inspired by their collaboration earlier, I allowed students to work in partners on this assignment, too, which proved helpful yet again for pairs, particularly in decoding their selected myths.

I acted as literature consultant during their independent study, suggesting good stories for the various cultures that had been selected: Greeks, Romans, Egyptians, Chinese, Native Americans, African tribes, and yes, even one lone Norseman. It was exciting to see the broad diversity represented – much more than I could have ever packed into a traditional mythology unit – and even more exciting to see the groups compare cultures with each other when prompted to do so periodically throughout the week.

While it would be disingenuous to suggest that the majority of students approached this second assignment with the same zeal they had applied to the contemporary mythology we studied, most were considerably more engaged in the study of classical mythology than my previous classes had ever been, and these new students certainly carried the content from their previous weeks' study with them. Many were attempting to create a list of cultural values for their chosen society by comparing the heroes from the classical myths they were reading to the contemporary comic book icons we had studied together, noting any similarities or differences that appeared.

Some lucky students were even able to apply their newfound comic knowledge. Preceding the unit, I was able to convince my (thankfully open-minded) librarian to order graphic adaptations of popular classical myths. Jeff Limke and Graphic Universe offer a large and diverse line of myths-in-comics, and there are many critically-acclaimed stand-alone adaptations such as Garreth Hind's *Beowulf*, George O'Connor's *Zeus: King of the Gods*, or Erik Evensen's *Gods of Asgard*. Students who used these adaptations seemed to have an easier time understanding the message of the myth, because they were afforded the additional language of visual media as a means to translate.

## **The Ultimate Boon: Assessment**

At the end of any quest comes the final test, the challenge that determines if our heroes have been transformed by their journey. For my mythology unit, this took the form of a creative writing project.

I asked each student to design an original, heroic character with larger-than-life attributes who embodies contemporary American values. Students were to create both a visual representation of this character and a brief “trading card” biography of their background, abilities, and personality. Once completed, they were to write a short, original story in which their hero had become displaced in time and had just emerged in the culture they had researched. The story needed to demonstrate students’ knowledge of the foreign society they had become experts on and to emphasize the conflicts that would occur due to the differences in values between their protagonist and setting (though to ultimately find a suitable resolution).

As with any project, there were varying degrees of success, but many of my students authentically found their way into the Contact Zone for their researched culture, and by sharing their stories on the last day of the unit, exposed their peers to a wide variety of worldviews they probably would not have been open to otherwise.

One female student created Glory Woman, a feminist who struggled with the misogyny of Ancient Greece but ultimately helped a young girl marry out of love instead of her father’s will, and in the meantime, move past her own super-heroine ego to find true love herself. Another student created Small Fox, a modern-day Native American who returns to his heritage

and ironically brings our nation's own values of democracy and liberty back to our European ancestors, preventing them from invading the New World that would one day become America; in the process, he learns to be less materialistic and wasteful. The Girl of Nature is a champion of recycling, who tries to inspire a "cleaner, greener" Industrial Revolution, despite widespread poverty and a lack of education among the masses.

By the end of the presentations, this time it was me who was asking, "So why do we have to read this stuff?"

A hand goes up. "What else would be more important?"

The sound of apotheosis was never sweeter.

### **The Return**

Hopefully something in the preceding pages has inspired a desire for exploration within the genre of American super-hero comics and the critical examination of contemporary cultural values in the classroom. Adding this missing element has changed the way my students think and talk about mythology, and has allowed for considerably more authentic Contact Zone experiences with foreign cultures than the lip-service I had previously been paying the pedagogy. And that is how mythology should be: alive and vibrant, not a dead carcass for forensic analysis. The myths of old can live again and speak lost truths and timeless wisdom, but only when their audiences have an appreciation for the context of their own culture.

