

First Fires

FOCUS QUESTION

What do myths tell us about the importance of fire?

NOTICE AND WONDER

Look at the myths you will read in this lesson. What do you notice? What do you wonder? Discuss your ideas with a partner.

WHAT IS A MYTH?

Pick one of the terms below and explain how it connects to myths. Add other words you know that connect to myths.

gods

explanation

nature

story

trickster

storyteller

tradition

ancient

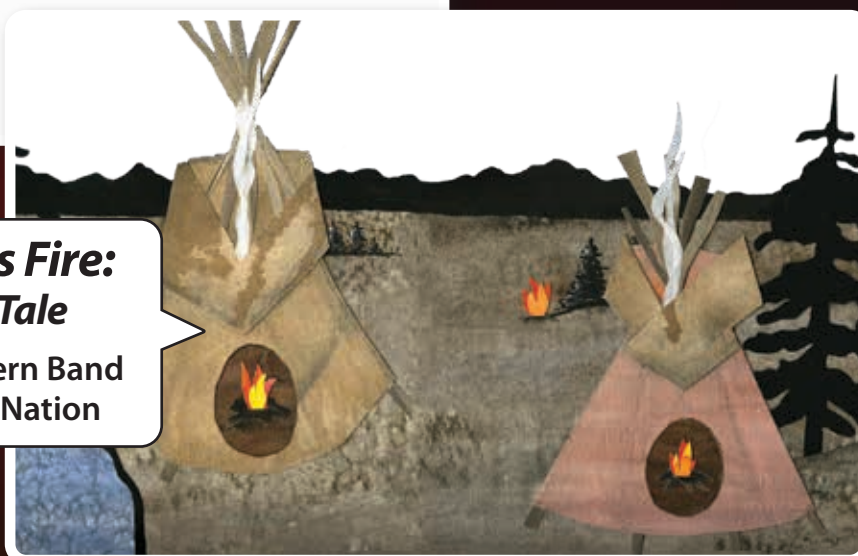
The word ___ is connected to myths because ___.

Another word connected to myths is ___.



