

Ring Lesson Plan:
Gods of Nordic Mythology Compared to Greek
Written by Olga C.G. Bezrukova for L.A.Opera

Grades: Secondary

Subject: Literature, Reading

*California State Board of Education Content Standards
Language Arts*

GRADES 11/12

2.0. READING COMPREHENSION (FOCUS ON INFORMATIONAL MATERIALS):

Students read and understand grade-level-appropriate material. They analyze the organizational patterns, arguments, and positions advanced. The selections in *Recommended Readings in Literature, Grades Nine Through Twelve* illustrate the quality and complexity of the materials to be read by students. In addition, by grade twelve, students read two million words annually on their own, including a wide variety of classic and contemporary literature, magazines, newspapers, and online information.

1.0. WRITING STRATEGIES: Students write coherent and focused texts that convey a well-defined perspective and tightly-reasoned argument. Student writing demonstrates awareness of audience and purpose and use of the stages of the writing process, as needed.

Organization and Focus:

- 1.1. demonstrate understanding of the elements of discourse (e.g., purpose, speaker, audience, form) when completing narrative, expository, persuasive, informational, or descriptive writing assignments
- 1.2. use point of view, characterization, style (e.g., irony), and related elements for specific rhetorical and aesthetic purposes
- 1.3. structure ideas and arguments in a sustained, persuasive, and sophisticated way and support them with precise and relevant examples
- 1.4. enhance meaning by employing rhetorical devices, including the extended use of parallelism, repetition, and analogy; the incorporation of visual aids (e.g., graphs, tables, pictures); and the issuance of a call for action
- 1.5. use language in natural, fresh, and vivid ways to create a specific tone

Preparation:

1. Copies of Worksheet A, Worksheet B, and *The Ring* synopsis.
2. Posters, and basic art supplies.
3. Computer lab with connection to the Internet.

Goals and Objectives:

1. The teacher will hand out Worksheet A and *The Ring* synopsis.
2. Teacher will introduce the class to *The Ring* and the students will read the synopsis as a group.
3. Teacher will encourage the students to participate in class discussion to fill out Worksheet A, as they are reading the synopsis.
4. Teacher will divide the class into seven groups.
5. Teacher will give each group a topic.
6. Teacher will help the students in finding appropriate websites for research.
7. Teacher will facilitate each of the groups' poster-making process.
8. Teacher will oversee the students as they prepare for their class presentations.
9. Teacher will oversee the students as they prepare for their class presentation.

Procedure:

1. Each student will get a synopsis of *The Ring* and **Worksheet A**.
2. Teacher will divide the class into seven groups.
3. The objective of each group will be to research Nordic gods and to compare those to the ancient Greek pantheon.
4. The students will fill out the worksheet as a group.
5. Teacher will hand out **Worksheet B**.
6. Each group will designate a leader.
7. Leaders will draw from the hat a name of the particular god/goddess that their group is going to be responsible in researching. The possible names of Nordic deities: Wotan, Fricka, Freia, Donner, Froh, Erda, and Loge.
8. Each group will research their topic and create a poster to present to class. The poster should cover these essential points:
 - a. The Nordic name of the deity, as well as the functions it performs in the mythology.
 - b. The functions of the deity in *The Ring*.
 - c. Comparison of the Nordic god/goddess to a one in Greek mythology.
 - d. List some of the myths that incorporate your particular deity.
9. The teacher will guide the students in their research.
10. The students will create posters.
11. Students will present their posters to class.
12. Assignment: Students will write an essay comparing the deities of Nordic origin to those of Greek origin.

Assessment:

1. Students will be able to read the synopsis and participate in class discussion about the Nordic deities and their functions in *The Ring* while filling out **Worksheet A** as a class.
2. In groups, students will be able to research a given topic.

3. Each of the groups will be able to find information on the given topic on the Internet and create a poster.
4. Each of the groups will be able to work on the poster as a team.
5. Each of the groups will be able to present as a team.
6. Each student will be able to use their research as well as the Worksheet A and Worksheet B to write an essay comparing the Nordic gods and mythology to Greek gods and mythology.