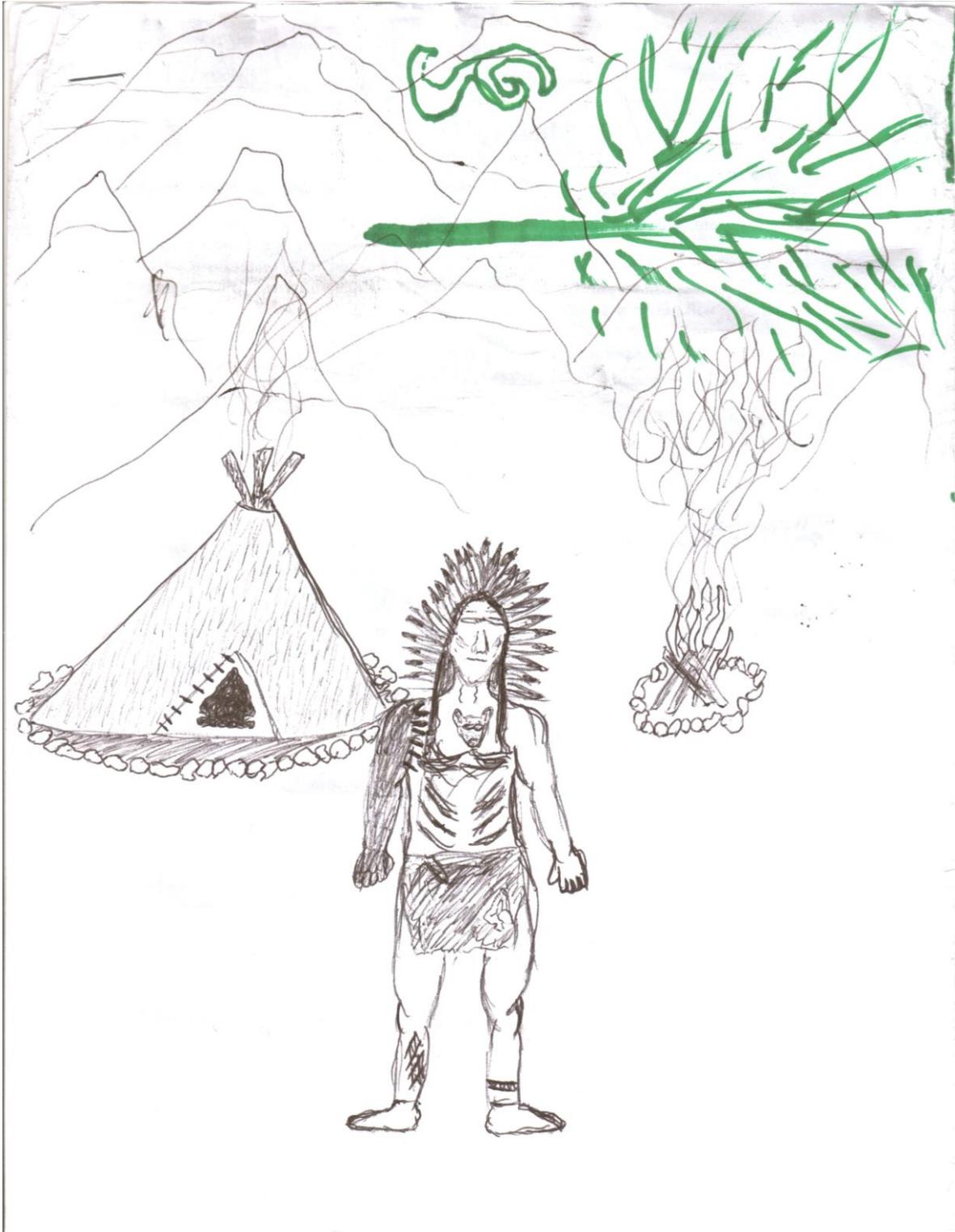
Which brings me back to our hero, Thor. It turns out he was a few decades ahead of me all along. He reinvented himself as a Marvel comic book character back in the 1960s (and will in fact be the subject of the company's next blockbuster movie come summer 2011) and has been