***Maui and the
Flaming Fingernails***

by Amira Shea



***Coyote Steals Fire:
A Shoshone Tale***

by The Northwestern Band
of the Shoshone Nation



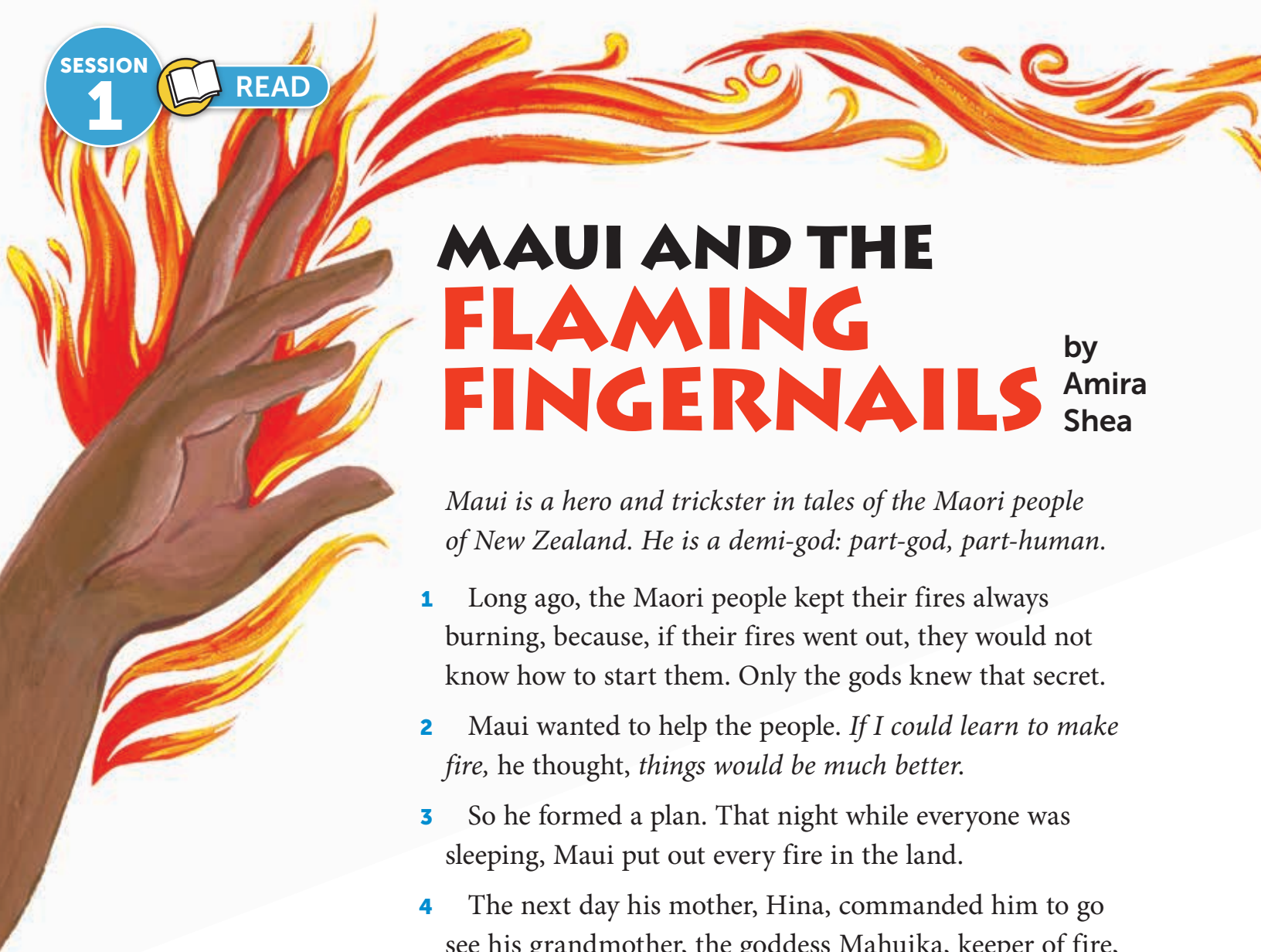
Prometheus's Gift

by Caleb Stanley



The First Fire

by Sophia Porter



MAUI AND THE FLAMING FINGERNAILS

by
Amira
Shea

Maui is a hero and trickster in tales of the Maori people of New Zealand. He is a demi-god: part-god, part-human.

- 1 Long ago, the Maori people kept their fires always burning, because, if their fires went out, they would not know how to start them. Only the gods knew that secret.
- 2 Maui wanted to help the people. *If I could learn to make fire, he thought, things would be much better.*
- 3 So he formed a plan. That night while everyone was sleeping, Maui put out every fire in the land.
- 4 The next day his mother, Hina, commanded him to go see his grandmother, the goddess Mahuika, keeper of fire, and bring fire back to the people.
- 5 So Maui went to the burning mountain where Mahuika lived. The goddess, glowing orange, red, and yellow, listened to her grandson's **plea**. Then she plucked out one of her fingernails. Sparks flickered and popped inside it. "Use this to relight the fires," she said.
- 6 Maui nodded, but on the way home, he dropped the flaming nail into a stream, **extinguishing** its tiny flame. Then he returned to Mahuika.
- 7 "Grandmother," he cried, "the fire you gave me got wet!"
- 8 Surely, he thought, *she will teach me the secret of fire now.*

plea = request or wish

extinguish = to put out
(a fire)


Stop & Discuss

What is Maui's plan?

Discuss details that help you understand what Maui wants and how he plans to get it.



* * *

- 9 Instead of teaching Maui the secret of fire, Mahuika gave him a second fingernail. He **doused** that one, too, went back, and got another nail. Maui did this over and over. Finally realizing that she had been tricked, Mahuika grew angry. She threw her next-to-last fingernail to the ground, starting a fire.
- 10 Maui tried to outrun the blaze. He changed himself into a hawk, but up in the sky the heat burned his wings. Then he dove into the ocean, but boiling water forced him out again. He begged the gods for rain, and they answered him with water that drowned the fire.
- 11 But Maui was not safe. Mahuika, still furious, chased the hawk back to the sky. Plucking out her last fingernail, she threw it at him. The flaming nail missed Maui and fell on five trees. The trees were pleased to receive Mahuika's gift of fire, and they held the sparks within their branches to keep fire safe from wind and rain.
- 12 Maui discovered that he could start a fire by rubbing together sticks from the trees. So, he brought home many branches and showed the people how to make their own fires. And that is how Maui brought back fire to the Maori people. 

douse = to use water to put out a fire

Stop & Discuss

Maui's plan works perfectly.

