**Honors World Lit 9-“In the Beginning”**

As we enter our first unit of literary study, we begin to take a closer look at the narratives that have shaped cultures over time using the Mythological Archetypal literary perspective. *This* is a handout in a series that serves as “notes” housing the vocabulary germane to the subject.

**Characteristics of Myths C***aution must be given about how much the definition of myth has been debated and written about. Take the following characteristics of myth in the spirit in which they are intended: general guidelines gleaned from what many people have noticed as often being true of myths. Remember these characteristics are neither absolute nor all-encompassing.*

**1. A story that is or was considered a true explanation of the natural world (and how it came to be).**

**2. Characters are often non-human – e.g. gods, goddesses, supernatural beings, first people.**

**3. Setting is a previous proto-world (somewhat like this one but also different).**

**4. Plot may involve interplay between worlds (this world and previous or original world).**

**5. Depicts events that bend or break natural laws (reflective of connection to previous world).**

**6.  Cosmogonist/metaphysical explanation of universe (formative of worldview).**

**7.  Functional: “Charter for social action” – conveys how to live: assumptions, values, core meanings of individuals, families, communities.**

**8. Evokes the presence of Mystery, the Unknown (has a “sacred” tinge).**

**9. Reflective and formative of basic structures (dualities: light/dark, good/bad, being/nothingness, raw/cooked, etc.) that we must reconcile. Dualities often mediated by characters in myths.**

**10. Common theme: language helps order the world (cosmos); thus includes many lists, names, etc.**

**11. Metaphoric, narrative consideration/explanation of “ontology” (study of being). Myths seek to answer, “Why are we here?” “Who are we?” “What is our purpose?” etc. – life’s fundamental questions.**

**12. Sometimes: the narrative aspect of a significant ritual (core narrative of most important religious practices of society; fundamentally connected to belief system; sometimes the source of rituals)**