Extra Credit: Have the students compile a listing of art works – music, drama or literature – that features their assigned “god.”



SYNOPSIS

Synopsis of the Ring

Das Rheingold

By Mark Lyons

In the Rhine River, the three Rhinemaidens frolic through the water. Alberich, a Nibelung dwarf, approaches the lovely creatures, hoping to join them, but the Rhinemaidens laugh at his ugliness. As the sunlight from above penetrates the waves, the river's golden treasure is revealed. The Rhinemaidens, guardians of the Rhinegold, disclose their secret: if someone were to renounce love and fashion a ring out of their gold, he would gain the power to win all of the world's wealth. They are confident that nobody would be willing to make that sacrifice, but, angry and rejected, Alberich seizes the opportunity. He curses love, but not lust, and steals the gold from its keepers.

Wotan, king of the gods, is awakened by his wife Fricka. In the distance lies the magnificent Valhalla, a newly-completed fortress that Wotan has had built by two giants, the brothers Fasolt and Fafner. Fricka had begged Wotan to build Valhalla, selfishly hoping that their new home would put an end to his wanderings. Wotan has promised the giants that they could have Fricka's sister Freia, goddess of youth, as payment. Wotan tells her that he has no intention of following through with the bargain. Loge, the god of fire, will help to convince the giants to change their minds. The giants draw near to demand their payment. Fafner knows how highly the gods depend on Freia, for she grows golden apples that bestow eternal youth upon them. Freia's brothers, Froh and Donner (gods of spring and thunder), try to protect her, but Wotan stops them, reminding them that all treaties are guaranteed by the writings on his spear, which include his contract with the giants. When Loge finally arrives, he agrees with the giants that no payment would ever compare to a beautiful woman. He has heard of only one being who has ever renounced love, Alberich, who now stands to control all of the world's power. Fafner tells Wotan that he is willing to accept Alberich's gold in Freia's place. The giants carry her away, promising to return that evening. In her absence, the gods soon begin to lose their youth.

Far underground in Nibelheim, Alberich's workers mine for gold. Alberich has forced his brother Mime to create the Tarnhelm, a magic helmet that enables its wearer to assume any shape. Alberich uses the Tarnhelm to make himself invisible to torment his workers. When Loge leads Wotan into the cavern, Mime tells them that Alberich has forged the magic ring from the Rhinegold, with which he discovers endless supplies of gold. He plans to use his wealth to take control over the world. Alberich returns, suspicious of the intruders. Bragging, Alberich tells them about the Tarnhelm, then demonstrates its power by transforming himself into a fearsome dragon. When Loge asks if Alberich can make himself into something tiny, Alberich takes the shape of a toad. Loge and Wotan quickly seize the creature and take the Tarnhelm away. Suddenly visible in his usual shape, Alberich is tied up as their prisoner.

Loge and Wotan drag Alberich back to the mountaintop, where they demand his gold as ransom. Alberich mutters to himself that he can use the ring to replace any gold that he must relinquish. He summons his workers to bring their hoards. Loge demands that he leave the Tarnhelm behind as well. Wotan sees the ring on Alberich's finger, and asks for that too. When Alberich refuses, Wotan tells him that he has no claim to it, for it was stolen from the Rhinemaidens. Alberich points out Wotan's hypocrisy, but ultimately relinquishes the ring in return for his freedom. Leaving, he puts a curse upon the ring so that it will bring only misery and death to whoever wears it.

Fasolt and Fafner return with Freia. Fasolt demands that the gold be piled up in front of her; the giants will release Freia

only when the gold completely blocks her from their sight. Froh and Donner begin the task. After all the gold is stacked, Fafner can still see Freia's hair. He asks for the Tarnhelm too, which Wotan gives up. Fasolt then spies Freia's eyes through a crack in the pile of gold, unwilling to let her go until Wotan's ring is added to the treasure. When Wotan refuses, Erda, goddess of the earth, emerges with a dire warning. She convinces Wotan that he must relinquish the ring, or face certain destruction. As Fafner and Fasolt survey their treasure, they argue over its fair division. When Fasolt takes the ring, Fafner kills him. Wotan realizes that Alberich's curse on the ring has already begun to take effect.

