

## Part II. Multi-cultural mythology

The Sun has inspired mythological, spiritual, folkloric beliefs in many cultures; including ancient Greeks, Romans, Egyptians, Aztecs, Native Americans, and Chinese. Students will be very interested to learn some of these stories surrounding beliefs about the Sun. The teachers can relate the following tales to the students as an 'anticipatory set' and to increase interest in learning about the Sun and solar wind.

### A. Greek and Roman Mythology

Helios, Greek God of the Sun

Helios was the Sun god of the Greeks, usually depicted as a beardless charioteer, crowned with the aureole of the Sun. He drove the Sun across the earth from east to west each day, thus bringing light and warmth to the earth and its people.

Eos, the Greek goddess of dawn, heralded the daily journey of Helios as he prepared to drive the chariot that carried the Sun. Each morning, after being aroused from slumber by the crowing of the rooster, she would rise to announce the start of his journey. She is often represented driving a rose-colored chariot drawn by white horses.

Helios fell in love with a nymph, Clymene. One of their children, Phaeton, became notorious for his clumsy driving of the chariot of the Sun. Phaethon had golden eyes, as did all of Helios' children. One day he had asked Helios, his father, for permission to command his chariot, and pull the Sun across the sky. Helios tried to warn Phaeton that the road from the sea each morning was very steep and difficult and the horses were hard to control. Phaethon stubbornly insisted and Apollo, wanting to please his child, reluctantly agreed. Phaethon lost control of the Sun chariot and crashed, burning and scorching much of the earth. Zeus, the ruler of the gods, saw what was happening. In order to save the earth, Zeus threw a lightning bolt at the chariot. Phaeton was killed and the horses splashed into the sea. Waves poured over the land and put out the fire. From then on, only Helios would ever drive the Sun's chariot across the sky.

\*Note: In later times, Helios is often identified with Apollo. Apollo is the only god to have the same name in both Greek and Roman Mythology.

Literature selections appropriate to read to students:

Random House Book of Greek Myths, by Joan Vinge. Random House: 1999. Pages 65-68.

Greek Gods and Goddesses, Retold by Geraldine McCaughrean. Simon and Schuster: 1997. Pages 30-34

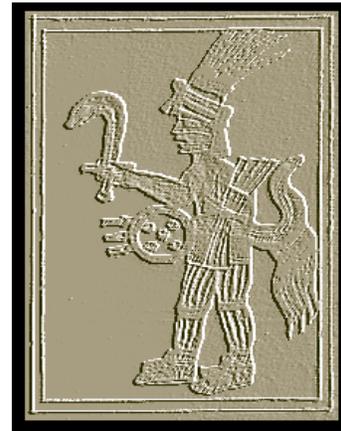
## B. Aztecs

Aztec mythology began with four Suns (epochs) prior to our current Sun (The Aztec calendar is based on the four gods and the directions they dominated). The earth destroyed the first Sun; the second Sun was destroyed by the wind; the third was destroyed by fire; and the fourth destroyed by water (The current Sun is the fifth).

The god of Sun and war was named Huitzilopochtli (hummingbird on the left); he was depicted as a blue man armed with feathers on his head.

Aztecs would offer human sacrifices to Huitzilopochtli. The sacrificial victims would often be captured prisoners during wars with neighboring people. The sacrifices were offered to secure rain, good harvests, and success in war.

The current Sun god is Nanahuatl. He sacrificed himself in a fire, and became the god of the fifth Sun.



## C. Sun dogs

August is generally known around North America as the "Dog Days of Summer." The origin of this term has been attributed to the month's extremely hot weather causing dogs to lie about panting as well as to an ancient Egyptian belief that the bright star Sirius, the Dog Star, prominent in this month, added to the heat of August days.



