



In the Beginning: Creation Stories from Around the World

Virginia Hamilton , Barry Moser (Illustrator)

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A thought-provoking collection of twenty-five stories that reflect the wonder and glory of the origins of the world and humankind. With commentary by the author. "A must for mythology shelves."--*Booklist*

In the Beginning: Creation Stories from Around the World Details

Date : Published September 15th 1991 by HMH Books for Young Readers (first published 1988)

ISBN : 9780152387426

Author : Virginia Hamilton , Barry Moser (Illustrator)

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From Reader Review In the Beginning: Creation Stories from Around the World for online ebook

Alison says

Title: In The Beginning: Creation Stories from Around the World

Author: Virginia Hamilton

Illustrator: Barry Moser

Genre: Myth

Theme(s): Creation, Culture

Opening line/sentence: "Time was, there were no people on earth. The first man still lay inside the pea pod."

Brief Book Summary: A collection of myths that has no boundaries and are from all regions of the world for all to enjoy.

Professional Recommendation/Review #1: Publisher's Weekly

According to PW, "Moser's watercolors gleam like jewels amid the setting of the text. His people and creatures gaze out at readers, as if to challenge their imaginations to comprehend the chaos before creation."

Professional Recommendation/Review #2: CCBC (Cooperative Children's Book Center Choices, 1988)

Hamilton's extraordinary skill in retelling each of 24 creation myths "on a level of understanding for many readers" while still retaining each account's cultural specificity results in an entertaining and enlightening anthology. Working with a theme which can be highly sensitive on several levels, Hamilton's succinct interpretative comments follow each account of how humans around the globe envision their world's creation. Moser's 42 paintings complement the tales' wonder and mystery and are reproduced in full color. The overall book design, typography and page layouts as well as the author's opening and closing notes and sources list contribute to the success of a stunning volume.

Response to Two Professional Reviews: I agree with the reviews. These myths are heavy topics that require children to use their imagination. They must respond to these stories about creation and topics we do not have the answers to. I also thought the illustrations were powerful and went along with the stories.

Evaluation of Literary Elements: The stories are easy to follow as the characters are described well. The stories are accessible for children even though they are difficult topics. They require children to employ literary knowledge and they will be able to get a lot out of these myths.

Consideration of Instructional Application: I think comparing and contrasting different versions of the myths will be useful. Or, just comparing myths that are significantly different or somewhat similar across cultures. Either way, I think these myths will be beneficial to children of all cultures to learn and read about.

Allison says

This was a good book. There were creation myths from places I haven't even heard of and it was interesting. There were also some myths that I have heard of or read about many time and love to hear over and over again. Some of my favorite myths are the myths of the Greek god like Zeus and the Titans. I have heard of Prometheus but I had never actually heard his story. I didn't get the whole story granted but I know more about him then I ever did before. I also had heard about Pandora's box but to be completely honest, I didn't actually know the whole story or never really gave the myth much thought. This was a fascinating myth. I also love Egyptian myths and had heard part of the story but not how Ra came to be. There were many other myths that I had never heard of but also liked. I liked Nyambi and Olorun and the Other Gods. They are both African myths and I had heard of Olorun but never knew much about him. They were both fun to read! I was also intrigued by the watercolor illustrations. Some of them were so intricate and colorful. It really brought the creatures, gods and places to life on the pages.

L12_markmesserly says

This review pertains to the 1988 hardcover edition.

Virginia Hamilton presents 25 multicultural creation stories. Barry Moser's watercolors depict gods, tricksters, and additionally illuminate concepts, such as Chaos (p. 126).

<http://www.moser-pennyroyal.com/moser...>

School Library Journal suggests a 6th grade or higher level. A watercolor painting introduces each story, and additional paintings illuminate ideas within some of the longer retellings. Some commentary, such as an explanation for an unusual term, is included. A brief description of the origins of the myth follows each story. An extensive list of additional resources is included at the end of the text.

Numerous opportunities exist for classroom use. Younger students (K-3) may retell a favorite myth from a collection. Small groups may enact the play for the class. Since this text skews toward older students, grades 4 and higher may create graphic organizers, such as Venn diagrams. Oral or written reports might focus upon why certain themes appear cross-culturally, or address similarities in how characters appear, act, or change in respect to a moral lesson within the tale.

