

## English/Humanities 226: Introduction to World Mythology

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### Texts:

- Thury, Eva M. and Margaret K. Devinney. *Introduction to Mythology: Contemporary Approaches to Classical and World Myths*. 23rd Ed. New York and Oxford: Oxford U. P., 2012. Print.
- The class web site at [imperial.blackboard.com](http://imperial.blackboard.com)

### Class Overview

As the name implies, this class will provide an introduction to mythology from around the world. Specifically, the class will examine the many ways that common mythical themes can be found in diverse cultures throughout human history. Additionally, we will discuss the many ways that traditional myths live and flourish in our own time.

### Student Learning Objectives For English/Humanities 226

Upon completion of this course, the student will be able to:

1. Show a broad understanding of common structures and themes found in mythological texts from around the world (ILO1, ILO2, ILO5)
2. Demonstrate command of rules regarding plagiarism and academic ethics. (ILO3)
3. Access and interpret literary texts via various sources (drawn from internet, library catalogue, and electronic databases); and, evaluate publishers/authors. (ILO1, ILO2, ILO4)
4. Analyze myths from different historical periods and different cultures. (ILO1, ILO2, ILO3)

### Class Rules:

1. Attend every class session. Any student who misses the first class will be dropped. Students may be dropped at instructor discretion if they miss more than a week of class hours continuously. Please make arrangements with the instructor or a fellow student to keep up with all assignments in case you cannot attend a class session for any reason.
2. Each assignment will be completed before the designated class in which it is due. **NO LATE WORK WILL BE ACCEPTED.**
3. Absolutely no food or drink in the class, as per college policy. An exception can be made for bottled water on hot days.
4. You are responsible for keeping track of your class grade average and the drop deadline.

**Plagiarism:** IVC expects honesty and integrity from all students. A student found to have cheated on any assignment or plagiarized will receive a zero for the assignment and sent to Disciplinary Officer Sergio Lopez. A second occurrence of cheating or plagiarism may result in dismissal from class and expulsion from IVC as outlined in the General Catalog.

**Grade Breakdown:**

Graded Assignment	%
Short Writing: Create a Myth	10
Midterm	20
Reading Questions (turned in via Blackboard)	20
Research Paper	20
Final Exam	30
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100</b>

**Midterm and Final:** For the midterm, I will ask you to analyze a series of myths from various cultures and historical periods. The final exam will consist of a series of short answer and essay-length responses aimed at assessing your overall understanding of the mythological concepts we will cover during the class.

**Short Writing: Create a Myth:** There will be a short writing due early in the semester that will allow you to use what you have learned about mythology to create your own myth.

**Research Paper:** You will be asked to take a myth or mythic figure from the past and link it to a contemporary work. The essay you write on this topic should be six-to-eight pages in length and include at least six citations (no Wikipedia, please). It must be typed and double-spaced, using a standard twelve-point font; the research must be documented according to the 2009 edition of the Modern Language Association (MLA) *Handbook*.

*Note: I will not be spending class time on grammar or MLA issues; these are topics you should have already mastered in English 101.*

**Reading Questions:** By the Friday of each week, I will post an assignment on Blackboard. This assignment will ask you to answer a certain number of questions regarding the following week's readings. The number of questions will vary, as will the instructions I give for you to answer them. Some weeks I will ask you basic reading questions; others may require some research on your part; still others will ask you to analyze a particular passage or theme in the given work. Your job will be threefold: to answer the questions, to submit your answers through Blackboard prior to class on Tuesday of each week, and to bring a copy of your responses to class with you (so you can refer to them during discussions). Points will be deducted if you do not bring a copy with you to class (or if you only turn it in online and fail to show up for class).

**Honors Option:** This class is being offered as an Honors course. For more on this, see the Honors Supplement to this syllabus. If you are interested in taking this class as an Honors class, see me during the first week of the semester.

**Disabled Student Programs and Services:** Any student with a documented disability who may need educational accommodations should notify the instructor or the Disabled Student Programs and Services (DSP&S) office as soon as possible. Visit or call DSP&S, Mel Wendrick Access Center, Room 2117, (760) 355-6312

### CLASS SCHEDULE

This Schedule may be adjusted at any point in the semester.

