

Eastern Illinois University
Course Proposal
ENG 3009G, Myth and Culture

1. Catalog Description

- a) ENG 3009G
- b) Myth and Culture
- c) 3-0-3
- d) F,S
- e) Myth/Culture
- f) Through comparative analysis of myths from selected cultural traditions, the course will examine relationships among mythical, historical, anthropological and scientific ways of understanding.
- g) Prerequisites: English 1001G and English 1002G.
- h) English 3009G is a writing -intensive course.

2. Student Learning Objectives

- a) In successfully completing English 3009G, students will
 - 1) enhance their reading and writing skills through confronting “alien” texts (literacy)
 - 2) assimilate, synthesize, and articulate information from primary texts and scholarly sources of various disciplines (writing, critical thinking)
 - 3) develop independent, critical thought through comparative analyses of various mythologies (critical thinking)
 - 4) learn how all human action is social action and calls for a mythically informed sensibility (citizenship)
 - 5) read myths from widely diverse cultures—Middle Eastern, Hindu, Mayan, Navajo, Greco-Roman, Judeo-Christian—and come to recognize the complexity of global diversity (critical thinking, citizenship)
 - 6) enforce and develop their writing skills through completing writing assignments throughout the course
 - 7) participate in class discussions (speaking).
- b) In fulfilling additional, course -specific learning objectives, students will
 - 1) explore the nature of intellectual and aesthetic matters related to the study of literature
 - 2) consider the value of expression and creativity, especially in literature and literary analysis

3. Course Outline: English 3009G is divided into 10 units, to be distributed evenly during a 15-week/50-minute course (45 classes) or a 15-week/ 75-minute course (30 classes).

Week 1. Contexts and Frames

Readings: Clifford Geertz, *Local Knowledge* (LK):
“Blurred Genres: The Refiguration of Social Thought”
“Found in Translation: On the Social History of the Moral Imagination”
Claude Levi-Strauss, *Myth and Meaning* (MM):

“The Meeting of Myth and Science”; “‘Primitive’ Thinking and the ‘Civilized’ Mind”; “When Myth Becomes History”

Joseph Campbell, *Myths to Live By* (MLB):

“The Impact of Science on Myth”; “The Emergence of Mankind”

Ernst Cassirer, *Language and Myth* (LM):

“The Place of Language and Myth in the Pattern of Human Culture”

Discussion: Comparison of perspectives and methods: interpretive anthropological (LK), structuralist (MM), archetypal (MLB) and symbolist (LM) approaches to myth studies. Assumptions and experience—student premises for developing working definitions of myth, religion, history and science. What world through whose eyes?

Writing: Journal responses; working definitions (1-2 pp)

Weeks 2-3. Middle Eastern Mythology

Readings: S. H. Hooke, *Middle Eastern Mythology*

Geertz, LK: “Common Sense as a Cultural System”; “Art as a Cultural System”

Cassirer, LM: “The Evolution of Religious Ideas”; “Language and Conception”

Discussion: Mesopotamian (Sumerian and Babylonian), Egyptian, Ugaritic and Hittite mythologies. Types of myth—ritual, origin, cult, prestige and eschatological concepts. Diffusion and disintegration of myths. Anything familiar here?

Writing: Journal responses; short essay—analysis of one myth, using perspective in LK, MM or LM—2-3 pp.

Week 4. The Epic of Gilgamesh

Readings: N. K. Sanders, *The Epic of Gilgamesh*

Geertz, LK: “Centers, Kings, and Charisma: Reflections of the Symbolics of Power”

Cassirer, LM: “Word Magic”

Discussion: The quest for immortality. Friendship with the “other,” the “wild” man. Searching for power, the power of the search--heroic identity through struggle. An early flood myth. Death, sleep and the uses of the dream and the name. The role of archaeology--cuneiform and tablets. Of what importance when I know what I know?

Writing: Journal responses; submit questions for mid-term.

Weeks 5-6. Greek and Roman Mythology

Readings: Philip Mayerson, *Classical Mythology in Literature, Art, and Music*

Discussion: Cosmogony and Theogony. Allegorical and “natural” deities. Prometheus and Zeus. Matriarchy and Mycenaean culture, patriarchy and Dorian culture. Zeus and counterparts in other religions. Hera (Juno), Poseidon (Neptune), Demeter (Ceres), Persephone, Apollo, Dionysus (Bacchus), Artemis (Diana), Athena (Minerva), Ares (Mars), Aphrodite (Venus), Hermes (Mercury), Hades

(Pluto), Orpheus, Perseus, Heracles (Hercules), Daedulus, Cadmus, Oedipus and Theseus. The uses of cultural legacy-gender, class and art. What are the games of gods?

Writing: Journal responses; short essay--compare one god to a contemporary leader or analyze a contemporary event from the point of view of a Greek myth, 2-3 pp; identification and short essay examination; submit questions for the mid-term.

Week 7. Looking for the World through Mythic Senses

Readings: Robert Fitzgerald, trans., *The Odyssey*

Discussion: The heroic quest. Disorientation and dislocation. Rational inquiry and intuitive risks. University education as an odyssey. Class and gender, the crew and Penelope. Deceit and desire. Memory and imagination. Is it impossible to get back home?

Writing: Journal responses; study questions; take-home mid-term essay examination.

Week 8. Hebrew and Christian Mythology

Readings: Hooke, *Middle Eastern Mythology*

Cassirer, LM: "The Successive Phases of Religious Thought"

Thorleif Borman, *Hebrew Thought Compared with Greek* (reserve reading)

Discussion: Creation myth. Cain and Abel. The flood and the tower of Babel. Cult myths. Joshua. The ark. The Elijah and Elisha myths. Apocalyptic myths (Daniel). Birth and resurrection narratives. Comparison of Hellenic and Hebrew traditions; dynamic and static thought, language, collective concepts, time and space, symbolism and instrumentalism, logical thinking and psychological understanding, and historical thinking. What do I know now that I did not know that I knew?

