

Myths and the role they play in society argumentative essay examples

[Religion](#), [God](#)



Long before we had books and places to store information, people used story telling as a form of passing their message from one generation to the next. Most of these stories were used to teach about national pride or the great works of their various gods and this gave rise to myths and legends. As time went on these stories also began to change to make them fit whatever the current generation was. The early Greeks were experts in the use of myths and many of their myths are still being read and studied and made into movies today. Today, however Walt Disney has taken these myths one step further in his story telling of Disney's princesses and many of the trials they had to endure in order to get to the finish line. This essay will look at one myth each from ancient Greece and the Disney respectively.

The story of King Midas has been told for a very long time and the moral of the story still rings true today. This story teaches about the dangers of greed. However there are people that have addressed successful business men as having Midas touch. I would therefore ask what exactly can be learnt from King Midas. Many people go away from that story wondering if greed is indeed good or bad or how much money you need to make to be considered greedy. The ancient Greeks believed that their gods usually come down from mount Olympus and meddle in the affairs of men. There are many stories of great men who were bore out of a union of a man and a god, or men that accomplished great things through the personal help of their gods. The myth of Midas and the golden touch is not any different as we see the god Dionysus interacts with Midas. As Joseph Campbell stated in *The Monomyth* "myths of man has flourished" The myth tells us that he was on a journey when one of his companions got lost. Silenus, who was also a teacher of

Dionysus ended up at the king's palace and after a feast was returned back to the god.

The god of wine was pleased to receive his companion back and offered to give Midas a gift - he says any wish he makes will be granted. After serious thought king Midas wanted everything he touched to be turned to gold and this request was granted to him. Now what he did not think about was that nothing would be excluded from everything so he would go to eat and on touching his food that too would be turned to gold. This does prove to be very difficult and Midas goes back to Dionysus and begs for the gift to be reversed and he was told to go bathe in river Pactolus and he does. This whole process has now turned him away from money to the point that he wanders the wilderness instead of returning to his palace where he was king.

When Midas made his wish he felt his life would never be the same and while that was true it wasn't the change he was expecting or hoping for. While he was happy to find that he could in fact turn anything to gold, he soon realized to his dismay that when he touched his food that turned to gold as well. Greed is addressed in this story of king Midas and his golden touch and that is usually the moral that is passed on whenever this myth is repeated. In trying to understand if greed in this case can be seen as good or evil I took a closer look at the events that took place before Midas was given the touch of gold. We are not told that Midas was a bad king and we have evidence to the contrary as we see him take in Silenus and hold a party for him after which he returned him to the god who must have been looking for him. It is only expected that he is rewarded for his good deed and Dionysus offers to do

this. Most poets who have told this story have not really given a definite reason as to why Midas chose this gift and others have come out straight to say that he was a greedy man who loved gold more than anything else and his gift is seen as a proof of that.

In this story it is clear to see that everything happened as a result of choice and effects or circumstance. Midas did a good deed and he was rewarded with a wish. He made a wish that in hindsight was not the best of choices and he paid for it with starvation till he had to beg for its reversal. After the gift was taken back from him he chose to stay as far away from the wealth that had made his life miserable and instead moved to the wild. We see in this myth a change from how most other Greek mythology is formed or told. Achilles did not choose to be strong but was made that way and neither did Hercules for that matter - . their destiny came as a result of fate as they had no hand in the events that led to people retelling their stories centuries later. However Midas got everything he did through the choices he made. While this myth does not really delve into the personality of Dionysus, Ovid the poet mentions that the god felt sorry with the choice of a gift that Midas made as he expected him to make a better one. The funny thing to notice here is that although the god feels the king made a wrong choice he still went ahead to grant the wish anyway. Many have stated that he did this to keep his word but others have claimed that the god wanted the king to experience first-hand the consequences of his decision. I tend to agree with the latter as the moral of this myth is usually on the topic of greed and its consequences.