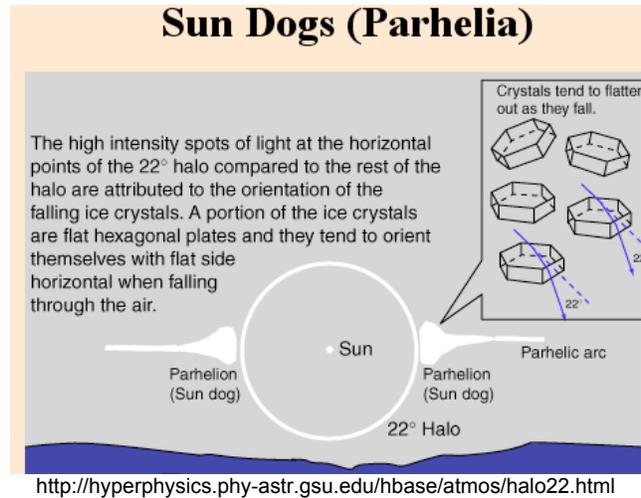
Photo by Clay S. Turner. Used by permission.

The topic focused upon however, is another weather dog: the Sun dog, though Sun dogs in the plural form seems more sufficient since they come in pairs. Sun dogs sit on each side of the Sun along a horizontal line through the solar orb.

Sun dogs appear in August (October, January, April - the month does not matter), but they are most regularly seen close to their solar master during winter months and when the Sun is low in the sky. View [http://www.suite101.com/article.cfm/science\\_sky/77278](http://www.suite101.com/article.cfm/science_sky/77278).

Sun dogs, or mock Suns, are technically called solar parhelia (parhelia meaning "with the Sun"). Sun dogs reveal that the clouds are hosting horizontal plate crystals. These plates drift slowly downwards like leaves with their large faces almost horizontal. View <http://www.Sundog.clara.co.uk/halo/parhelia.htm>.

Sun dogs can appear as bright bursts of light formed when Sunlight passes through ice crystals at the proper angle. They are often bright white but may show a partial spectrum of color with the red wavelengths on the edge nearest the Sun. Sun dogs often have comet-like appearance with a bluish-white tail facing away from the Sun. The degree to which colors are visible depends on the amount of wobble in the ice crystal as it falls: the more wobble, the more color. The Sun dog's tail is formed by light passing through the ice crystals at different angles.



Sun dogs typically appear when the Sun is low to the horizon, usually just prior to Sunset or after Sunrise, or during the winter months at mid-latitudes. If the Sun is low (horizon to about 15° above it), each Sun dog is separated from the Sun by 22°. As the Sun rises the Sun dogs appear to be off the 22° mark. At 61° solar-altitude, the Sun dogs disappear.

View [http://www.suite101.com/article.cfm/science\\_sky/77278](http://www.suite101.com/article.cfm/science_sky/77278).

Traditionally, Sun dogs foretold a weather change or rain. The brighter the Sun dog the heavier the showers. Among North American farmers if the Sun dog on the north side of the Sun is the brighter of the two, this indicates colder temperatures in the forecast. If the southern Sun dog is the brighter optical image, warmer temperatures are predicted. To the Native American Blackfeet people, Sun dogs were thought to be a warning sign of approaching danger. View

[http://www.sharlot.org/archives/history/dayspast/text/1999\\_12\\_12.shtml](http://www.sharlot.org/archives/history/dayspast/text/1999_12_12.shtml).

Today the appearance of these optical images is still an indication of a weather change. Strong vertical air currents associated with low-pressure storms carry moist air skyward, where water freezes. High-speed winds above the storm system push the ice crystals on ahead. When you see haloes around the Sun or moon, you can be sure of two things; there are cirrostratus clouds above and, in a day or two, the skies will darken with an approaching storm. View <http://www.freestudentessays.com/science/25.shtml>.

#### 4. Navajo

##### Navajo Sun Legend

The Sun, johona'ai, and the moon, olje' are borne across the skies by immortal bearers, which are considered masculine. Thirty-two trails have been created for their travels and summer and winter solstice occur as they return from the northern or southern trails. The bearers carried out their threat of taking a human life on every journey, by introducing man-eating monsters. There were many but the big yei, yeitso', was the son of the Sun. The monster crane, formed from a white eagle and white thunder, made by the Sun, lived on the cliffs of tsebitai', the winged rock Shiprock. The monster slayer finally killed the monsters and the Sun personally killed his son, yeitso', making it safe for the Dine' to live in the present, twelfth world.

An eclipse is caused by the "death" of the orbs, the Sun and moon and the immortal bearers revive them. All journeys and work ceases during an eclipse and its passing is awaited in silence.

The Sun is instrumental in being used to tell time by pointing out its position in the sky. Direction and directional assignments in the home and ceremonies are Sunwise.