☐ agree

☐ disagree

Use details from the text to explain your answer.





Analyze Story Elements

- Myths from different cultures can have similar topics, patterns of events, and themes.
 - The topics often explain something about the natural world or people.
 - The patterns of events include characters with similar goals, plans, and challenges.
 - The themes can include similar messages about life and how people act.

Reread/Think

Reread “Maui and the Flaming Fingernails.” Work with a partner to fill out the story map.

Topic	Characters
Beginning (What does the character want? Why?)	
Middle (What is the character's plan?)	
End (How does the plan turn out?)	
Theme (What's the message about life?)	



Coyote Steals Fire: A Shoshone Tale

by The Northwestern Band
of the Shoshone Nation




Stop & Discuss

What do the children want Grandmother to do? What do you think will happen next?

Underline details that support your ideas.

Coyote, also known as Itsappe, is a trickster character in many Shoshone stories.

- 1 Every winter, Grandmother came to the *Moson Kahni* valley to gather with her people. There were hot springs here, and fish, game, and plenty of shelter. It was the old ones' time. Grandmother was a storyteller.
- 2 "Grandmother, tell us how *Itsappe*—Old Coyote—stole fire!"
- 3 "Oh, that's a good story. But remember, if you fall asleep during the story, we all go to bed."
- 4 "Haa" and "hoo," agreed the children. 



* * *

- 5 Coyote was walking along and was tired of being cold. He called the animals together.
- 6 “Let’s go to the desert lands in the south,” he said, “and steal the people’s fire.”
- 7 “Haa” and “hoo,” said the animals.
- 8 Coyote chose Packrat, Stinkbug, and Porcupine to go with him. The friends walked a long time. They watched the landscape change from pine to **piñon**, mountain to desert.
- 9 Nearing the camp of the people in the south, Coyote searched for a disguise.
- 10 “Those people don’t need to know who I am,” he said.
- 11 He tore off long shreds of juniper bark to make a wig. Packrat said he looked good.
- 12 They found the people dancing the round dance, so Coyote and his partners happily joined in. The girls thought Coyote was handsome in his wig, and that Porcupine’s quill dress was very pretty. Stinkbug jumped up and down to **impress** them, but they didn’t think he was good looking. They danced all night. 🖐️.....➡️

piñon = pine tree found in dry areas

impress = to amaze or get attention from

Stop & Discuss

Why does Coyote want fire? How does he try to get it?

Explain Coyote’s plan using details from the text.



coal = a piece of wood that is burning slowly

Stop & Discuss


How does Packrat help Coyote?