This reviewer did not detect inappropriate, controversial, or didactic material. Other texts to explore might include *Mammals Who Morph: The Universe Tells Our Evolution Story* (ISBN: 1584690852), a picture book suited to younger readers (grades 2-4) studying creation myths. This may involve controversy as it references evolution. Junior high or high school students may find J. F. Bierlien's *Parallel Myths* (ISBN: 0345381467), of interest, as it offers cross-cultural comparisons.

In the opinion of this reviewer, the extensive list of additional resources concerning creation myths suggests that the contents of this text are credible.

Heather says

In the Beginning by Virginia Hamilton is a book that contains many stories of creation from all around the

world. There is a total of 25 different stories within this book. In many ways I enjoyed reading *In the Beginning* because I had never heard any of these creation myths, so it was very interesting learning about what people around the world believe. Also, at the end of each story, the author put a footnote about the origin of the myth. I liked learning the background information. Another thing I really liked about this book was that there were illustrations by Barry Moser to go along with each story. They really brought the myths to life. However, I would have liked the book more if the stories were more detailed and longer. On average, the myths were just 3 front and back pages long. In many cases the myths were a little vague and left me with many questions. Overall I enjoyed reading this book. I would really recommend *In the Beginning* to young children. I also would recommend it to teens or adults wanting to learn about other cultures around the world.

Chris says

I read this book of creation stories and cosmogonies from around the world out-loud to my 8-year-old daughter to try and balance out the Christian stories that she is deluged by in American culture. Many children have no idea that predominant western religions did not develop in a vacuum, but are threads in a tapestry of world mythology and religion that is as varied as it is valued by so many different people in different times and climates. We really enjoyed the stories, although some of them were as strange on first read as the stories of the Bible and western myths must feel to children from other cultures. Going through all the stories was actually a riveting experiment in exchanged perspective, and the disorientation caused by the change lasted long enough for us to go back to our own stories and sense afresh the “vagueness, monstrosity, and incoherent variety” (H.G. Wells) of the western gods. I thought it was especially beneficial to have the Bible story of Eden placed at the end of the book as a way to say, “And now, doesn’t this story seem to have much more in common with the stories of antiquity and early thought than you had realized?” Brilliant.

In addition to being understandable by old and young alike, the stories were very well spaced temporally and geographically, and mixed together an excellently artful and balanced pastiche of creative human narrative. At the end of each story, updated with modern language but loaded still with rich and incomprehensible imagery, there was a nice little paragraph about the story and its cultural setting and significance that helped explain elements of the tales that would have passed us by. My daughter and I read this together at bedtime every night, and we made it more fun by taking an atlas and a globe and looking up the country of origin for each story. It was very educational, and we learned more about mythology, religion, history, anthropology, geography, globes and atlases (cartography) than we ever imagined we would. It even inspired an idea in me to help other families guide their kids along a similar tour of origin stories from around the world, and I have already taken it to the interfaith group in our city which has granted me a hearing.

I am reminded of the words of George MacDonald who believed in the value of understanding the worlds that exist in other people’s minds, “If you understood any world besides your own, you would understand your own much better.” I want my children to understand their world, and the people that make up their world. I want them to develop a profound appreciation for the survival and bravery of other peoples, and the indestructible spirit and hope that have caused other cultures to endure. I want them to believe in the power of the creative instinct that lies deep within us, to learn to harness the power of imagination to solve problems and simulate alternatives, and to understand the significance of narrative identity in human minds which weaves together the happenings of our lives into a cohesive whole which gives us a sense of direction. We miss so much when we close ourselves off from the rest of universe and the complex beings who inhabit it. I recommend this book, and books like it, to everyone who has grown accustomed to the same stories,

with the same morals, preaching the same fear of the unknown. Sapere aude!

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Joshua Lawson says

The stories in this book are simply told and easy to read. I would have liked more information regarding the cultural context and origins of each myth, and how some might have influenced others, but perhaps that is best left for another book. This compilation is good for a basic introduction as it seems to have been intended.

❄️Elsa Frost❄️ says

This book contains many (though not all) creation stories from many different religions. Each religion has their own unique creation story that they believe and hold true, which this book then collects and allows you to read from. Of course, this book describes these stories as "myths," but there is an extreme importance tied to the word "myth" in here. So if you believe in God and believe in one of these creation stories but hate that this book uses the term "myths," the book has an important note attached.

