

EPIC OF GILGAMESH

- The Epic Tale of Gilgamesh is the most important and famous example of Sumerian literature. It is likely that Gilgamesh was actually a Sumerian king who ruled the city of Uruk. However, the story tells of an epic hero comparable to Hercules from Greek mythology.

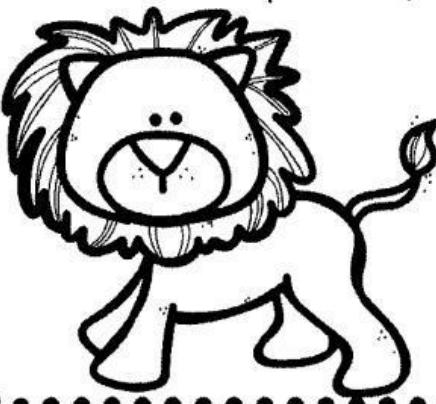
Author

- A Babylonian scribe first recorded the Epic of Gilgamesh around 2000 BC. The story was written in Akkadian, the language of the Babylonians at the time recorded. The tale discusses the Sumerian people and myths though, so it is likely the story was created much earlier and the scribe just recorded his version.
- Archaeologist, George Smith, first translated the story in 1872.
- Many tablets with stories of Gilgamesh have been recovered in Nineveh's Assyrian library.



The Story

- There are a few different versions and poems about Gilgamesh. The story starts by discussing the strongest and most powerful man in the world, King Gilgamesh of Uruk. He is part god and part human, is able to defeat any enemy in battle, and lift mountains. Gilgamesh becomes bored and starts mistreating the citizens of Uruk. The gods take notice and feel Gilgamesh needs a challenge. They send him Enkidu, a wild man to battle. Neither of them can beat the other, so they eventually stop fighting, start to respect one another, and become best friends.
- They embark on an adventure into the Cedar Forest and hope to battle Humbaba, a fearsome monster. They could not find him at first, so they started chopping down cedar trees. Humbaba appeared and Gilgamesh summoned the great winds to trap Humbaba. They killed him, cut down a number of cedar trees, and took the valuable logs back to Uruk. Later in the epic, Gilgamesh and Enkidu kill the Bull of Heaven, another monster. This angers the gods and they decide one of them must die. They chose to kill Enkidu, causing Gilgamesh to become depressed. He worries about dying too and begins searching for eternal life. He goes on many adventures where he meets up with Utnapishtim, who had saved the world earlier from a great flood. Eventually Gilgamesh realizes that no human can escape death, but can live on in the memories of the people he loved.



Legacy

Gilgamesh is the world's first super hero. The story has been told all over the world. It is similar to stories in other religions. For example an epic flood appears in many literary and religious traditions of several people. The Jewish and Christian faiths have the story of Noah and the Ark just as Gilgamesh met a man who had survived an epic flood.

Name _____

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Matching: Match each term with its description.

1. ____ George Smith	A. Location of the Assyrian library
2. ____ Enkidu	B. Second monster defeated by Enkidu and Gilgamesh
3. ____ Uruk	C. Gilgamesh's best friend; killed by the gods and goddesses
4. ____ Utnapishtim	D. First monster defeated by Enkidu and Gilgamesh
5. ____ Nineveh	E. Story in Christian and Jewish faiths featured this man
6. ____ Hercules	F. The first Epic of Gilgamesh was written in this language
7. ____ Humbaba	G. Saved the world from a great flood; Gilgamesh met him
8. ____ Akkadian	H. The epic of Gilgamesh is compared to this Greek hero
9. ____ Bull of Heaven	I. Archaeologist who translated the Epic of Gilgamesh
10. ____ Noah	J. Gilgamesh was likely a real Sumerian king of this city

Multiple Choice: Choose the best answer.

- 11. Which event occurred first in the Epic of Gilgamesh?
A. Gilgamesh met Utnapishtim.
B. Gilgamesh and Enkidu engage in battle.
C. Gilgamesh and Enkidu become best friends.
D. Enkidu is killed by the gods and goddesses.

- 12. How does Gilgamesh feel about Enkidu's death?
A. Depressed B. Relieved C. Excited D. Empowered

- 13. Why is Utnapishtim important in the Epic of Gilgamesh?
A. He becomes Gilgamesh's best friend.
B. He helps Gilgamesh defeat the Bull of Heaven.
C. He helps Gilgamesh realize he would live on in people's memories.
D. He helps Gilgamesh out of the Cedar Forest.

- 14. Why did the gods and goddesses kill Enkidu?
A. He and Gilgamesh killed the Bull of Heaven.
B. He and Gilgamesh killed Humbaba.
C. They were jealous of their relationship.
D. They wanted Gilgamesh to go into a deep depression.

- 15. Which does NOT accurately describe Gilgamesh?
A. He was half human, half god.
B. He was probably a real Sumerian king.
C. He searches for eternal life after his friend died.
D. He was immortal (would never die).