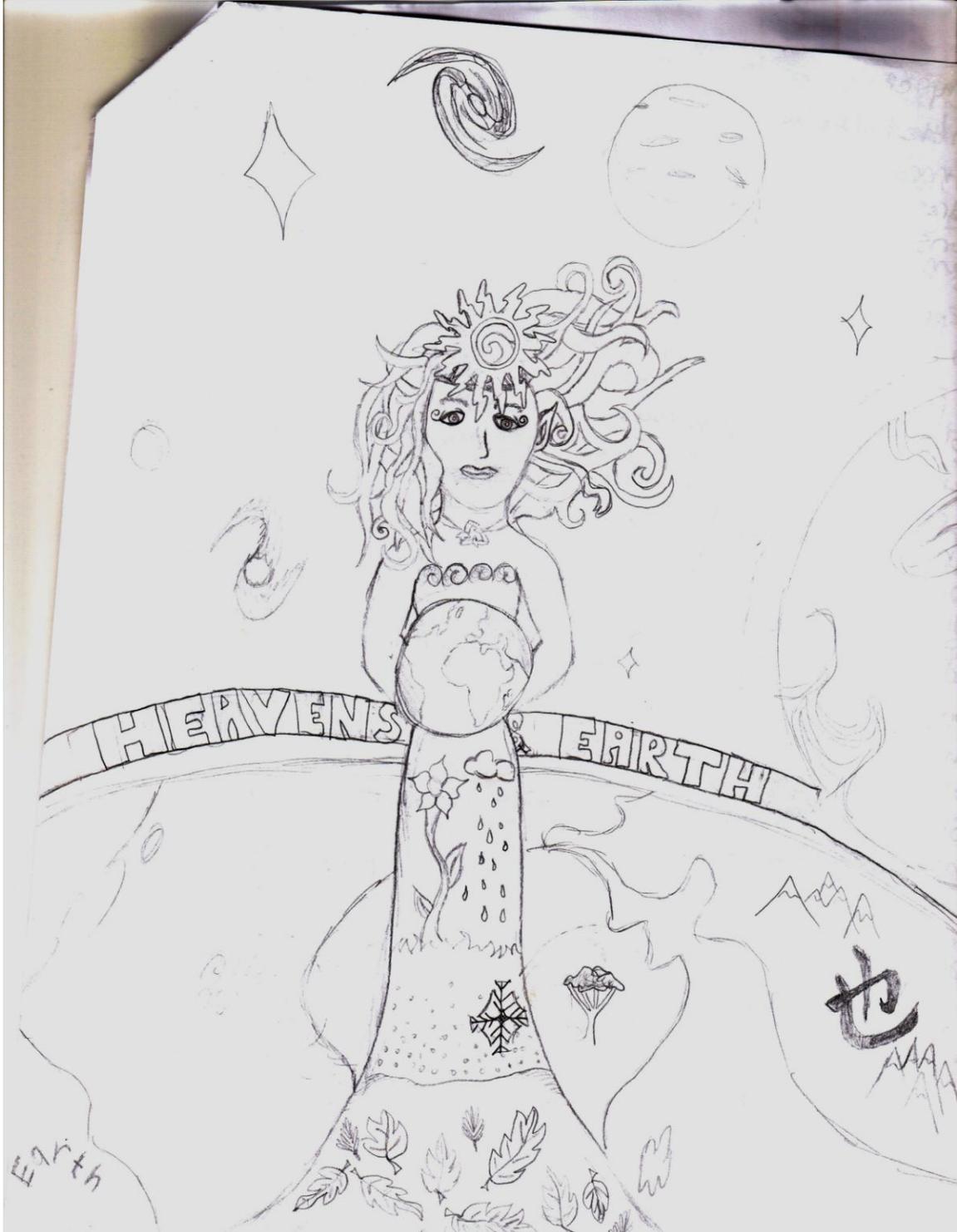
comfortably enjoying an exciting array of new adventures – and inspiring the minds of new generations – ever since. May he continue to postpone Ragnarök for many more cultures to come...

**Appendix – Student Illustrations: “Glory Woman”**



**Appendix – Student Illustrations: “Small Fox” and “Girl of Nature”**





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