

Name: _____

Date: _____

Gilgamesh

The Epic of Gilgamesh is among the earliest known works of literature. An epic is a long poem that tells the story of legendary or heroic people or gods. Like most epics, the first stories of Gilgamesh began as oral stories handed down by word of mouth. Hundreds of years after the poets first spoke of Gilgamesh; the legends were collected and recorded on clay tablets.

The story takes place nearly five thousand years ago. Gilgamesh was the king of the wealthy city of Uruk. The king was strong and handsome, but he was also cruel. Gilgamesh forced the people of Uruk to build him great palaces. He also made his subjects live in constant fear. When the people of Uruk begged the gods for help, they led Enkidu to Uruk. Enkidu was also big and strong, but he was wild and ignorant of the ways of civilized people. Enkidu was raised in the forest where he lived with the animals. When Enkidu learned of Gilgamesh's cruelty, the wild man challenged the mighty king to fight. As the two powerful men battled, they realized they admired one another; so instead of remaining enemies, they became inseparable friends.

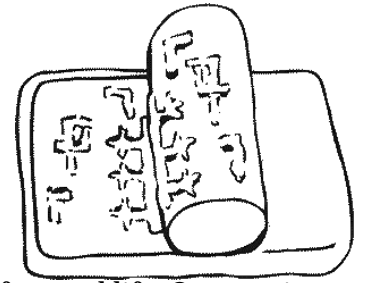
The unlikely pair left Uruk to embark on many adventures. Gilgamesh and Enkidu entered the forbidden Cedar Forest where the gods lived, but they soon faced a grotesque monster named Humbaba.

"in order to protect the Cedar Forest [the gods] assigned Humbaba as a terror to human beings; Humbaba's roar is a flood, his mouth is fire, and his breath is death!"

When Gilgamesh and Enkidu tricked the beast, the powers of Humbaba were spread over the lands of Sumer.

Gilgamesh displeased the goddess Ishtar, so she sent the fearsome Bull of Heaven to destroy the crops of the Sumerian farmers. Gilgamesh and Enkidu killed the bull. This enraged the gods, so they caused Enkidu to fall ill and die.

Gilgamesh was heartbroken by the death of his friend. The king also feared that one day he would also die, so Gilgamesh began to search for the secret of eternal life. One version of the epic describes a terrible flood that covered the earth many years before the time of Gilgamesh. Gilgamesh went on a long journey to meet Utnapishtim, an elderly man who survived the flood because the gods warned him of the coming deluge. Utnapishtim told Gilgamesh,



"The life that you are seeking you will never find. When the gods created man they allotted to him death, but life they retained in their own keeping."

Gilgamesh returned home filled with wisdom from his adventures with Enkidu and Utnapishtim. Gilgamesh became a gentle ruler who no longer mistreated the people of Uruk. Gilgamesh realized that he could not escape death, but he could live on in the memories of the people he loved.

The Epic of Gilgamesh had many parallels with the story of Noah and a great flood in the Old Testament of the Jewish and Christian holy books. Other cultures also have legends of a great flood. The Greeks legends say a god named Zeus once unleashed a flood because he was displeased with a sacrifice made in his name. The Hindus speak of Manu, a Brahmin king who saved mankind from a deluge.

Modern science has discovered that there was a marked increase in the sea levels about 6,000 years ago as the last ice age ended. The melting ice drained to the oceans causing the sea levels to rise more than ten feet in one century. Gilgamesh and the other flood legends may be connected with the end of the ice age.

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Fill in the Blanks

The Epic of G__l__a__e__h is among the earliest known works of l__t__r__t__re. The epic *p_____ began as a series of o_____ legends told throughout S__m__r by s__o__y__e__l__e__s nearly five thousand years ago. Later writers recorded the l__g__n__s on c_____ tablets.

Gilgamesh was a powerful k_____ who treated his people with terrible c__u__l__y. Gilgamesh was c__a__l__n__ed by a wild man from the f__r__st named Enkidu. The two powerful men b__t__l__d, but they also learned to r__s__e__t one another. Gilgamesh and E__k__du became great friends.

Gilgamesh began to search for the s__c__et to e__e__n__l life after the d__a__h of En__i__u. A wise old man told the G__l__a__e__h, "The l_____ you are s__e__i__g you will never find. When the gods c__e__t__d man they allotted to him d__a__h, but life they r__t__i__ed in their own k__e__i__g." Gilgamesh returned to his home a much *w__s__r ruler. Though he could not e__c__pe death, Gilgamesh realized that he could live on in the m__m__r__es of the people he loved.

The Epic of Gilgamesh mentions a great f_____. Stories of a great deluge are common in the l__g__n__s of many c__l__u__es. Scientists have evidence that suggests s_____ levels changed at the end of the last i_____ a_____ about 6,000 years ago. It is possible that Gilgamesh and other legends are connected with this ancient event.

Answer in complete sentences

1. How were Gilgamesh and Enkidu different from one another?

2. How did Gilgamesh's many adventures change him?

3. Explain how the epic of Gilgamesh is similar to the story of Noah from the Christian and Jewish holy books.

*This is a higher order learning question. You must answer the question to the best of your ability, but any reasonable answer will be graded as correct.