

Norse Myths Block

5 weeks

Why Norse Myths?

In third grade, a major main lesson was Old Testament Stories. Here, by hearing stories of the Fall, the Flood, Cain and Abel, of Moses and the Law, the emerging 'I' of the nine-year-old was nourished by being able to stand in relation to the problems of good and evil. As he experienced his own Fall, the child could take comfort in knowing (unconsciously of course) that all human beings are imperfect and that the Fall from Innocence allows for the possibility of human freedom.

Now in fourth grade, the Norse Myths – like the further stories of the Old Testament included in this syllabus – speak to a new dimension in the ten-year-old: moral ambiguity. Children of this age are testing the waters in terms of stretching their new sense of 'I' and black and white answers and immutable laws are beginning to not be satisfactory. Ten-year-olds are aware of the fallibility of their parents and some are also aware of the very human limitations of other important adults in their lives. While they are still too young to be expected to truly understand and forgive or to have more than the first hints of true compassion, it is right for them to start to become aware of the complexities of human life.

This is where the Norse Myths come in. A central theme is the mistakes these gods make and their very human reactions. Even the All-Father, Odin, makes a mistake, one so great that it could be said to lead to the destruction of the gods: he swore a blood-oath with Loki and thus let evil into the god's paradise. Or was it a mistake? Can there truly be good without evil? Can the light exist without the dark? Doesn't Loki bring new energy and life to the gods?

And even though the gods eventually fall, these myths are incomplete without the story of Líf and Lífthrasir and the possibility of a new dawn. Hope is never extinguished and though the destruction of Ragnarokk seems complete, there is always the possibility for a new beginning.

Such profound images are enormously helpful to children of this age, acting as balm on their souls as they struggle with their own relation to good and evil, whether that which lives within them or that they observe around them.

One can also find further “soul-food” as one looks more deeply into these stories and seeks to understand the truths revealed through mythic picture-language. Roy Wilkinson has written extensively about various aspects of the Waldorf curriculum. In his *The Norse Stories and their Significance* he has the following to say about the figure of Baldur and also the deep wisdom contained in the central image of the World-Tree, Yggdrasil:

Baldur was known as the Beautiful. He had an aura of light around him. In his presence was joy, happiness and healing forces. No-one disputed with him. He quarreled with no one. His death is a prelude to the twilight of the gods when men would finally lose all perception of the spiritual world. When Baldur has