In this note, the author (or, shall I say, "collector of these stories")--Virginia Hamilton--explains that myths are different from fairy tales. As the author describes, and I will quote it here word for word:

Fairy tales take place *within* the time of human experience. They tell us stories that happened "once upon a time" in a recognizable past. They tell us about how things were then.

Myth stories about creation are different, however. In a prophetic voice, they relate events that seem outside of time and even beyond time itself. Creation myths take place before the "once upon a time" of fairy tales. They go *back beyond anything that ever was* and begin *before* anything has happened. No attempt is made in a myth to prove the truth of its story to us. Its voice of authority relates an account of utter fact. Even the word *myth* comes from the Greek word *myths* which means *word* in the sense of final authority.

This book displays a wide range of myths from different parts of the world and tells them as they are told (inasmuch as you can tell them in a collection of creation stories). Within these, I find that Carl Jung's theory of the collective unconscious holds very much true (link here: <https://www.britannica.com/science/co...>). Throughout societies, we see that people hold up very similar ideas and share them with others, often passing them down generation after generation.

In these creation myths, though I may be in the minority among some in this, I believe that each story holds some level of truth. You see, I am a religious person, and I do believe that many of these stories hold truths about the beginning of our world, especially since these stories hold many similarities that were passed down and some were--eventually--collected into this book of work. They hold similarities, such as how many contain the one man and one woman creation who are to be the parents of the rest of humanity (which is proven true and authentic by National Geographic, link here: <https://news.nationalgeographic.com/n...>).

However, each one also has its own uniqueness. In some creation myths, a god is created, but in others a god is always there and is ever present. In some creation myths, this God is a male, and in others God is a female. Sometimes God is a few persons but still God; yet others display God as incapable of being more than one person, even when others try to become powerful like God. In some myths, no specific timeline of creation is specified, yet others say that God created the world in a number of days. In one of these myths, God doesn't even live--God dies, and from there people are born. From these, we can see that there is such a wide variety of storylines saying how creation came about.

This book reminds me of the age-old question people ask: "If there is a God, why does He allow suffering to exist?" In all reality, this book reminds me of something I've known all along: This question is, most likely, coming from someone who is or has been heavily exposed to Christianity. In Christianity, God is considered a "God of Love," and so this question often stems from exposure to this belief system. While it makes sense to ask a Christian about this in order to exact an answer, there are many answers a wide variety of religions could give. For example, in the creation myth of the Kono people, God isn't quite a considerate one. Instead, God elopes with and marries Death's (Sa's) daughter without Sa's consent. As a result, each of God's children--humanity--must die (p. 15-19). Yet another example is that of Phan Ku's story, which stems from China (600 BC). In this creation myth, it is said that, "by losing the living god Phan Ku, humanity loses its creator and therefore suffers forever" (p. 23). In these cases, how would our questions change to consider these other perspectives, where God isn't necessarily portrayed as a kindly one, or is already dead and--therefore--not responsible for suffering nor pain? How would we view God differently and what questions would we ask based on these different perspectives?

There's also a level of intrigue in some of these myths. In one of these myths, God needs four creations in order to succeed in creating humankind, and even in the fourth one God falters a bit by making humankind perfect. God reverses that.

And then there's the Tahitian myth, where the God and Goddess curse the earth because of the first man's wicked deeds. It is the first woman who, in a sense, spares humankind.

Here is a list of the stories, their origins, and (if applicable) the type of myth they follow.

"The Pea-Pod Man: Raven the Creator"

Inuit/Eskimo

Not specified type; Raven is acknowledged as a trickster kind of god

"Finding Night: Quat the Creator"

Banks Islands (north of New Hebrides in Melanesia)

Not specified type; the beginning is of light and Quat must discover darkness

"An Endless Sea of Mud: Death the Creator"

Kono people of Guinea

Not specified type; death comes first, and God isn't as powerful as Death (aka Sa) is

"Bursting from the Hen's Egg: Phan Ku the Creator"

Ancient China (600 BC)

Cosmic Egg myth; through Phan Ku's death, humanity loses a creator and is doomed to suffer

"Traveling to Form the World: Old Man the Creator"

Blackfoot Amerind

Not specified type; Old Man is a wandering creator, who creates as he goes along. Woman is the cause of death here.

