

## **The Symbol of the Rainbow**

Rainbows are a relatively common meteorological phenomenon, appearing as perfect arcs, often during rainstorms when the sun shines through the water droplets, shattering the white light into an array of brilliant colours. Rainbows have presumably been seen by humans since the dawn of our species, and cultures across the world have sought meaning in the translucent arcs in the sky.

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For the Aboriginal people of Australia, the rainbow is a brightly coloured snake that appears to stop rain sent by their enemies. The rainbow serpent is a powerful spirit throughout Aboriginal Dreamtime beliefs, which are thought to be the oldest continuous faith in the world, depicted in rock art at least 10,000 years old. For some cultures, rainbows are bridges to the realm of the gods – a pathway to heaven. In Japanese myth, the rainbow is a floating bridge on which the male and female creators of the world descended to create land from the ocean of chaos. In Western art and culture, it is a sign of hope and a promise of better times to come. More recently, the diversely coloured rainbow has been used to reflect diversity in sexuality, becoming the international symbol of the gay movement.

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What causes rainbows?

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What are the ancient Aboriginal beliefs called?

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In Western culture, what does the rainbow symbolise?