Donner sweeps away the stormclouds and Froh points the way over a rainbow bridge to Valhalla. The gods begin their journey to Wotan's new fortress, as the Rhinemaidens mourn the loss of their gold.



Die Walküre

Act One

Siegmond collapses from exhaustion after taking refuge in an unfamiliar house. Sieglinde, startled to find a stranger in her home, tells him that her husband Hunding will return home shortly. Siegmund assures her that she has nothing to fear from an unarmed, wounded man. He tells her that his name is "Wehwalt" (Sorrowful) and rises to leave, but Sieglinde convinces him to stay and rest. When Hunding arrives, Siegmund relates the tragic tale of his life. Fighting a gang of ruffians who had killed his mother and kidnapped his twin sister, he became separated from his father. He was left alone, rejected by all he encountered and treated like an outcast. He had tried to rescue a girl who was being forced by her family to marry. Although Siegmund tried to shield her from her furious kinsmen, his weapons were shattered and the girl was killed. Hunding has, in fact, just returned from a search party he had joined with the girl's surviving family, hunting for Siegmund. He tells Siegmund that he may stay the night, but that they will fight to the death in the morning.

Left alone, Siegmund despairs at having no weapons to defend himself, even though his father had once promised him a sword in his hour of direst need. Sieglinde returns, having drugged her husband. She tells him how, during her wedding to Hunding, a stranger entered the house, which had been constructed around an ash tree. Clad in grey with a hat slung low over one of his eyes, he plunged a sword deep into the trunk of the tree; nobody has subsequently been able to pull it out. Sieglinde hopes that "Wehwalt" might be the one to seize the sword and free her from her unhappiness. Gazing intently at him, she realizes that he looks familiar; even his voice begins to stir her memory. When Siegmund tells her that his father's name was Wälse, Sieglinde excitedly recognizes him as her long lost twin. Siegmund triumphantly pulls the sword from the tree and, rejoicing in the reunion of the Wälungs, hails Sieglinde as both sister and bride.

Act Two

The king of the gods, Wotan, urges Brünnhilde to protect his mortal son Siegmund in the coming fight. Brünnhilde is one of the nine Valkyries, immortal daughters of Wotan and the earth goddess Erda, who ride to battle in search of the bravest warriors. Wotan's wife Fricka arrives in a fury. As goddess of marriage, she is horrified at the incestuous and adulterous union of Siegmund and Sieglinde, and shamed by Wotan's own adultery. She demands that Hunding be avenged. Wotan is determined that Siegmund survive the fight so that he can win back an all-powerful ring forged from the Rhinegold. The ring had been stolen from Alberich by Wotan, but has come into the possession of the giant Fafner. By acting independently from his father, Siegmund would enable Wotan to circumvent his guilt for stealing the ring. Fricka points out that, by leaving a sword behind for his son, he has merely made Siegmund his unwitting player in his plan. Wotan reluctantly agrees that neither he nor Brünnhilde will protect Siegmund in the coming fight.

Alone with Brünnhilde, Wotan laments that the gods would be overthrown easily if Alberich were ever to regain the ring.

Furthermore, Erda had foretold that the reign of the gods would end if Alberich were ever to have a son, and Wotan has heard that the dwarf has done so, after using his gold to entice a mortal woman. To Brunnhilde's shock, Wotan orders her to make certain that Hunding is victorious. Wotan's laws, carved onto his spear, must be upheld or Wotan's reign is meaningless.

Fleeing from Hunding, Siegmund and Sieglinde pause to rest. As Sieglinde sleeps, Brunnhilde appears, telling Siegmund that he must follow her to Valhalla. Siegmund refuses to leave his beloved behind. Moved by his passion, Brunnhilde determines to save Siegmund after all. When Hunding arrives, she shields Siegmund in the fight. Wotan then appears, shattering Siegmund's sword with his spear, and Hunding is now able to slay his rival easily. Brunnhilde, gathering up the broken sword, hurries Sieglinde away to safety. Wotan contemptuously kills Hunding, then vows to punish Brunnhilde for her disobedience.