"First Man Becomes the Devil: Ulgen the Creator"

Russian Altaic

Not specified type; different versions say that the devil, Erlik, is the first man; others say that God Ulgen is the first man

Full review to come!

Christina Taylor says

In *The Beginning: Creation Stories from Around the World* provides multiple explanations for the origin of life, the universe, and everything as explained by the pre-scientific beliefs of many cultures and traditions. Although this text is bound by space constraints and ease of translation for as Hamilton notes in the introduction not all myths can be “rendered on a level of understanding for many readers,” the author has amassed a representative collection that is marked by her signature clarity. Through memorable stories that address phenomena which confused and intrigued early people, these myths attempt to explain how the world works, demystify the universe, and give meaning to human life. They often portray gods as having human shape, feeling human emotions, and performing human acts, even if they are immortal and more powerful than people are. In this context, the universe seems more understandable than if cold forces that don’t care about people’s welfare ruled it. In short, they explain the world by relating what people didn’t understand to what people DID understand. The book’s formal layout with Moser’s beautiful watercolor depictions on the verso and the text on the recto impose an emotional distance upon the reader which does not allow her to fully suspend disbelief and immerse herself in the world that the myth creates. Furthermore, Hamilton’s explanatory note that follows each myth forces the reader to contextualize the tale rather than experience it and to be ever mindful that these are indeed myths. Although critics may complain that these notes would better serve their purpose by preceding the narrative, their strategic placement encourages the reader to make meaning for herself which can then be evaluated against a stated significance.

Marsha says

As long as man has existed, he has wondered about the world around him, how it came into being and his place within it. This anthology lists some of the stories of origin from around the world. The best ones are those that feature the voice or actions of man and/or woman or the less-than-divine beings that create them. Some of the stories are a little dry, as they are barren of emotion, while others are surprisingly humorous. (The one about a god retreating from Earth because mankind kept poking him whenever he went about his daily life is rather superior.)

The one that falls really flat is the first two books of Genesis, the one familiar to most English-speaking Westerners and Europeans. Elohim the Creator merely brings things into being, pats himself on the back for the job well done and his sole reaction is to call it “good”. This adjective, so faint and lackluster, gets done to death, tacked on as it is at the end of every act of creation; a riveting storyline this is not.

Of course, like any anthology, there will be selections you like and ones that you don’t. By and large, this

anthology merits attention. It is also enhanced by the vivid illustrations of Barry Moser. Mr. Moser favors a realistic style, giving us gods, animals, humans, etc., that are not necessarily beautiful but command the attention nonetheless.

Thomas Bell says

I thought that the different stories were very interesting. I was disappointed to find that Virginia Hamilton had changed some of the stories slightly to fit the feel she wanted to give, but she didn't change them very much. I was also disappointed to see that her respect of people's religion wasn't very high. For example, she claims that these days scholars call the accounts given in Genesis the 'genesis myths.' Well, maybe the scholars that she associates with call it that. It seems that all these stories she gives as primitive ways to explain what's around them. Then she says that they are true to the people who tell them. So, is she saying that the Bible is true to good Christians but not true? I think Virginia Hamilton is a liberal progressive leftist who thinks that religion IS a myth that is interesting but holding us back. She seemed to write in a way that everyone reading just takes for granted that it is a myth and not true. Does she not understand that there still are a LOT of people that believe in Christianity and the Bible? Or does she just ignore those people and pretend they aren't part of her reading audience? Still, 3 stars for providing interesting material.

Cindy Kelly Benabderrahman says

SUMMARY

This is an anthology of 25 culturally rich creation stories, from all over the world, accompanied by 42 color paintings by Barry Moser, a wonderful introduction placing the stories in an authentic context, and a brief exposition at the end of each story offering insights into the culture of the people from which it came. They are told in a simple voice, complimenting the simplicity of the Oral Tradition. The language is quiet and powerful. "Time was, there were no people on earth." starts the Eskimo story of The Pea-Pod Man: Raven the Creator. And it goes on to tell how the first man grew on a vine, and of the Raven's gift to man - how he made a woman from clay with watercress for hair, who came to life with a flap of the Raven's wings. This sacred story ends on a satisfying note, with "The world prospered." With uncomplicated language and straightforward prose, all of the stories are delightful and thought-provoking for children, adding to the old conversation of Where We Came From.