While this particular myth is centered on king Midas and the consequences

of his many decisions, people could look at this story and call the king an idiot. However when the story is looked at not from the point of the king but rather greed; king Midas then just acts as a tool showing us the dangers of being greedy. Looking at the parable from this angle we now see how difficult it is to judge Midas as a normal character. We now have to judge him as a tool that really can't be judged. In trying to do this we have to ask ourselves how effective was Midas in teaching us about greed. This was a man who was greedy and then had to pay the price of greed so we can say that greed is bad. However he also got redemption when he asked Dionysus to reverse the gift which he now saw as a curse. Are we then to say that it is okay to be greedy as long as you recognize it before it kills you and ask for forgiveness and help?

The myth of king Midas and the golden touch is one that has been retold for almost two thousand years. This story is almost always told to show the dangers of greed so we can say that Midas symbolizes greed. However 2,000 years after this story was first told we can expect to see some changes begin to creep into this myth as times changes as well. In a country like America which is a majorly capitalist society the understanding of greed begins to change. It is no longer seen as a bad thing to make lots of money and in most cases it is considered as being successful which is now termed a good thing. So in these times while Midas is still seen as a greedy man the golden touch he was bestowed with is now seen in our society as a thing of value - hence you hear the term of someone with a golden touch as a compliment and no longer a negative symbol.

It is a common thing for people to be rewarded for doing well and this is very

common in ancient Greek mythology. The gods were quick to give gifts to people that have done well and Midas was no exception. The fact that Dionysus was able to give a gift to Midas for the favor he did was to show the power and benevolence of the gods of the ancient Greeks. When Midas realizes that his gift was not the best he could have asked for he went back to Dionysus and asked for a reversal of fortune and this too was granted him. This myth therefore also shows that when you acknowledge your mistake you can get redemption. Now this paints the picture that the gods of ancient Greece were not very different from those of our modern religions.

Many of us have heard the saying - be careful what you wish for as you may just get it. While I can't really say if it got its origin from the myth of king Midas it can be applied to it. As people we all have wishes and hope they come true but there are also many instances where people have had their wishes and it never ends well for them after that. A good example would be a couple of lottery winners whose lives became worse after they had won the lottery. Could it be that as humans we can't deal with the weight of our wishes been fulfilled. Midas could only see the immediate gain that would come with having everything he touched turn to gold that he did not stop and consider the dangers involved. If he did I am very sure he may have chosen a different gift.

Although the story of the golden touch is indeed a myth king Midas is a real historical figure that ruled Phrygia in what is in today's Asia in the 8th century BCE . This myth explains the punishment for greed and although today the term Midas touch is seen more as a good thing than an evil thing,

Midas is still used as a personification of greed and greed has been termed as one of the seven deadly sins.

Tiana – The Disney Princess

Most Disney pictures have been accused of portraying the myth that beauty is power. The Princess and the Frog was praised by many groups as been the first Disney movie with a black heroine in Tiana. Unfortunately Tiana is not a princess but a girl from a struggling home and it is her beautiful white friend that has a rich upbringing. We also see femininity as something less than masculinity and even in a movie that supposedly stars Tiana, being white is viewed as the norm. Although boys watch Disney movies as well, girls are the major target audience and these little girls are changed by what they see in these movies as truths. Disney has always selected their heroines based on goodness and looks. Walt Disney has said personally that there is always a lot of exaggeration in cartoon characters. While people complimented the interracial coupling of the princess and the frog it should be noted that they fell in love as frogs and were as a reason the same so their colour does not play any part in the character's progression. Children are very impressionable and they are easy targets for consuming what popular culture sells to them.

Many critics have given Disney a poor mark in their portrayal of race and gender in their movies. Disney over the years has become such a commercial force that you hardly find a house with a girl who at one point never wanted to be a Disney princess. This business has sold everything from movies to theme parks to consumables and impressionable kids are more than willing to be a part of that magic - even for a day. However most

Disney fairy tales hide the ideas they pass on race and gender. They have taken historical fact and made them pretty enough to be consumed by the young viewers but in so doing they have also changed some of the valuable lessons that would have been learnt otherwise.