Act Three

On a mountaintop, the Valkyries gather together before carrying slain warriors to Valhalla, where they will help guard the fortress of the gods. Brunnhilde soon joins them, fleeing from her father's wrath to protect Sieglinde. Unwilling to defy their father, the Valkyries refuse to help her. Sieglinde mourns the death of Siegmund, but Brunnhilde tells her that she must live for the sake of their unborn child, who will grow up to become the greatest of all heroes. Brunnhilde gives Sieglinde the pieces of Siegmund's broken sword, and tells her to seek shelter in the forest where Fafner guards his hoard, for Wotan would not dare to follow her there.

When Wotan arrives, he tells Brunnhilde that she must be stripped of her divinity, and left there in exile, locked in sleep, for any man to claim as his own. Brunnhilde tells him that although she disobeyed his orders, she knew that she was merely following what his heart desired most. Deeply moved by her courage, Wotan eventually agrees to Brunnhilde's one request, that he surround her with flames that only the bravest of men might penetrate. Wotan says his final farewell to his daughter. As she sinks into her long sleep, he calls upon Loge, the god of fire, to encircle the rock with terrifying flames; only one who knows no fear will be able to awaken her.



Siegfried

Act I

In his cave deep in the forest, the dwarf Mime forges a sword for his foster son Siegfried. He hates the boy but hopes that Siegfried will kill the dragon Fafner, who guards the Nibelungs' treasure, so that Mime can get the all-powerful ring and rule the world. Siegfried runs in, picks up the new sword and smashes it, raging at Mime's incompetence. The dwarf, acting innocently, offers him food and kind words, but Siegfried doesn't want any of it. He knows he cannot be Mime's real son, as there is no physical resemblance between them, and demands to know who his parents were. For the first time, Mime tells Siegfried how he found his mother, Sieglinde, in the woods and how she died giving birth to him. Siegfried is moved by the story but asks for proof. When Mime shows him the fragments of his father's sword, Nothung, Siegfried orders Mime to repair it for him and rushes out.

As Mime sinks down in despair, a stranger enters. It is Wotan, lord of the gods, in human disguise as the Wanderer. He challenges the fearful Mime to a riddle competition, in which the loser forfeits his head. The Wanderer easily answers Mime's three questions—who lives under the earth (the Nibelungs), on it (the giants), and above it (the gods). Mime in turn knows the answers to the traveler's first two questions but gives up in terror when asked who will repair the sword Nothung. The Wanderer admonishes Mime for enquiring about faraway matters when he doesn't know about the things that closely concern him. Then he departs, leaving the dwarf's head to "him who knows no fear" and who will re-forge the magic blade.

When Siegfried returns demanding his father's sword, Mime tells him that he can't repair it and tries in vain to explain the concept of fear to the boy. To teach him, he proposes a visit to Fafner's cave. Siegfried agrees and enthusiastically begins to forge the sword himself. While he works, Mime prepares a sleeping potion to give to Siegfried once he has killed Fafner. Flashing the finished sword, the boy smashes the anvil in half and runs off into the forest.

