

California State University, Sacramento  
Humanities and Religious Studies Department  
HRS 151: World Mythology – G.E. Area C3  
Fall 2009

Prof.Thoma  
Section 3 / Tues / 5:30--8:20 pm  
Mendocino Hall 1024

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+ see ^ ^ I rarely answer my phone

**Special note for fall 09: The information in this syllabus is subject to change as issues related to furlough planning are updated and resolved.**

**General Course Description:**

This course offers a general introduction to the nature and function of myth. The specific material studied will be exclusive of classical mythology and the breadth of the subject matter will vary in content. The mythology of at least four world cultures will be covered each term. The teaching format of the class will be lecture with discussion as time allows and when appropriate to examination of the topics.

**Specific Focus of This Section:**

This section will examine specific mythology of the Near East, South Pacific, Northern Europe and North America. (Because mythology encompasses vast amounts of often complex and esoteric information, our studies cannot be comprehensive, but are designed as introductions and hopefully will inspire interest and further study.) In addition to reading and discussion of primary source materials, this course will include an exploration of scholarly theoretical approaches regarding the role and function of myth within different cultural contexts.

**Required Texts:**

Karen Armstrong: A Short History of Myth, Canongate Books Ltd., 2005.

Stephen Mitchell: Gilgamesh, Free Press, 2004.

Seamus Heaney, trans.: Beowulf, W.W. Norton and Co., 2000.

Leslie Marmon Silko: Ceremony, Penguin Books, 1986.

HRS 151 – World Mythology Reader: not available through the CSUS bookstore. Information on purchasing the reader will be provided in the first two weeks of the semester.

*Additional reading materials including, but not limited to, online material or handouts may be provided throughout the course of the semester.*

**Course Objectives:**

Successful students will:

- acquire a thorough understanding of the definition of myth and its purpose as an important expression of culture.
- be familiar with the essential mythology of the featured societies and be able to draw cross-cultural comparisons.
- develop an understanding of how modern theorists have approached the study of myth.
- recognize and appreciate the continuing influence and value of mythology in the arts and society.

**Requirements and Grading:**

Reading and writing are fundamental aspects of this course, therefore, it is essential to complete all reading assignments and be attentive to lecture materials and presentations. (Take notes!) Attendance is required as per departmental attendance policy—grade reductions will result from excessive absences. Respectful participation in class discussions is encouraged and may affect your overall grade favorably.\* Disrespectful conduct, including, but not limited to, cell phones ringing, texting, playing computer games, chatting, coming in late, leaving early, disruptive behavior, etc...will affect your grade unfavorably. If you have special needs or extreme circumstances requiring you to miss class, come late, etc..., please discuss with the instructor.

\*If you are a student who experiences anxiety simply at the thought of speaking up in class, please see me for helpful strategies and tips for reducing stress and improving your learning experience. I consider all students equally important to the classroom dynamic.

**Course grades are determined by the following:**

**(Possible Points)**

25% -Attendance and Participation†-----	75 points
30% - Quizzes (4-lowest grade dropped) **+ (30 points each) -----	90 points
20% - In-class writing assignment (2)**♦-----	60 points
25% - Final**- short essay and multiple choice-----	75 points
<u>100%</u> -----	<u>300 points</u>

- A -----300-277 points
- A- -----276-268 points
- B+ -----267-261 points
- B -----260-246 points
- B- -----245-237 points
- C+ -----236-230 points
- C -----229-216 points
- C- -----215-206 points
- D+ -----205-199 points
- D -----198- 186 points
- D- -----185-175 points. **You should have come to see me long before it got to this point.**
- ! -----Yikes. " "

*It is your responsibility as a committed student to keep track of your point total and manage your study habits accordingly. This will eliminate grade "surprises" at the end of the semester.*

† The attendance and participation grade will include points accumulated by good attendance (15 pts), class discussion (15 pts), regular "journaling" (25 pts) and some miscellaneous "TBA" opportunities (20pts).

\*\* All quizzes, writing assignments and the final must be taken at the scheduled times. Students may not leave and return to the classroom during quizzes, writing assignments or the final. Take care of any necessary tasks before or after the class session. If you require special testing and/or writing accommodations, please consult with instructor. For quizzes: you will need (4) **Scantron forms, 882-E**.

**The In-class Writing Assignments:** plain notebook paper is fine--a bluebook is okay, but not necessary. These assignments are not tests, but an exercise in analysis of information and creative application of your knowledge. No additional preparation beyond completing assigned readings and attentive presence in class should be necessary to do well on the writings. Good writing skills will be important in presenting your ideas well, but emphasis will be on *thinking* rather than mechanics of writing. More detailed instructions and guidelines will be given at the time of assignments.