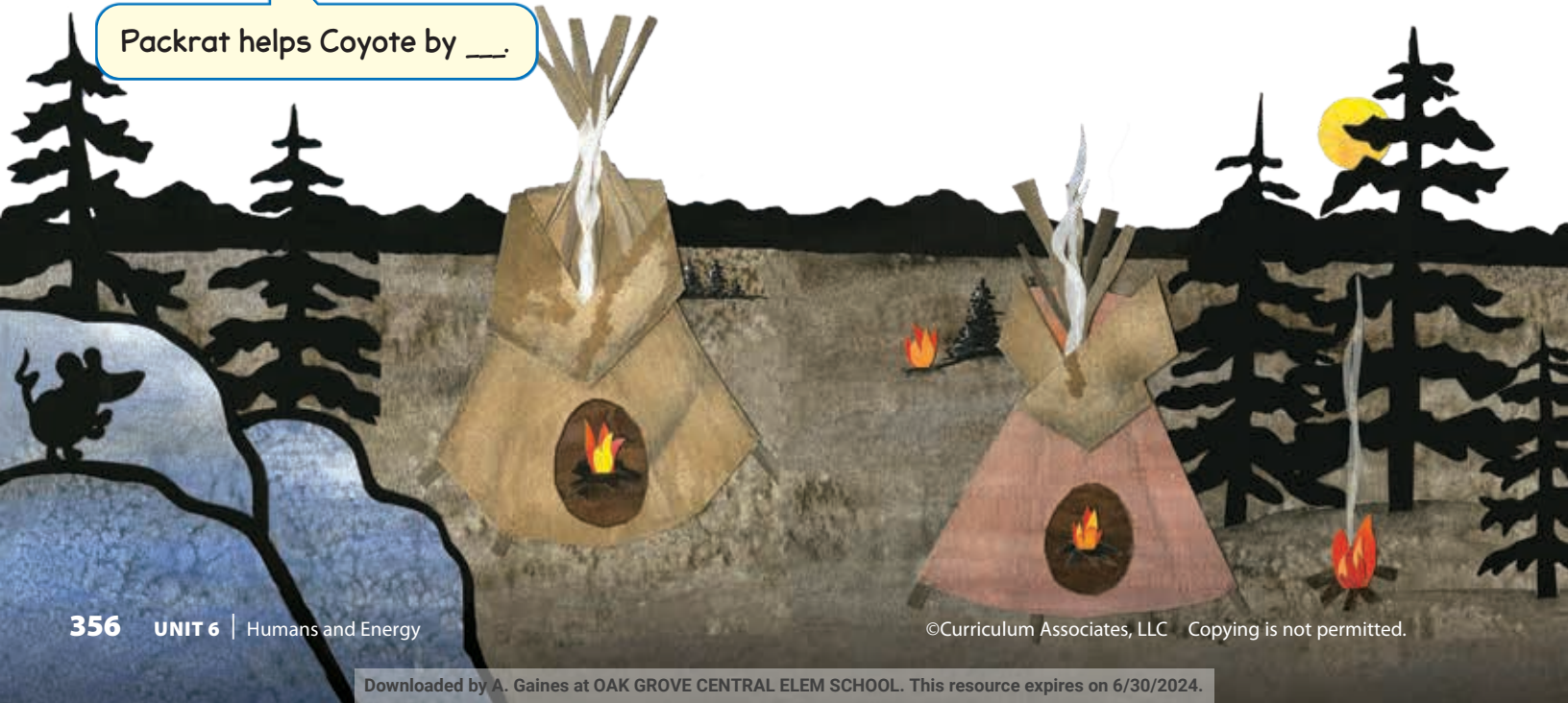
Explain how Packrat helps Coyote in your own words.

Packrat helps Coyote by ____.

- 13** At dawn Coyote danced closer and closer to the flames, till suddenly . . . he set his wig on fire! Then the people said, “It’s *Itsappe!* He’s stealing our fire!” The animals ran for the hills, with the people right behind them.
- 14** First they caught the slow ones—Stinkbug and Porcupine. Packrat and Coyote ran and ran, but the people followed fast. When he couldn’t run one more step, Coyote tossed the burning wig to Packrat. Then the people caught Coyote. Packrat kept running with the fire under his belly. He watched the landscape change from piñon to pine, desert to mountain.
- 15** Finally, Packrat reached his nest, and by then the fire was a little red **coal**. He blew on it gently, added twigs, and soon he had a fire to share with all the animals.
- 16** They divided the fire in the four directions.

* * *

- 17** “Is everyone still awake?”
- 18** “Haa” and “hoo.”
- 19** “*Kaan kwaisi yukwamitto’i,*” Grandmother said. “That’s the end of the story.” 





Compare Stories

Comparing stories can help you find similar patterns and themes and understand more about both stories.

Reread/Think

Reread "Coyote Steals Fire." Work with a partner to fill out the story map and compare it to "Maui and the Flaming Fingernails."

Topic	
Beginning (What does the character want?)	
Middle (What is the plan?)	
End (How does the plan turn out?)	
Theme (What's the message?)	



Talk

Use your story maps to compare the pattern of events in "Maui and the Flaming Fingernails" and "Coyote Steals Fire."

- How are Coyote and Maui similar? How are they different?
- What is similar about their plans? What is different?

In both myths, ____.

One way the myths are similar is ____.

One way the myths are different is ____.

Write

Compare the pattern of events in “Maui and the Flaming Fingernails” and “Coyote Steals Fire.” What is similar? What is different? Use details from both texts to support your response.

