

### **The Dogness of Everything**

There's a good likelihood you think of your dog as part of the family. More of us than ever tell researchers we do. For that reason it's easy to assume the human-dog bond is stronger now than it's ever been—but is it? Before we had goats and cows to herd, before we had homes to protect, before we domesticated animals of any other species, dogs were our friends and allies. Archeological finds suggest we often relied on them for our lives. With their superior senses, dogs were our hunting partners, our guards against predators, and our companions on journeys into the proverbial woods of the unknown. So deep and strong was the bond between early humans and early canids that dogs play a major part in every world mythology. The powerful symbolism of dogs—and dogness—suffuses our collective conscious.

In many mythologies, dogs are guides between the worlds of life and death—and symbolically between the conscious mind and the wilderness of the unconscious psyche—as well as co-hunters, able to track and catch human souls. In Greek mythology, the three-headed dog Cerberus (of Harry Potter fame) is the original watchdog of Hades. The virgin-huntress Artemis has seven dogs as her eternal companions. In Norse mythology, Odin's wife Frigga, goddess of marriage, traveled in a chariot drawn by dogs, symbols of fidelity and true-heartedness. Native American folklore includes dogs in both creation stories and end-of-the-world stories. Mostly, dogs appear in legends that reveal human character—kindness to dogs is rewarded and abuse harshly punished.

We may have (mostly) left the myths behind, but dogs are still part of our culture, roaming our thoughts and our language. They still help us navigate the unknown, express our dreams, and make sense of the world—arguably as much as in prehistoric times. We have simply moved them from cave paintings and heavenly constellations into art, film, cartoons, books, and music, not to mention into our homes and onto our couches. And if we sometimes can't tell where we end and dogs begin, who says we have to? Our ancestors never did.