Date	Readings	Topic
Week 1	Thury & Devinney, Chapter 1	What is Mythology?
Week 2	Thury & Devinney, Chapters 2-3	Understanding Myths, Creation Myths
Week 3	Thury & Devinney, Chapters 5, 8, 9, 11	Creation Myths (Cont.)
Week 4	Thury & Devinney, Chapters 7, 12, 13, 14	Creation and Destruction Myths
Week 5	Thury & Devinney, Chapters 15, 16, 19	Heroes and Tricksters
Week 6	Thury & Devinney, Chapter 21	<b>Short Writing Due;</b> Heroes and Tricksters
Week 7	Thury & Devinney, Chapters 22-24	Heroes and Tricksters
Week 8	Thury & Devinney, Chapters 25-26	<b>Midterm;</b> Heroes and Tricksters
Week 9	Thury & Devinney, Chapters 27-29	Ritual and Myth
Week 10	Thury & Devinney, Chapters 30-32	Ritual and Myth
Week 11	Thury & Devinney, Chapters 35-37	Folktale and Myth
<b>No Class -- Spring Break</b>		
Week 12	Thury & Devinney, Chapters 38-39	Folktale and Myth
Week 13	Thury & Devinney, Chapters 41-42	Contemporary Myth
Week 14	Thury & Devinney, Chapters 43-44	Contemporary Myth, Literature and Myth
Week 15	Thury & Devinney, Chapters 45-46	<b>Research Paper Due;</b> Literature and Myth
Week 16	<b>Final Exam</b>	

## **Appendix A: Questions to Address to Mythic Texts**

The following is taken from William G. Doty's book *Mythography: The Study of Myths and Rituals* (466-67). It is, as Doby notes, a "list of critical questions" that "an attentive analyst ought" to ask when examining myths (466). Because the original was designed for graduate students specializing in mythography (the study of myths and rituals), I've reorganized and simplified it. In all cases here, use a very familiar source—like the Adam and Eve story in the Bible or the *X-Men* films—as an example to help you best understand and apply these questions.

### **Social Questions**

- What role did this myth originally play in society (entertainment, education, religion, etc)?
- In what specific situations is the myth used or told and how do those situations fit into the larger context of that society?
- To what extent does it justify social roles, reinforce authority and social hierarchy (think Zeus lording over the other gods on Mt. Olympus), convey moral values, express political opinions, or suggest other social messages?
- How "realistic" is the material?
- Does it model, idealize, reflect, or criticize social experience?

### **Psychological Questions**

- What psychological or personality traits does the myth address? Some examples include Freud's id, ego, and super-ego; character traits like courtesy, clumsiness, and jealousy; or personality traits like openness, extraversion, and neuroticism.
- Does the myth speak primarily to individuals or to collective groups?
- How does the myth discuss or examine issues of gender, age, occupation, and class?
- Does it express revealed (or spiritual) truths that help us understand the origins of life or the reasons for everyday occurrences (like why humans don't have tails)?
- How effective is the myth at conveying emotions, either through the characters or through the narrative?
- How does the myth relate to cultural patterns of exhibiting and controlling emotions like anxiety, anger, and joy? Does it offer models for behavior or warnings about misbehavior? Does it demonstrate what happens when individuals "lose control"?

### **Literary Questions**

- In what artistic genres is the myth expressed or interpreted? [Is it a poem, a play, a story, a song, etc? Is it a mystery, a comedy, an action-adventure, etc?]
- What are the literary characteristics of the myth (such as plot, setting, themes, heroes, villains, mood, tone, climax, and so on)?
- How is the myth related to other myths in the culture (or beyond it)? Is it typical, or is it unique?
- Did the myth inspire or influence other myths? Has it exerted an influence on other things in culture? [Think: Comic-Con]

- How were the materials transmitted, performed, distributed, and codified (converted into rules or laws)?
- Are there literary or dramatic elements in this myth that are not found elsewhere in other myths or works of literature?

### **Structural Questions**

- Are there indications within the material about the correct context for its performance (performed or read only during certain seasons or during particular rituals, etc.)?
- What are the innate dynamics of the myth? That is, who is in charge? Who controls the action? Do things happen to call that authority into question? If so, then how is this explained or reconciled? What does all this say about the culture from which the myth arose?
- To what extent does the myth represent a class (or genre) of similarly structured materials, and to what extent is it unique?
- How does the myth fit within the society's rules, laws, and social systems? Does it refer to other privileged codes, or does it function as a "master code" that rules other materials? (A master code would be the Bible in western culture or the Koran in the Arab world.)

### **Political and Cultural Questions**

- What functions does the myth serve in the original society?
- Where does the myth fit within political frameworks? Is it "conservative" or "liberal" in orientation and application? That is, does it offer a radical challenge to the general beliefs of a culture, or does it reinforce that culture's belief systems?
- In what ways has this myth influenced future cultures, including our own?
- How does the myth connect to larger cultural forces like love, sex, religion, and art?
- Who controls access to the ritual or myth, and how much change is acceptable?
- How self-evident is the meaning of this myth for the hearer/reader? Or does it require someone else to act as interpreter (a priest, for example)?