Act II

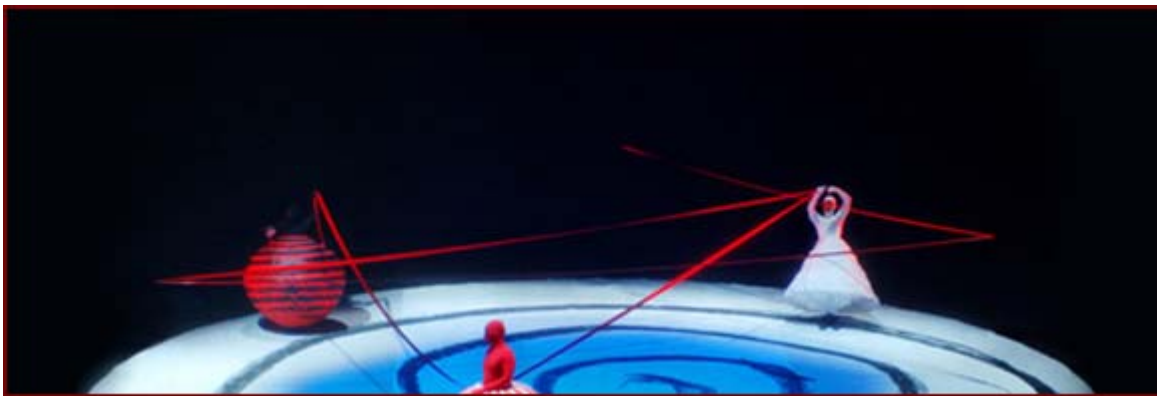
That same night, Mime's brother Alberich is hiding by the entrance to Fafner's cave, obsessed with thoughts of winning back the ring. The Wanderer enters, assuring the startled Nibelung that he is not after the ring. Instead, he warns Alberich to watch out for Mime. He then wakes Fafner and tells him that a young hero is on his way to kill him. Unimpressed, the dragon goes back to sleep. The Wanderer and Alberich disappear.

As Dawn breaks, Mime and Siegfried arrive. The youth sends Mime away and, caught up in the peaceful beauty of the woods, thinks about his parents. Listening to the song of a bird, he tries to imitate it on a reed pipe but fails and blows his horn instead. This awakens Fafner, who comes out of the cave, and in the ensuing fight Siegfried kills the dragon. With his dying breath, he warns the boy of the destructive power of the treasure. When Siegfried accidentally touches a drop of Fafner's blood to his lips, he suddenly understands the singing of the bird, directing him to the gold in the cave. Alberich and Mime appear quarreling but withdraw as Siegfried comes out with the ring and the Tarnhelm. The bird warns Siegfried not to trust Mime, and when the dwarf returns with the potion, Siegfried kills him. The bird then tells Siegfried of a beautiful woman named Brünnhilde, asleep on a mountain surrounded by fire. He immediately sets out to find her.

Act III

On a wild mountain pass, the Wanderer summons Erda, goddess of the Earth, to learn the gods' fate. She evades his questions, and he resigns himself to the impending end of the gods' reign. His hope now rests with Brünnhilde and Siegfried and the redemptive power of their love. When Siegfried approaches, making fun of the god whom he takes for a mere old man, the Wanderer attempts to block his path. With a stroke of Nothung, Siegfried shatters the Wanderer's spear (the same one that smashed Nothung to pieces years before) and advances.

Dawn breaks on the mountaintop where Brünnhilde sleeps. Siegfried, who has never before seen a woman, thinks he has discovered a man. When he removes Brünnhilde's armor, he is overwhelmed by the sight of her beauty. For the first time he feels fear. Mastering his emotions, he awakens the girl with a kiss. Hailing the daylight, Brünnhilde is overjoyed to learn that it is Siegfried who has brought her back to life. At first she resists his declarations of passion, realizing that earthly love must end her immortal life. Finally understanding that her vanished godhood has left her a mortal woman, she says goodbye to Valhalla and joins Siegfried in praise of love.



Götterdämmerung

Prologue

On the Valkyries' rock, three Norns spin the rope of Fate, recalling Wotan's days of power and predicting the end of the Gods. When the rope breaks they descend in terror to their mother, Erda, goddess of the earth. At dawn Siegfried and his bride, Brünnhilde, emerge from their cave. Though fearful that she may lose the hero, she sends him forth to deeds of valor. As a token of his love, Siegfried gives Brünnhilde the magic Ring he took from Fafner, and she gives him her horse Grane in exchange. Passionately they bid farewell as Siegfried sets off into the world.

Act I

In their castle on the Rhine, Gunther, Lord of the Gibichungs, and his sister Gutrune, both unwed, ask counsel of their half-brother, Hagen. Plotting to secure the Ring, Hagen advises Gunther to marry Brünnhilde: by means of a magic potion Siegfried can be induced to forget his bride and win her for Gunther in return for Gutrune's hand. The hero's horn announces his approach. Gunther welcomes him, and Gutrune offers him the potion. Remembering Brünnhilde, he drinks and forgets all, quickly succumbing to Gutrune's beauty and agreeing to bring Brünnhilde to Gunther. The two men swear an oath of blood brotherhood, and then depart. Hagen, left to keep watch, broods on his plot's success.