♦ The **in-class writing assignments** will be graded on a simple rubric (1- minimal or no effort, unfamiliar with the topic, 2- some basic ideas, 3-very good development in discussion of assigned topics and good use of information gained through the lectures and readings and 4-excellent application of knowledge and analysis of material including good creative interpretation.) Good writing skills will be important in presenting your ideas well, but emphasis will be on *thinking* rather than mechanics of writing.

*The writing assignment point conversion for the purposes of calculating your final grade will be as follows:*

*Writing assignments totaling 8 points = 60 grade points; 7 = 54 grade points; 6 = 48 grade points; 5 = 42 grade points; 4 = 36 grade points; 3 = 30 grade points; 2 = 24 grade points; 1 = 10 grade points*

**Final Exam:** The final will consist of multiple choice and short essay questions. It will only be comprehensive as it pertains to basic, theoretical concepts and practices in the study of myth and basic knowledge of our focus cultures. The greater emphasis will be on the material covered in the second half of the semester. You will need Scantron form **886-E for the final**.

Adjustments may be made to this syllabus at the discretion of the instructor. Students will be given reasonable notice prior to any such changes.

### Course Calendar

Complete all reading assignments before the class week for which they are listed and be prepared to discuss them.

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#### **Week 1 - SEPT 1**

Introduction; syllabus; defining myth.

**Read:** KA: What is a Myth? (1-11) (KA refers to Karen Armstrong's *A Short History of Myth*)

WMR: "About this Reader," "Overview to specific material in this Reader" and "General Functions, approaches and theories of myth." (WMR refers to World Myth Reader)

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#### **Week 2 – SEPT 8**

Categorizing myth; understanding the history and functions of myth.

**Read:** "Introduction" and "Great Themes in Myth" by Willis

KA: The Paleolithic Period (12-40), The Neolithic Period (41-57), The Early Civilizations (58-78).

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#### **Week 3 – SEPT 15**

Focus on theory: C. G. Jung, Levi-Strauss, Eliade, Campbell

**Read:** WMR: "Ways of Understanding Myth," "How to Perform a Jungian Analysis..." and "The Hero with a Thousand Faces" by Thury and Devinney.

**! Quiz #1**

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#### **Week 4 – SEPT 22**

Egyptian mythology: Approaches to the Study of Myth; Egyptian cosmogony; The Myth of Isis and Osiris.

**Read:** WMR: "The Egyptian World," "Introduction," and "The Myth of Kingship by Hart.

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#### **Week 5 – SEPT 29**

Mesopotamian mythology; Mesopotamian cosmogony and creation; the *Epic of Gilgamesh*

**Read:** WMR: "The Mesopotamian World," "Introduction" and "Gods and Mortals..." by McCall

SM: Introduction, prologue, books I-II (pp.1-90) (SM refers to Stephen Mitchell's *Gilgamesh*.)

**! Quiz #2**

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#### **Week 6 – OCT 6**

Mesopotamia and Gilgamesh continued.

**Read:** SM: books III-XI (pp.91-199)

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#### **Week 7 – OCT 13**

Film TBA

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#### **Week 8- OCT 20**

Northern European Mythology: The cultural context of myth in Northern Europe; the Norse pantheon.

**Read:** WMR: "The Norse World," "Introduction," "

**! In-class writing assignment I**

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#### **Week 9 – OCT 27**

Northern Europe cont.: Pagan and Christian values and ideas in myth; the heroic code; introduction to *Beowulf*.

**Read:** WMR: "The Prose Edda's Creation Stories," and "Ragnarok" by Thury and Devinney, "Aesir, Vanir and a Few Kings" and "Baldr and Loki" by Page.

begin *Beowulf* (introduction and pp. 3-87)

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**WEEK 10-- NOV 3 -**

Read: continue *Beowulf* (pp.80-finish); plan feast!

**! Quiz #3**

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**Week 11 – NOV 10**

Mythology of the Pacific Islands; Maori Creation Cycle; Maori Cosmogony and creation stories.

Read: WMR: "The Creation Cycle" by Rosenberg. "Maori Mythology," by Orbell, Maori Handouts.

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**Week 12 – NOV 17 !FEAST NIGHT!**

Pacific Islands continued, preparation for the film *Whalerider*.

Film: *Whalerider*

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**Week 13 – NOV 24**

TBA

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**Week 14 – DEC 1**

Native North American Mythology; The Native American Cultural Context; Native American creation and trickster myths.

Read: WMR: Maps; "the Emergence" by Rosenberg, Raven: a Native American trickster," by Thury and Devinney.

begin *Ceremony*

**! In-class writing assignment II**

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**Week 15 – DEC 8**

Discussion of *Ceremony* and the role of myth in the modern world.

Read: continue *Ceremony* Summary, catch-up, discussion and review.

Read: finish *Ceremony*

**! Quiz #4**

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**Week 16– DEC 15**

FINAL EXAM: 5:15-7:15 (Bring Scantron Form # 886 E)

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**HAVE A GREAT HOLIDAY!**  
**(I'm really going to myth all of you.)**