A popular misconception about mythology is that it is synonymous with the word false, something that is believed only by the naïve, the uneducated, or the “primitive.”

If upon leaving its burrow on February second, a groundhog casts a shadow, six more weeks of winter should be anticipated; if, however, it has no shadow, look forward to an early spring.

In contrast to the popular notion that they are untrue, myths make no comment whatsoever on whether or not a belief is, in a modern literal sense, true or not. Myths are not lies or untruths; myths make no comment on truth.

Some definitions of Myth:
1. “Myth [is] a dramatic presentation of the moral wisdom of the race. The myth uses the totality of the senses rather than just the intellect.” (Rollo May)

2. “Myths are things which never happened but always are.” (Carl Sagan)

3. “Myths are original revelations of the pre-conscious psyche, involuntary statements about unconscious psychic happenings.” (Carl Jung)

4. “Myth is the secret opening through which inexhaustible energies of the cosmos pour into human cultural manifestations.” (Joseph Campbell)

Myth is whatever a people believe or behave as though they believe!

Oral tradition:
The oral tradition is the transmission of material from person to person and from generation to generation by word of mouth and memory. Materials such as the folk epic, the ballad, folklore, proverbs, and many songs which originated among illiterate or semiliterate people were presented to their audiences by recitation and singing, transmitted by memory rather than in written form. Such materials use many formulaic expressions, pronounced cadences, and other devices to aid memory. Materials that have been preserved through oral transmission have usually undergone many changes and often exist in several versions.

3 traditional characteristics of myth:
• passed on orally, retold by one generation to the next
• exist in variation
• are anonymous
Transmission of myth:
- **Convergence**—the pressures of an environment upon an individual or group produces the myth: similar pressures and environments produce similar myths

- **Diffusion**—radiates out from one location or center: the story “travels” from one group to another and is modified or adapted to the new group

Types of myths:
- **Etiological myths**—the beginnings of things, creations myths, origin stories: these are myths proper

- **Legend or saga**—a myth with a connection to history: Wyatt Earp or Billie the Kid are examples of legends that did indeed exist, but not as they have been popularly remembered

- **Märchen** (ˈmaɪr-ken)—a fairy tale or fantasy

- **Ballad**—a story told by song

**Joseph Campbell’s four essential functions of myth:**
- **Mystical**—mythology awakens and perpetuates for each individual a sense of wonder and participation in the great mysteries of the universe

- **Cosmological**—mythology gives a deeply mystical importance to whatever image of the universe a people share

- **Sociological**—mythology validates and maintains the moral system and customs of the people

- **Pedagogical**—mythology harmoniously conducts individuals through the cycles of their lives: birth and the dependency of childhood, the responsibilities of maturity, old age and the passage into death

**Myth tells us about:** Space—nature, the world and our place; Time—our existence and life. Myths, then, deal with issues of Space and Time and with the Inner and Outer worlds.