EVALUATION

Hamilton's collection is culturally rich, and her retellings of these old stories are accompanied with insightful comments. After the telling of the Maidu Indian story, Turtle Dives to the Bottom of the Sea: Earth Starter the Creator, Hamilton offers, "Creation myths do not always give reasons for the way people are or the manner in which things happen." She goes on to say that sometimes we do not know the importance of people or events, or why something happens. It simply happens, and we have to "accept that [it:] does without explanation." Some might not like the way women are portrayed (often the cause of trouble, or there to be man's helper or companion), but Hamilton's treatment is true to the traditional stories, and I don't think she has anything for which to apologize here.

N_hannahkang says

Virginia Hamilton retells twenty-five creation myth stories from a variety of cultures. The entire compilation allows the reader to consider the ways each group or culture believe the way the earth and humans were created. Hamilton is clear in her introduction that each of the stories are called myths and that "Myths present themselves as truth and as accounts of actual facts no matter how different these facts or truths may be from our ordinary, 'real' experience. There are myths that are sacred or religious. And in all of them, there is the feeling that the unusual or divine events are inevitable" (x). Some critics may argue that these stories are not true, but it's not necessarily a matter of fact or fiction but more about belief. The collection is an attempt to share how people from all around the world "sensed the wonder and glory of the universe" (xi). And readers can experience these moments through an Eskimo myth titled "The Pea-Pod Man" where the raven creates earth, man, woman, trees, fruit, and animals. Then readers then can learn how races were created and the relationship between life and death from the Kono people of Guinea in "Death the Creator." Being exposed to a variety of creation myths will allow readers to gain perspective.

Michelle Pegram says

Hamilton has collected creation myths from 25 different cultures and put them in one volume. There are stories from Iceland, New Guinea, Russia, Nigeria, Zambia, Greece, Egypt and Guatemala just to name a few. In addition to this, the creation stories from Judaism and Christianity are included as are stories from two native american cultures, the Huron and the Blackfoot. This variety in and of itself makes this book worth a read. Hamilton also classifies creation myths based on type and give some information about the culture from which the creation story comes.

There are Two main reasons that I gave this book three stars even with the weight of the positives mentioned above. First of all, Hamilton puts all of the information about the culture of the creation stories at the end of the story rather than the beginning. As I was reading the stories, I found myself flipping to the end of each story so that I could read the story with the knowledge of its origin.

The second major drawback is that the illustrations included, though interesting and captioned in order to show how they connected to the story, did not add to the understanding or communication of the story. They did not have the life of the stories and, even with the captions, were not always clearly connected to what I was reading.

Despite these drawbacks, this book is worth reading and using in the classroom. With some pre-teaching for each creation story and some creativity in presentation - maybe tracking country of origin on a map or finding culturally relevant images to add to the story - there is wonderful material in this book with which to work. The book is recommended for grade 7 and up, but if they are read aloud, the stories may be appropriate for upper elementary grades as well.

Melissa Barbier says

This is a great collection of specifically just creation myths from many cultures. The index is just lacking the culture of origin for each story. The reader has to read the myth and see the note at the end to see where the myth is from. It would be easier to have the origin of the myth noted by each story in the index in case the

reader is trying to find myths from a certain culture. If a reader is simply trying to learn more creation myths, this a great book for that. Each story contains one or two illustrations, but they do not necessarily add to the comprehension of the story. For example, there are a few illustrations with subtitles that just say "woman" and "deer" and "thunder and lightning" which are not at all essential for readers to comprehend what they are reading. The notes at the end of each story do tell a little bit more about the culture like where they came from or if their other myths are about the same topics. This book would have to be used with older readers maybe 4th grade through middle school. The illustrations are not very inviting and I could see many students getting bored with the book if they are not as interested in mythology.

Kirsten says

I've always found myths to be fascinating, and even though this book is aimed at younger readers, the bones of the stories are still there. Also, a collection of stories around a particular theme like this is even more interesting to me, because you start to see some common themes emerging, even though the originating cultures were separated by significant amounts of time and space. A few of the creation stories here were familiar to me (obviously the Biblical accounts, and also parts of the Norse and Greek myths), but most were not, and I appreciated the way this book included both well-known creation stories and much more obscure ones.
