Тема: Знаки зодіаку (Signs of the zodiac).

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These constellations appeared to be similar to the shapes of animals, so the constellation belt (known as the zodiac) comes from the Greek word *zodiac* which means the circle of animals.
 The 12-window division of the sky dates back to the Sumerian civilization and astronomy of ancient Babylon. As a result of the adoption of the Babylonian system by the ancient Greeks 12 signs of the zodiac were born (by the number of constellations).

Each sign of the zodiac corresponds to its own legend that comes from ancient Greek myths.

Aries is the first sign of the zodiac in myths. Aries always appears as a courageous, mobile and energetic animal, able to overcome obstacles. The ancient Greek legend is associated with this sign. Titanid, saving her children from the wicked stepmother, put them on a golden ram which was supposed to carry them into colchids, but the girl did not keep on her back and fell into the sea, where she drowned. As soon as the boy arrived to safety place, he sacrificed this beast. Zeus himself took it and carried to heaven, creating the first constellation — Aries.

The second sign of the zodiac is Taurus. It’s an animal that always symbolizes strength and sexuality. According to legend, the ancient Greek god Zeus was in love with the Phoenician girl Europe. To possess her, he turned into a white Taurus and abducted her. He carried her to the island of Crete, where he possessed her, and the head of a huge Taurus reflected on the sky and turned into the constellation of Taurus.

Gemini (Twins) is the third sign of the zodiac. According to legend, Zeus had two sons, who were given birth by Princess Leda. Their names were Castor and Pollux. They were mighty and brave brothers who had done many feats. When one of the brothers died, the other asked Zeus to take his immortality from him, so that he could reunite with his brother. Zeus did so by putting the two brothers in heaven.

 The fourth sign of the zodiac is depicted as a Cancer, acquatic inhabitant that can also move on land. It is known that Cancer appeared in the zodiac about 500 years before the beginning of our era. The name is connected with the second feat of Heracles, when Heracles fought in the waters with Lernaean Hydra. Cancer stuck into his leg, and Heracles weakened but immediately killed Cancer and still managed to end the fight in his favor. However, the goddess Hera who did not like Heracles considered this cancer a very brave animal and took it to heaven. So this constellation appeared.

The fifth sign of the zodiac is represented by the Lion, the king of the beasts. The first feat of Heracles was to destroy the fierce and fearless Lion, who lived in the German valley. No human weapon could have pierced his skin. Heracles tried to kill Leo with arrows, but this technique also failed. The hero decided to defeat the Lion with his bare hands. Possessing incredible power, he managed to squeeze his fingers around his neck and strangle him. The constellation of the Leo perpetuates the courage of Heracles during a fight with the mighty German Lion.

The Virgin is the sixth sign of the zodiac. It’s also the second sign the symbol of which is a human, not animal. It is known that the Virgin symbolizes the goddess of fertility Demeter. The sign is a symbol of innocence and purity. The appearance of the constellation of Virgo is associated with the myth of the pandora’s box. Pandora brought a box that she was forbidden to open. One day, succumbing to curiosity, she lifted the lid despite Zeus's orders. All the misery and human vices were scattered. There was only hope at the bottom of the box. Then the dark times came and the gods left the Earth one by one. The last one who flew away was Astrea, the goddess of innocence and purity. She’s been living among the stars ever since, becoming the constellation of Virgo.

Libra is the seventh sign and the only sign the symbol of which is neither man nor animal. The scales represent balance, justice and harmony. In ancient Egypt the god Anubis possessed the scales of justice. Anubis stands at large scales, with the help of which he weighs the heart of the deceased. On one scale is the human heart, on the other is the feather of the goddess Maat which symbolizes truth. According to the beliefs of the Egyptians, if man’s heart is balanced with truth, he can find a second life.

The eighth sign of the zodiac is represented by the Scorpion who paralyzes its victim with poison. The name is associated with a quarrel between Artemis and Orion, the hunter. Artemis sent Scorpion to poison him. After Orion’s death, Zeus created two constellations, Scorpius and Orion.

Sagittarius is the ninth sign of the zodiac. Sagittarius is a centaur. It is a mythological creature, half male half horse. According to legend, he is a wise Charon who possessed many arts. He was able to heal, hunt, play musical instruments and predict the future. Heracles once wounded Charon with a poisoned arrow, but since the wise centaur was immortal, Heracles promised to find a way to relieve his suffering. When Heracles found the wretched Prometheus who was buried on a rock where the eagle devoured his liver, the centaur Charon agreed to take his place. Zeus rewarded him for his nobility by placing the centaur among the stars. So he became the constellation of Sagittarius.

The tenth sign of the zodiac is Capricorn, an animal with strong hooves that climbs up the mountain cliffs clinging to every ledge. The image is connected with the great Mesopotamian god Ea who gave knowledge and culture to these people. In the time of the ancient Greeks Capricorn became associated with merry and lustful god Pan, the master of forests and fields, herds and shepherds. Pan jumped into the river to escape the monster Typhon. Before he could complete the transformation, the part that remained under the water became a fish tail and the top part remained like a goat.

The symbol of the eleventh sign of the zodiac is Aquarius, a man with a jug from which water flows. In the ancient Greek epic, Aquarius is associated with the myth about the only man who was not harmed during the Great Flood. After the rains, the only surviving righteous Deucalion and his wife Pira took refuge on Mount Parnassus. Zeus commanded the water to retreat and ordered them to collect as many stones as possible and throw them without turning around. Deucalion and his wife did so and the stones that Pira threw turned into women. Those that were thrown by Deucalion turned into men. So Deucalion became the forefather of mankind.

The twelfth sign of the zodiac is depicted as two fishes tied to each other, but swimming in opposite directions, one downstream and one upstream. The two fishes in the water symbolize the opposing emotions. According to legend, the goddess of love, Aphrodite, and her son, Herot, walked along the river bank. Suddenly a huge fire-breathing monster Typhon appeared in front of them. He made sounds of the roar of a bull, the snarling of a lion, and the hissing of snakes. Aphrodite’s father Zeus turned them both into two fishes which jumped into the river and managed to escape.

As we see, the formation of the zodiac signs took place gradually and all the signs that the ancient Greeks received from the Sumerians were combined with their sense of the world. As a result, such system has reached our days.