[illegible]

WRITING CHECKLIST

- ☐ I compared the events in two myths.
- ☐ I included details from both texts.
- ☐ I used complete sentences.
- ☐ I used correct spelling, punctuation, and capitalization.



Prometheus's Gift

by Caleb Stanley

This story is a retelling of a Greek myth.

- 1 Long ago in ancient Greece, two families of gods, Titans and Olympians, lived in the mountains in splendid marble and gold palaces. Warmed by crackling fires, they ate honey-flavored food and drank sweet nectar. Yet, humans did not have these comforts and were miserable. They ate raw food and slept in cold, dark caves.
- 2 One Titan, Prometheus, felt sorry for humans. He traveled to Mount Olympus to speak with Zeus, ruler of the Olympians. "I wish to share fire with humans," Prometheus declared.
- 3 "Impossible!" Zeus shouted. "With fire, humans would become strong and independent."

fennel = a plant with feathery leaves

defy = to not obey

- 4 Determined, Prometheus formed a plan. While Zeus was asleep, Prometheus stole a glowing spark from Zeus's lightning bolt, hid it in a hollow stalk of **fennel**, and then gave it to humans. Prometheus showed humans how to use fire for warmth, cooking, and light.
- 5 Gazing down from Mount Olympus, Zeus spotted small bonfires blazing across the earth like scattered fireflies. "How dare Prometheus **defy** me!" he roared.
- 6 Furious, Zeus chained Prometheus to a large rock to punish him. For one thousand years, Prometheus suffered scorching sun, drenching rains, and howling winds. Eventually, Heracles, famous for his strength, freed him.
- 7 Prometheus's gift forever brightened the lives of humans.





