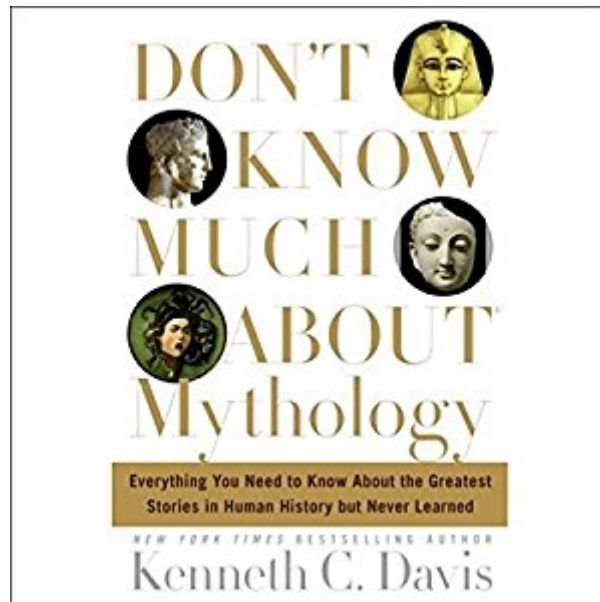


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Don't Know Much About Mythology



Synopsis

The latest installment in the New York Times bestselling Don't Know Much About® series -- a magical journey into the timeless world of mythology! It has been fifteen years since Kenneth C. Davis first dazzled audiences with his instant classic Don't Know Much About® History, vividly bringing the past to life and proving that Americans don't hate history, they just hate the dull, textbook version they were fed in school. With humor, wit, and a knack for storytelling, Davis has been bringing readers of all ages up to speed on history, geography, and science ever since. Now, in the classic traditions of Edith Hamilton and Joseph Campbell, he turns his talents to the world of myth. Where do we come from? Why do stars shine and the seasons change? What is evil? Since the beginning of time, people have answered such questions by crafting imaginative stories that have served as religion, science, philosophy, and popular literature. In his irreverent and popular question-and-answer style, Davis introduces and explains the great myths of the world, as well as the works of literature that have made them famous. In a single volume, he tackles Mesopotamia's Gilgamesh, the first hero in world mythology; Achilles and the Trojan War; Stonehenge and the Druids; Thor, the Nordic god of thunder; Chinese oracle bones; the use of peyote in ancient Native American rites; and the dramatic life and times of the man who would be Buddha. Ever familiar and instructive, Davis shows why the ancient tales of gods and heroes -- from Mount Olympus to Machu Picchu, from ancient Rome to the icy land of the Norse -- continue to speak to us today, in our movies, art, language, and music. For mythology novices and buffs alike, and for anyone who loves a good story, Don't Know Much About® Mythology is a lively and insightful look into the greatest stories ever told. --This text refers to an alternate Audible Audio Edition edition.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

HarperCollins's Don't Know Much About series is the slightly more attractive younger sibling of Alpha Book's Idiot's Guide series. If Alpha's famous orange-and-white dressed reference books have spawned a whole new generation of readers whose quest for a maximum amount of facts are sated by prose any "idiot" could read, the Don't Know Much About series offers the same promise with a bit more elegance and charm. The text for DON'T KNOW MUCH ABOUT MYTHOLOGY is provided by Kenneth C. Davis, a journalist and National Public Radio commentator whose encyclopedic knowledge of world history and culture enables him to construct prose that is as breezy as it is informative, as witty as it is delightful. He has an impressive ability to synthesize great quantities of texts and facts into a concise and coherent digest that, well, just about any idiot can read. Organized into nine chapters that explore first the earliest civilizations in Egypt and Mesopotamia, then the later civilizations of Greece, Northern Europe, the Far East and the African continent, and finally the Americas, DON'T KNOW MUCH ABOUT MYTHOLOGY follows the same sequence that countless mythology texts have used before. And like those texts, the bulk of Davis's book is comprised of well-written prose paraphrases of ancient literatures. In terms of form and function, it doesn't break any new ground; instead, it offers another alternative to speedy referencing. Bracketing each chapter are lists that frame important events in a sequential time table called "Mythic Milestones." When read side by side, they constitute a concise timeline of world history. Of perhaps more pedagogical interest are a series of "key questions" that introduce each new section.

I liked how Davis introduces each civilization's mythology with basic history and possible connections to the gods they have. He also provides a quick "Who's Who" of the various pantheons of gods. Unfortunately, that's about as far as it goes. In his first chapter, Davis makes a distinction between mythology and myth. I didn't realize how true he would hold to the title of the book. This is a book about various mythologies (the study of myths) as opposed to actual myths (the stories of gods and men). As such it does a decent job. If you're expecting a book containing popular myths from each culture, look elsewhere. If you're looking for a book to introduce you to the major players in each culture's myths so that you can look smart and know who Ra really is when watching Stargate or who Homer Simpson is talking about when he makes fun of "the many arms of Vishnu," then this is the book for you. One pet peeve though. He tries really hard to remain "religiously

tolerant", which to me means "all religions are myth." He relates ancient myths to our modern times, in particular to various Judeo-Christian beliefs. He's largely successful and knowing his reader base, tries to respect Jewish and Christian beliefs, but there were times where I felt he just wanted to call Judeo-Christian beliefs myths. Because of this, I'm hesitant to read his Don't Know Much about the Bible book. He also has no problems including Hindu, Confucian, Tao, and tribal "myths," despite their common modern practice. As an added insult, he has no problem laying on the guilt of Christian interference in either altering ancient myths or completely destroying tribal religions, but he has few problems with the Aryan influence on the Greeks and Indians.

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