On the Valkyries' rock, Brünnhilde greets her sister Waltraute, who says Wotan has warned the gods their doom is sealed unless Brünnhilde yields the Ring to the Rhinemaidens. But Brünnhilde's new love for Siegfried is more important to her than concern for the Gods. She refuses to give up the Ring, and Waltraute rides off in despair. Dusk falls as Siegfried returns transformed by the Tarnhelm into Gunther's form. He tears the Ring from the terrified Brünnhilde's finger and claims her as Gunther's bride.

Act II

At night, before the Gibichung hall, Hagen dreams of his father, the Nibelung Alberich, who forces him to swear he will regain the Ring. As dawn breaks, Siegfried returns with cheerful greetings for Hagen and Gutrune: he has won Brünnhilde for Gunther. Hagen summons the vassals to welcome the king and his bride. When Gunther leads in Brünnhilde, she is startled at seeing Siegfried; observing the Ring on his finger, she decries his treachery and proclaims Siegfried her true husband. Still under the potion's spell, the hero vows upon Hagen's spear that he has never wronged her. Brünnhilde swears he lies, but Siegfried dismisses her charge and leaves with Gutrune. The dazed Brünnhilde, bent on revenge, reveals to Hagen the hero's one vulnerable spot: a spear in the back will kill him. Taunted by Brünnhilde and lured by Hagen's description of the Ring's power, Gunther joins the murder plot. The couples proceed to the wedding feast.

ACT III

On the bank of the Rhine the three Rhinemaidens bewail their lost treasure. Soon Siegfried approaches, separated from his hunting party. The maidens plead for the Ring, but he ignores both their entreaties and warnings. When the hunters arrive, Siegfried at Hagen's urging describes his boyhood with Mime (his Nibelung foster father), his slaying of the dragon Fafner and finally - after Hagen gives him a potion to restore his memory - his wooing of Brünnhilde. Pretending indignation, Hagen plunges a spear into the hero's back. Remembering Brünnhilde with his last breath, Siegfried dies and is borne off.

At the Gibichung hall, Gutrune nervously awaits her bridegroom's return. Hagen tells her Siegfried has been killed by a wild boar, but when his body is carried in she accuses Gunther of murder. Hagen admits the crime. Quarreling over the Ring, Gunther is killed by Hagen, who falls back in fear when the dead Siegfried raises his hand. Brünnhilde, entering, orders a funeral pyre for Siegfried. She condemns the gods for their guilt in his death, takes the Ring, and promises it to the Rhinemaidens. Placing it on her finger, she throws a torch onto the pyre and joyfully rushes into the flames. As the river overflows its banks and the Gibichung hall is consumed, the Rhinemaidens, dragging Hagen to his death, regain their gold, at last purified of its curse. Flames engulf Valhalla, leaving a human world redeemed by love.

Worksheet A

After reading the synopsis as a group, fill in the blanks on the right with as many elements that you can pick up from the story. These elements can be to the type of god/goddess the deity is, their relationship to each other, as well as their function in the story.

God/goddess	Description, functions, relationships
Wotan	
Fricka	
Freia	
Donner	
Froh	
Erda	
Loge	

Worksheet B: Group Assignment

Let the team leader pick a god/goddess out of a hat. As a team, research the deity that your group picked out of a hat and create a poster that will reflect the god/goddess. Include pictures, words, drawing and anything else that can reflect your topic. The most essential elements your poster should convey are:

- a. The Nordic name of the deity, as well as the functions it performs in the mythology.
- b. The functions of the deity in *The Ring*.
- c. Comparison of the Nordic god/goddess to a one in Greek mythology.
- d. List some of the myths that incorporate your particular deity.

As a group, present your poster to class. While other groups are presenting fill in additional information on each god/goddess.

Assignment:

After the presentations, write an essay comparing Nordic Mythology to Greek Mythology using **Worksheet A** as well as your group research and poster as examples. Make sure to include differences as well as similarities.