In the princess and the frog, the females of African American background were highly stereotyped as we saw them live in a small black community while making chicken gumbo. Tiana's dad had a dream of owning a restaurant where he could sell his gumbo but he dies leaving Tiana and her mother to fend for themselves. At the end of the movie through the help of a wishing star she gets her father's dream achieved and gets the restaurant. Interracial relationships have been on the rise over time and while on the surface this seemed to be one of such relationships, it should be noted as I said earlier that the majority of the relationship happened with them as frogs. Another thing of importance is the fact that Tiana was changed to a frog. Looking through the Disney universe we see people turned into animals as a result of a problem or a fault as can be seen from the Beast in Beauty and the Beast who was turned to a beast because he was a cold man that did not respect his servants. One could be led to ask the question then - why was Tiana changed to an animal? What was wrong with her? It therefore did not paint a good picture that the first African American Disney princess had to endure been a frog. With regards to look Tiana is also not the norm for African Americans and is therefore not really relatable. Most African Americans will tell you that growing up they were encouraged to eat and we all know that foods deemed as African American comfort foods usually makes one pile the weight. It is therefore hard to believe that an African

American lady that grew up during slavery eating chicken gumbo would turn out that thin.

Sigmund Freud has stated that the first half of a child's life is difficult (Campbell 8) Impressionable young girls consume any message they are told to and these messages in future help to shape them into the women they become and in so doing build their social values. Self-esteem has been defined as the picture one has of their self so they could either have low self-esteem or good self-esteem. Having a low self-esteem can affect other areas of one's life and many people have fallen into depression as a result of low self-esteem. Now if the message that Disney is passing to girls creates a lie about their body image then those are myths that should be addressed properly for the sake of the next generation. Disney needs to consciously play a part in this turn around of what has been believed to be right by young girls who grow up to be women. Disney has for a long time fed people the myth that beauty is power and as a result young kids already consider themselves to be losers before they even venture into the real world because they do not fit the mould set by Disney on what is beautiful and right.

Disney has always been about your dream coming true and just like I showed in the previous myth; it is not always a joyful thing to have your wish come true. The major story a child who watches the Princess and the Frog comes away with is this - a dream is a wish that will eventually come true. And while Disney may have had some missteps in the retelling of this myth I do agree that the things they did well was very well done. They taught empowerment through a girl who would not let her father's dream die with

him but instead did all she could to get the restaurant of his dreams. If that is the only dream Disney made come true in this film then they chose the right one.

In conclusion I will compare and contrast these two myths and see if myths have a plan that makes them all align to the same pattern or if they are indeed different. It must be noted here that myths do not have scientifically researched material for storage of information so the stories that myth are made of change over time. In King Midas and Tiana we see them both making a wish and watching the wish turn bad, we also see them getting the wish reversed and while Tiana went on to be better off than before she made the wish the same cannot be said about king Midas who loathed gold so much that he went to reside in the wild and there he worshipped the god of the wilderness.

I do agree that there is a place for myths in our lives but I wish they could be changed for the better. Most of these myths were written before we were conceived and times have changed and these myths should acknowledge that fact. Looking at Tiana it will be a bit hard for the girls in the black community to watch and think - oh that could be me someday. Disney who happens to be one of the biggest marketers for such products should entertain little girls with believable features. It is one thing where a girl is dreaming about finding her own prince. She should not be made to leave that movie theatre with the belief that even if the prince does come he will not come for someone with her body types. As we watch our world change and see our values change, we should still be able to read myths and go away with lessons like the perils of greed and the reward in good work. If

these are all we can get from our myths, then they are still achieving the reasons they were sent out in the first place.

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