

California State University, Sacramento
Humanities and Religious Studies Department

HRS 151: World Mythology – G.E. Area C3
Spring 2009

Prof. Thoma
Section 2 Tues 6:00--8:50 pm
Mendocino Hall 1003

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Office Hours: Tuesday 1:30-2:30; 4:30-5:30
and by appt.

General Course Description:

This course offers a general introduction to the nature and function of myth. The specific literature 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. In addition to reading and discussion of primary source materials, our study 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.

World Mythology Reader: available at www.universityreaders.com – instructions on how to purchase at site.
Additional reading materials, available online or as 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)
15% -Attendance and Participation-----	45 points
30% - Quizzes (4-lowest grade dropped) ** (30 points each) -----	90 points
30% - In-class writing assignments/ myth analysis paper (2 @ 45 points each)** ^---	90 points
25% - Final exam**- 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

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.

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 ** 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**.

^ There will be three writing assignments offered for the semester. Two of the assignments will be **in-class writings** and one will be a **myth analysis paper**. You are required to complete two of the three assignments. That is, you can do both in-class writing assignments and skip the myth analysis paper, or do either one of the in-class writing assignments plus the paper. There will be a possible 90 points for any combination of two assignments.

(e.g., in-class writing X + in-class writing Y = 90 - **or** - in-class writing X (or Y) + myth analysis = 90)

Hey! How did that math get on this syllabus?!

The In-class Writing Assignments: plain notebook paper is fine--a bluebook is okay, but not necessary. This assignment is not a test, 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 **writing assignments** will be graded will the following guidelines in mind. A low grade will be earned if the paper appears to be of minimal effort with little or no application of information gained through assigned reading and lecture material. An average grade will be earned if the paper shows a thoughtful attempt and some basic ideas reflecting course material, and a high grade will be earned when the paper demonstrates a very good development in discussion of assigned topic and use of information gained through the lectures and readings.

The Myth Analysis Paper: This should be a fun, light research project. Briefly, it involves the following: You will research a myth that interests you and falls within the culture categories covered in class. The myth can be obscure, didactic, ritual related, etc... but must be of a reliable source and one we have not discussed in class. (The CSUS library has a good reference link for world myth and you can likely find an appropriate topic by using this link: <http://library.csus.edu/guides/rogenmoserd/humanities/worldmyth>.)

You can cut and paste the original myth text in your paper and then you will apply your knowledge of theoretical analysis to explain possible functions of the myth in the cultural context. The process will be clear to you after the first couple of weeks of the semester and more information will be provided. The total length of your analysis (exclusive of the actual text of the myth) should be 2-4 pages. If you choose this as one of your assignments, you must complete it and turn it in no later than **April 28**.

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. The greater focus 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.

Week 1 - JAN 27

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)

Week 2 – FEB 3

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).

Week 3 –FEB 10

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

Week 4 – FEB 17

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.

Week 5 – FEB 24

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

Week 6 – MAR 3

Mesopotamia and Gilgamesh continued.

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

Week 7 – MAR 10

Film TBA

Week 8- MAR 17

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

Week 9 – MAR 24

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)

WEEK 10-- MAR 31 - SPRING BREAK-----HAVE FUN – BE SAFE – RELAX-----

Week 11 – APR 7

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

! Quiz #3

Week 12 – APR 14

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.

Week 13 – APR 21

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

Film: *Whalerider*

Week 14 – APR 28

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

! Myth analysis paper due today ! (Late papers will lose a half grade per day after today.)

Week 15 – MAY 5

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

Read: continue *Ceremony*

Week 16–MAY 12

Summary, catch-up, discussion and review.

Read: finish *Ceremony*

! Quiz #4

Week 17 – MAY 21 – FINAL EXAM: 5:15-7:15 (Bring Scantron Form # 886 E)

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