

This unit covers some of the earliest recorded human writings.

- The Enuma elish
- The Gilgamesh Epic
- Flood narratives from the Judeo-Christian and Greek cultures

This unit is meant to generate discussion among students about the similarities in stories that humans across cultures tell. There are opportunities here for cross-curricular discussions about the cultures, eras and geography of the places in which they take place (i.e. the geography has a great deal to do with the kinds of stories that a culture produces.)

Major Themes:

- Mankind's quest for immortality
- Mythology to explain surroundings
- Transition from oral to recorded history

As humans transition away from oral traditions to recorded history, this is the perfect unit to cover content in groups and call attention to the repetition and story elements that might no longer be necessary as thoughts can now be documented and stored in something other than brains.

Supplemental Resources:

Animated version of the [Gilgamesh Epic](#)
[BookRags Epic of Gilgamesh Summary & Study Guide](#)
[SparkNotes](#)

Teaching Strategies:

Since these stories were the first attempt at providing a written account of gods and heroes from the oral tradition it may make sense to read them aloud in large groups to approximate how people may have heard them thousands of years ago. Oral storytelling contains a great deal of repetition so if you feel the need to condense some of the materials the stories lend themselves to shorter versions if students are just reading them to get the main ideas.

Stories can tell us a lot about the culture that produced them just like making new versions of them can tell us more about the time and culture today. You may wish to encourage students to retell the stories from a modern perspective or to recreate them using video or graphic representations and discuss what insights their versions might give to people viewing them in the future.

There are materials on life in ancient Sumer included in the *Before you read The Epic of Gilgamesh* page. If you would like to go more in-depth on this topic and discuss [the early Middle East](#), more resources are available under a Creative Commons license from ushistory.org as part of their Ancient Civilizations course.

It would also be appropriate to have students research other creation myths and early stories from other cultures. Greek and Norse stories will be provided later in this course.

