In the very beginning, there was no earth, or sea, or sky. There was only a mass of confusion in darkness, called Chaos.

After many, many years, Mother Earth, called Gaea, was born out of Chaos. And after many more years, she gave birth to a son, Uranus, who was Father Heaven.

Father Heaven loved Mother Earth, and he made rain fall on her, so that her flowers and trees and grass grew. The rain also fell into hollows and crevices, forming seas and rivers and lakes. Then Mother Earth created many kinds of animals to live in the forests and fields and oceans and lakes.

Mother Earth and Father Heaven had many children. First Mother Earth gave birth to three monstrous sons, each with fifty heads and one hundred hands. Then she gave birth to three more gigantic sons, just as ugly, called the Cyclopes. Each Cyclops had only one right eye in the middle of his forehead. These six sons were as strong as earthquakes and tornadoes put together. And they were often as destructive.

Finally Mother Earth bore the first gods, six sons and six daughters called the Titans. They, too, were gigantic, yet somewhat more like humans than her first children. They were just as strong as her first six sons, but sometimes they used their power wisely.

Father Heaven could not stand the sight of his six ugly sons, and he was afraid of them, too. One day he threw them into a dark ugly hole under the earth.

Mother Earth cried bitterly over this cruelty to her children. She decided to destroy Father Heaven and bring back her beloved children. She made a weapon, a sickle, and gave it to the Titans. "Kill your cruel father," she begged them, "and then go down into that dark hole and bring your brothers back to me."

Cronus, the strongest and bravest of the Titans, led the attack on his father and wounded him dreadfully. Then he released his brothers. The Titans made Cronus the ruler of heaven and earth and their sister, Rhea, his wife and queen.

But power changed Cronus, and now *he i*mprisoned his brothers, the one-eyed Cyclopes and the hundred-hand monsters, in the dark hole under the earth.

This enraged Mother Earth, but she did not tell Cronus how she felt.  She bided her time while Cronus's wife, Rhea, bore sons, for she knew that one of them was destined to overthrow Cronus.

Cronus, too, knew that one of his children was to rise up against him and take his place as king of the gods.  Therefore, to keep his children away from growing up and becoming powerful, he swallowed them up as soon as they were born.

Rhea was deeply saddened by this as, one by one, Cronus devoured her first five children: Hestia, Demeter, Hera, Hades, and Poseidon.  When she was expecting her sixth child, she determined to save it from Cronus.  After her baby son, Zeus, was born, she gave him to Mother Earth, who hid the baby in a cave on the island of Crete.

Then Rhea went to Cronus and said, "Here is our sixth child, a son.  Do whatever you wish with him."  She handed Cronus a bundle that looked like a baby wrapped in a blanket.

Of course Cronus swallowed it, just as Rhea had expected.  But Cronus had swallowed a stone wrapped in a blanket, not the baby Zeus.

Now Rhea was happy.  She hoped that Zeus was the son who would destroy his frightful father Cronus.

Zeus grew up on Crete among shepherds and nymphs, far from his wicked father, Cronus.  He drank the milk of a goat nymph, who fed him honey, too.  He slept in a golden cradle that was hung from a tree, and armed guards protected him.  Whenever he cried, the guards banged their spears on their shields so that Cronus would not hear Zeus's loud wails and know that he still lived.

Nevertheless, Cronus learned that his son was alive on Crete, and went after him, intending to swallow him.  But Zeus was too clever for Cronus.  He changed himself into a serpent, and though Cronus searched high and low, he could not find Zeus.

Rhea, Zeus's mother, had told him about the terrible deeds of his father, and Zeus vowed that when he was fully grown, he would rescue his brothers and sisters.

At last that time came.  Zeus returned to Rhea and disguised himself as a servant in Cronus's palace.  Then he and Rhea laid their plot.  "If you concoct a poisonous potion," said Zeus to his mother, "I will mix it into Cronus's drink."  His mother agreed readily, and when the poisoned drink had been prepared, Zeus served it to Cronus.  Cronus drank it quickly, for he was thirsty.  He became very ill and vomited up the stone he had swallowed.  The pains continued as, one by one, out of Cronus's mouth sprang his five children.

Zeus's brothers and sisters hugged him and thanked him for giving them new life.  "And now that you have set us free," they said to Zeus, "you must lead us in battle against Cronus and the Titans.  We, not they, must rule the universe, and never again will we be imprisoned."

The terrible war raged for ten long years.  Cronus was no longer young, so Atlas led the Titans.  However, two other Titans, Prometheus and Epimetheus, joined Zeus and his brothers and sisters.  That made the sides nearly equal in strength.  Neither could win.

Finally wise Mother Earth told Zeus that his side would be victorious if he followed her advice.  "Go down into the dark hole under the earth and release the one-eyed Cyclopes and their hundred-hand brothers, for they shall help you win."

Zeus followed Mother Earth's advice and descended bravely into the dark hole.  He killed the guard and freed the prisoners.

The Cyclopes, in turn, gave Zeus gifts to use as weapons against Cronus and the Titans.

"To Zeus," said one of the Cyclopes, "we give our powerful weapons, the thunderbolts."

"To Zeus's brother Hades," said another, "we give this magical helmet of darkness."

"And to their brother Poseidon," said the third, "we give this sharp-pronged trident."

Zeus, Hades, and Poseidon thanked the Cyclopes and discussed how to best use their gifts.

Then Hades put on the helmet of darkness, which made him invisible.  He crept up behind Cronus and stole his weapons.

Poseidon struck the ground with his trident, which caused the earth to shake.  Cronus, terrified, became powerless.

Then Zeus threw his thunderbolts, and Cronus and Atlas and the rest of the Titans retreated.

Meanwhile the three hundred-hand brothers hurled three hundred rocks at the Titans, all at once, over and over.

The earth was almost torn apart by the dreadful battle, but before it could be destroyed, Zeus and his brothers and sisters won.  They punished all of the Titans except for Prometheus and Epimetheus, who had helped them.  They made Atlas, the Titans' leader, carry the sky on his shoulders, forever.  And they chained Cronus and the others in the dark hole under the earth.

Zeus could not rest long, though, for Mother Earth gave birth to one more enemy, the most terrible of all, a monster named Typhon.  Typhon had one hundred heads and spurted a steam of fire from each eye.  But Zeus hurled thunderbolts and struck down that hideous creature.  At last there was peace on earth.

Now, which of the three brothers, Zeus, Poseidon, or Hades, should be the ruler of the universe?  They had had enough of fighting, and they wanted to settle this problem without an argument.

They decided to draw lots.  Hades won the underworld, and Poseidon won the sea.  And Zeus became lord of heaven and ruler of all the gods of Mount Olympus.