

Throughout history, humans have wondered how everything came to be. How was Earth created? Where did we come from? To answer these questions, most civilizations developed creation stories. The people of ancient Greece used the story of Chaos to illustrate how they viewed the creation of Earth, the stars, and the sun. By bringing the celestial elements to life, the Greeks created mythological beings whose great powers influenced humans. These myths explained why and how the gods acted in human life. Greeks used these myths in their everyday lives to teach lessons about family and society and to explain events they did not understand.

In the Beginning

When you think of chaos, you probably think of something that is out of control and in a state of confusion. The word *chaos* refers to the absence of,

or lack of, order and organization. It comes from the Greek word for the beginning of the universe. There are different myths about Chaos that describe it as a giant mass of all things to come. Sometimes Chaos is an empty, airy space.

In Greek mythology, Chaos is the name of the first god that emerged at creation. Chaos is described as what existed before there was anything else. The second god Gaea, or Earth, emerged shortly thereafter. Next, Tartarus appeared as the dark region below ground, somewhat like the underworld. Finally, Eros—love—appeared in the universe and brought life. These four gods gave birth to the rest of creation.

Descendants of the Gods

Chaos had powerful children. Erebus, the first child, acted as the darkness of Tartarus, or the underworld, and Nyx, also called Night, was the darkness over Earth. Erebus and Nyx together created Aether and Hemera, also known as Day. Aether is the heavenly light, and Hemera is light on Earth.



In the beginning, there was Chaos. From Chaos came darkness and light. The Greeks created stories to explain what they saw in the night sky. This led to the beginning of Greek mythology.

Hemera allowed Gaea to split the sky from herself. This created Uranus, who represents heaven. Because Uranus surrounded Gaea, they were perfect mates. Together, they created Earth's first inhabitants—12 Titans, 3 Cyclopes, and Hecatoncheires. Hecatoncheires were 100-armed, 50-headed monsters. The Titans represented different parts of Earth's creation. Hyperion was the Titan of light. Thea was the Titan of sight and gold, silver, and gemstones.

Themis was the Titan of justice. She is often shown holding the scales of justice. Mnemosyne was the Titan of memory. Rhea was the Titan of fertility. Many of the Titans married one another and created other parts of the universe. Hyperion and Thea were the parents of the Sun, Moon, and Dawn—or Helios, Selene, and Eos.

Gaea and Uranus lived together happily until Uranus took a dislike to his children, the Hecatoncheires, who also did not like him. Uranus forced the Hecatoncheires back into the earth. Gaea was saddened and asked her other children to help free them. She created the first sickle, a weapon with a curved blade, and asked her children to take revenge on their father. The Cyclopes refused, and most of the Titans were too afraid of their father. One Titan agreed to help. Cronus was the Titan of time. He took the sickle and attacked Uranus. When part of Uranus landed in the ocean, the goddess Aphrodite was formed. Where drops of Uranus' blood hit Earth, fantastic creatures such as the Furies, Giants, and nymphs were born.

Uranus retreated to the sky and did not return to Earth again. Cronus sent the Hecatoncheires and Cyclopes to Tartarus, and declared himself the head of the Titans.

The Mother's Revenge

Many stories in Greek mythology are circular in nature. The creation story is no different. Once Cronus came to power, he took the Titan Rhea as his wife. But his main weakness was his children. Gaea prophesized, or predicted, that just as Cronus had taken power from Uranus, one of his own children would overtake his throne. So, like Uranus, he imprisoned them all. Instead of putting them in the earth though, he swallowed them.



Cronus, the Titan of time, agreed to help his mother, Gaea. He took her sickle and attacked his father, Uranus.

Both Rhea and Gaea were angered at Cronus's treatment of his children. When Zeus, the last son of Cronus, was born, they both worked together to trick Cronus. Rhea wrapped a stone up in a blanket and gave it to him to swallow instead of Zeus. She then hid Zeus in a mountain cave on the island of Crete.

When Zeus grew up, he married Metis, the daughter of a Titan. Gaea guided them home to his father's house. Zeus tricked Cronus into drinking a potion that Metis had made that would make him vomit up all his children. Once out of their father's stomach, Zeus led his brothers and sisters in a revolt against their father. Zeus released the Cyclopes from Tartarus to help. The Cyclopes armed the children. Zeus was given a lightning bolt, Hades was given a powerful helmet that brought darkness, and Poseidon was given a 3-pronged spear known as a trident. Working together, Zeus and his siblings defeated Cronus and imprisoned the other Titans. One Titan was singled out for leading the fight against Zeus: Atlas was sentenced to hold up the sky.

The Greek Pantheon

Zeus became the leader of the Greek pantheon, the temple of all Greek gods. Each of his brothers and sisters was given a specific area to lead, but he kept Earth for himself. These 12 Olympians were the main deities that the Greeks worshiped. Zeus, Hera, Poseidon, Demeter, Athena, Hestia, Apollo, Artemis, Ares, Aphrodite, Hephaestus, and Hermes kept council on Mount Olympus. They watched over and meddled in the lives of humans. The unique nature of each god could be appealed to if humans needed help or guidance. The story of the Greek gods and how they created order from chaos is a fascinating myth.

After reading the passage, answer the following questions:

1. Based on how it is used in the text, *celestial elements* relate to
 - A. light
 - B. sky
 - C. water
 - D. fire
2. Both Cronus and Uranus used Tartarus as a prison. Where is it located?
 - A. in a black hole
 - B. below ground
 - C. the space between the sky and Earth
 - D. outside the known universe
3. Rather than punish his children by sending them away, Cronus swallowed them all except Zeus who was snuck away by Rhea and Gaea. Why did Cronus' plan backfire on him?
 - A. His children, who were gods, survived inside his stomach until Zeus grew up and led a revolt against their father.
 - B. One day Cronus would die and his cruel ruling would live on through his wife Rhea.
 - C. Uranus was predicted to come back and regain the throne.
 - D. Cronus' plan was unstoppable, and it did not backfire on him.
4. Even though the Greek gods were mythological, they represented different parts of the real world. How did the Greek gods reflect the ancient Greeks' understanding of the creation of Earth? Support your answer with details from the passage.
5. How might this creation myth still influence literature and language today? Provide 1 or 2 examples, and support your answer with details from the passage.