The First Fire

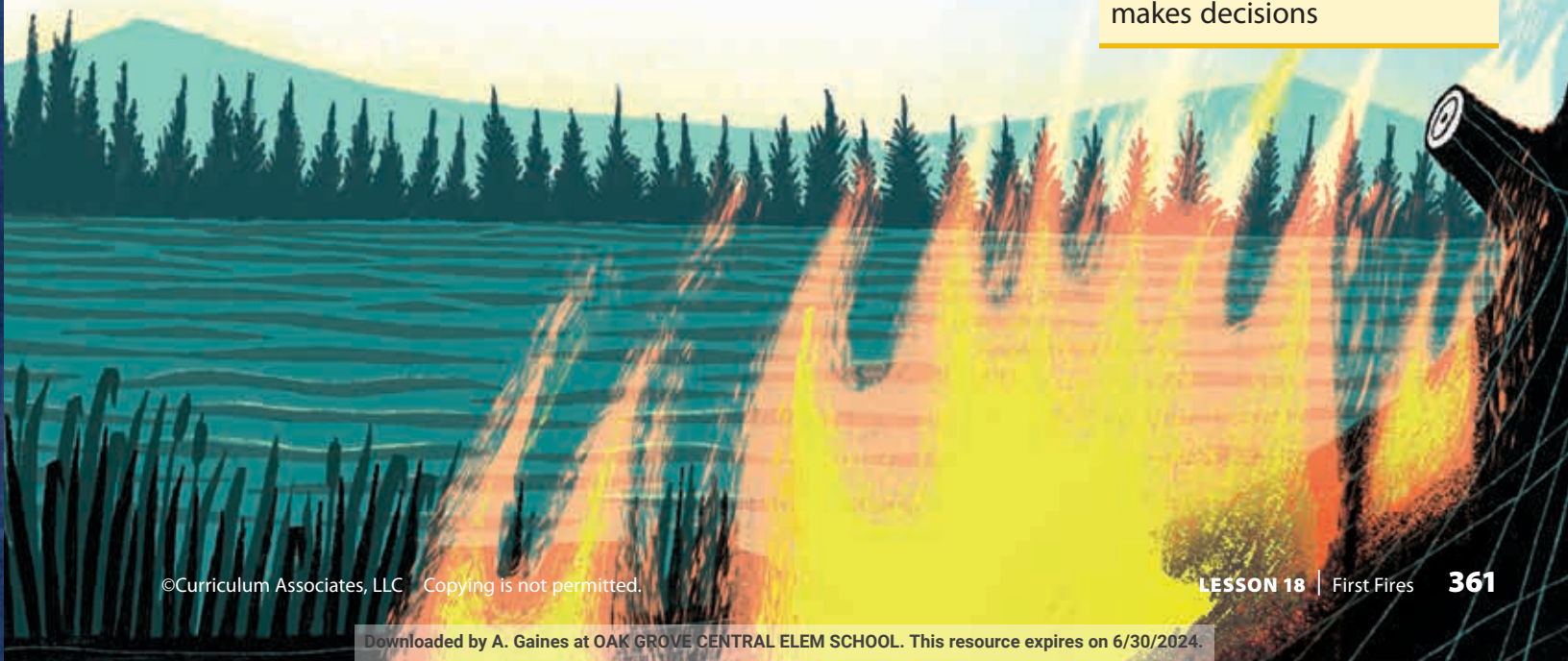
by Sophia Porter

This story is a retelling of a Cherokee myth.

- 1 When the world was new, there was no fire. The animals shivered in darkness, until one day, Thunder sent Lightning to a distant island to put fire inside a hollow tree. From land, Bear noticed smoke rising above the tree and called a **council** meeting of all living creatures.
- 2 “We need fire’s warmth and light,” Bear said, “so who will go to the island to get a piece for us?”
- 3 Owl offered to go first. He flew to the island and stared down into the tree. *Ayo!* That hurt! Smoke stung his eyes, and to this day Owl’s eyes grow fiery red.



council = a group that makes decisions



smolder = to burn slowly without flame

- 4 Next, Snake swam to the island and slipped into a hole in the trunk. *Ayo!* The ashes burned Snake's scales. He wriggled back and forth to escape, and that is why he moves this way still.
- 5 Finally, tiny Water Spider asked to try. Owl and Snake laughed, thinking the spider was not strong or brave enough. But Water Spider had a plan. She produced some of the silk thread she used to build webs and expertly wove it into a bowl. Next she attached the bowl to her back and glided across the water's surface. She crawled inside the **smoldering** tree and grasped one coal with her long legs. Carefully placing it in the bowl, Water Spider carried it home safely. Everyone was surprised. And Owl and Snake could not believe Water Spider had outdone them.
- 6 And so today, Water Spider has a bowl-like sac on her back—and the world has fire.





Respond to Text

Reread/Think

Reread "Prometheus's Gift" and "The First Fire." Compare the stories.

- Write an **X** in the box next to each event to show whether it describes "Prometheus's Gift," "The First Fire," or both myths.

Events	Prometheus's Gift	Both Myths	The First Fire
Someone wants fire.			
Someone acts alone.			
Someone gets burned.			
Someone is punished for getting fire.			
Getting fire takes several tries.			
Fire makes life more comfortable.			

- Which statement **best** describes the pattern of events in both stories?
 - Someone steals fire from the gods to give it to people, and they get punished for stealing.
 - Someone faces challenges to get fire and share it with others.
 - Someone tries to get fire to so they can share it with everyone, but they get burned.
 - Someone gets fire, brings it to people, and teaches them how to use it.



Reread/Think

3. In paragraph 5 of “The First Fire,” what is the meaning of *grasped*?

- A.** kicked
B. held
C. ate
D. lit

Write

Compare the topics and patterns of events in “Prometheus’s Gift” and “The First Fire.” How are they similar? How are they different? Use details from both texts in your response.

[illegible]

WRITING CHECKLIST

- ☐ I compared the events in two myths.
- ☐ I used details from both texts.
- ☐ I used complete sentences.
- ☐ I used correct spelling, punctuation, and capitalization.



Respond to the Focus Question

What do myths tell us about the importance of fire?

Reread/Think

Choose one myth from this lesson to reread.

TEXT: _____

What does the myth tell us about the importance of fire?

Talk

Discuss the questions below.

Why do some characters want to share fire and others do not?

Why do some characters use tricks instead of asking or fighting for what they want? Is tricking ever okay?

What is similar about all the myths? What is different about the myths?

Some characters want to share fire because ____.

Some characters use tricks because ____.

Write

Write your own myth about fire that follows a similar pattern of events as the myths in this lesson. Explain how a trickster character gets fire from someone powerful and shares it with others.