Writing: Journal responses; short reaction essay (1-2 pp)

Weeks 9-10. Hindu Mythology

Readings: Wendy O'Flaherty, trans., *Hindu Myths*

Campbell, MLB: "The Separation of East and West"; "The Confrontation of East and West in Religion"; "The Inspiration of Oriental Art"; "Zen"

Discussion: Prajapati and Brahma. Indra and Angi, Rudra and Siva. Vishnu and the avatars Rama and Sita, the Buddha and Kalkin. Devi, the goddess. gods and demons. Reincarnation and immortality.

Writing: Journal responses; submit questions for the final; short essay--a) if god were a woman, then.. . or b) if you were the Devi, then.. . (2-3 pp)

Weeks 11-12. Northern European Mythology

- Readings:** H. R Ellis Davidson, *Gods and Myths of Northern Europe*
 M. Magnusson and H. Palsson, *The Vinland Sagas: The Norse Discovery of America*
 Cassirer, LM: "The Power of Metaphor"
- Discussion:** *The Prose Edda*. Odin and the gods of battle. Thor, Freyr and the gods of peace and prosperity. Gods of the sea, gods of the dead. Twin gods--Bragi and Idun, Mimir and Hoenir. Loki and Balder. The world tree, creation and destruction. How do old gods die?
- Writing:** Journal responses; submit questions for final; short essay (2-3 pp) comparing one god from Northern Europe with one from the Greeks or from the Hindus.

Weeks 13-14. Native American (New World) Mythology

- Readings:** Dennis Tedlock, trans., *Popul Vuh*
 Paul Zolbrod, trans. *Dine Bahane*
 Cheyenne origin myth (handout)
 Cheyenne wheel of law (handout)
 Acoma Pueblo origin myth (handout)
- Discussion:** Mayan creation epic--the "daykeepers," diviners of the distance between sky and body. Navajo creation epic. Use of contemporary informants to reconstruct ancient texts. Cheyenne earth-diver myth; myth, ecology and law. Acoma emergence myth. What ghosts grow in the corn?
- Writing:** Journal responses; submit questions for final; short essay (2-3 pp) comparing Hebrew/Christian mythology with Native American mythology.

Week 15. Mythology and the Modern Mind

- Reading:** Geertz, LK: "The Way We Think Now: Toward an Ethnography of Modern Thought"; "Local Knowledge: Fact and Law in Comparative Perspective"
- Discussion:** Law and myth as local knowledge--gender, class, time, place and varied issues--civility and religion. Expanding modes of discourse in film and television, from Sergeant Friday to Judge Wapner, from facts to precedent and pattern. Accents of characterization and narration, imaginings of particular place in particular time about particular things by particular peoples--meanings, not machines. How shall we dance when it rains in the mind and what shall we plant?
- Writing:** Journal responses; submit question for final.

4. Evaluation of student learning

- a) Achievement of student learning will be evaluated based on the following:
- written response journal (20%)
 - short essays, at least one with revision (35%)
 - mid-term essay examination (10%)
 - final essay examination (20%)
 - discussion/participation (15%)

b) English 3009G satisfies the criteria for a writing- intensive course.

5. Rationale

- a) English 3009G will be in the Humanities segment of the General Education program. In this course, students will use methods of critical and comparative analysis in order to examine the role of mythology in shaping, nurturing and proscribing cultural transformation from a variety of selected Western and non-Western cultures
- b) Prerequisites: ENG 1001G, 1002G.
- c) This course does not duplicate any current offerings.

6. Implementation

a) The course will be taught by members of the English Department.

b) Texts:

Acoma origin myth (handout)

Boman, Thorleif. *Hebrew Thought Compared with Greek*. 1960; rpt. Norton, 1970.
(reserve reading)

Campbell, Joseph. *Myths to Live By*. Bantam, 1973.

Cassirer, Ernst. *Language and Myth*. Trans. Susanne Langer. 1946; rpt. Dover, 1953.

Cheyenne origin myth (handout)

Cheyenne wheel of law (handout)

Davidson, H. R. Ellis. *Gods and Myths of Northern Europe*. Penguin, 1974.

Geertz, Clifford. *Local Knowledge: Further Essays in Interpretive Anthropology*. Basic, 1983.

Hooke, S. H. *Middle Eastern Mythology*. Penguin, 1963.

Levi-Strauss, Claude. *Myth and Meaning*. U of Toronto P, 1978.

Magnusson, Magnus and Hermann Palsson, trans. *The Vinland Sagas: The Norse Discovery of America*. Penguin, 1965.

Mayerson, Philip. *Classical Mythology in Literature, Art and Music*. Xerox, 1971.

O'Flaherty, Wendy, trans. *Hindu Myths*. Penguin, 1975.

Sandars, N. K., trans. *The Epic of Gilgamesh*. Penguin, 1960. [A new translation by Maureen G. Kovacs, published by Stanford UP, may be substituted, if available in paper.]

Tedlock, Dennis, trans. *Popul Vuh: The Definitive Edition of the Mayan Book of the Dawn of Life and the Glories of Gods and Kings*. Simon and Schuster, 1985.

Zolbrod, Paul. *Dine Bahane: The Navajo Creation Story*. U of New Mexico, 1988.

c) There will be no supplementary materials or laboratory experiences required.

d) English 3009G will first be offered in Fall 2000.

7. Community College Transfer

A community college course may not be judged equivalent to this course.

8. Date Approved by Department: 10 April, 2000

9. Date approved by CAHCC: 19 April, 2000

10. Date approved by CAA: 19 October, 2000

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