

English 270: Introduction to Folklore

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Class Time: MW 1:30-3:18

Class Location: Denny 214

Office Hours: T 12:00-2:00 or by appt.

Course Objectives

The purpose of this class is to explore central issues in the study of folklore by introducing you to a range of traditional verbal art, custom, and material culture from a number of different regions and ethnic groups. Central issues include the dynamics of tradition, creativity and artistic expression, personal and group identity, making everyday experience meaningful, and the relationship between folklore and worldview.

No prior knowledge of folklore is assumed or required. Most important are your curiosity about people like you and different from you, your ability to keep up with the reading and assignments, and your willingness to share your ideas with colleagues in class discussions.

Required Texts

Brunvand, Jan. *The Vanishing Hitchhiker* (New York: Norton, 1981)
available at SBX bookstore, 806 North High St. between 14th and 15th Ave

Optional reader available at UniPrint, Tuttle Park Place Garage, 2055 Millikin Way

All readings (except Brunvand's book) and assignments on [Carmen](#)

Assignments and Expectations

Final grades will be figured as follows:

- 15% Participation including regular readings quizzes
- 30% Midterm exam
- 25% Fieldwork collection and analysis project
- 30% Final exam

Participation:

Participation involves much more than showing up (though, see attendance policy below). GAt minimum, good participation means coming to class on time having read the material assigned for the day, being prepared to contribute your views on the assigned reading, and generally

demonstrating dedication to achieving the goals set by this course. Active listening, reading, and questioning are important components of participation.

Much of your participation grade will come from brief readings quizzes, which you should expect and be prepared for at the beginning of every class session (another reason to come on time!). Quizzes missed due to absence or lateness cannot be taken at a later time and will be recorded as "zero points." I will drop your two lowest quiz scores. This should be sufficient buffer against emergency absences.

Midterm and Final Exams:

These two exams will include multiple choice, matching, and fill in the blank questions; short answer questions; and essays. These exams will test your comprehension and retention of information and ideas from readings, lectures, videos, and class discussions. Essays in particular will test your ability to apply and/or evaluate perspectives gained from class materials. All reading materials are fair game for exam questions, whether or not these materials were discussed at length in class. Study guides will be provided. The objective questions and short answer questions on the final exam will focus on material since the midterm exam. The final exam essays, however, will be cumulative in that they challenge you to synthesize information and ideas from throughout the quarter. You will receive the essay questions ahead of time.

Fieldwork Project

For the fieldwork project, you will go out into the world, record and transcribe folk narratives, and offer written analyses of them. **You will need access to an audio recorder.** More details about the collection project will follow.

Class Policies

Attendance and promptness:

Absence and tardiness are sure signs of indolence, shiftlessness, and moral turpitude. — Confucius

You are expected to attend every class, and I will take attendance, usually in the form of quizzes. As stated above, missed quizzes cannot be taken later. Everyone is allowed two personal days or "free" absences as a buffer against health, transportation, familial, and other emergencies. You would be wise to save these days only for real emergencies. After two absences, you will lose a point off your final grade for each additional absence. Do speak with me if something dramatic happens, such as extended hospitalization, so we can negotiate a plan. Otherwise, there is no need to hand me excuses or notes from your doctor, lawyer, mechanic, etc. Again, I am not drawing a distinction between excused and unexcused absences. You get two free absences. After that your grade will suffer.

Class meetings will start promptly at 1:30; quizzes and announcements about readings or schedule changes will take place at that time. If for whatever reason you cannot avoid coming late, you are responsible for finding out what you missed at the beginning of class. Likewise, if you miss a class, you are responsible for getting notes and any handouts from a fellow student. I encourage you to get the phone number or email of someone in the class early on.

Finally, in addition to inconveniencing yourself and affecting your grade, coming late and leaving early is terribly disruptive and extremely inconsiderate to your fellow classmates and to me. Please don't do it.

Due Dates

As it says on the front door of the American embassy in Sydney, "Bad planning on your part does not constitute an emergency on our part." Extensions on assignments will only be given in exceptional circumstances. Contact me ASAP if you have an extremely compelling, verifiable reasons to need an extension. Otherwise, grades on late work will plummet one third of a letter (e.g., C- to D+) for each day it is late.

Plagiarism

This includes handing in class assignments that you did not write, submitting fraudulent documents, forging signatures, and plagiarizing. Plagiarism, as defined by the English Department, is "the representation of another's work or ideas as one's own: it includes the unacknowledged word for word use and/or paraphrasing of another person's work, and/or the unacknowledged use of another person's ideas." All cases of suspected misconduct will be reported, in accordance with university rules, to the Committee on Academic Misconduct. [See more on plagiarism](#) .

University Resources and Services:

Center for the Study of the Teaching of Writing (CSTW)

The Writing Center staff can help you with general writing strategies as well as specific assignments. Call 688-4291 or 292-5607 for an appointment. They also offer tutorials on-line. [See the CSTW Web site](#) for guides to many aspects of writing, from the general composition process to specifics of grammar and documentation. The Writing Center is located at 485 Mendenhall Lab, at 125 South Oval Mall.

The Office for Disability Services,

Located in 150 Pomerane Hall, ODS offers services for students with documented disabilities. Contact ODS at 292-3307 if you wish to schedule an appointment or consult with staff there.

Class Schedule (subject to revision)

Week 1 *Introduction to the course and fundamental ideas in the study of folklore*

(no readings due)

Week 2 *The "Folk" in Folklore; Overview of Major Folklore Genres*

Readings to be discussed:

- Schoemaker, George. "Introduction: Basic Concepts of Folkloristics"

- Oring, Elliott. "On the Concepts of Folklore"
- Schoemaker, George. "Introduction: Basic Concepts of Folkloristics"
- Oring, Elliott. "Ethnic Groups and Ethnic Folklore"
- Oring, Elliott. "Folk Narratives"

Week 3 *Historical Legends; The Issue of "Truth"*

Readings to be discussed:

- Basso, Keith. "Stalking with Stories"
- Alver, Brynjulf. "Historical Legends and Historical Truth"
- O'Brien, Tim. "How to Tell a True War Story"

Week 4 *Supernatural Legends and Belief*

Readings to be discussed:

- Irish legends of "the Good People" (a.k.a. fairies): "The Legend of Knockgrifton," "The Three Sneezes," "The Woman Dropped from the Air," "How the Shoemaker Saved His Wife," "Calamity Meat: The Fairy Carcass," "Lanty's New House," and "Jack and the Cluricaune"
- Arensberg, Conrad. "The Good People"
- Hufford, David. "Beings Without Bodies"

***** NOTE: Class will not meet on Monday 1/21 (MLK Jr. Day) *****

Week 5 *Urban Legends; Modern Beliefs, Values, and Anxieties*

Readings to be discussed:

- Brunvand's *The Vanishing Hitchhiker* in its entirety, from "Preface" through the "Afterword." (This may seem like a lot of reading, but trust me—you will find that it is face-paced and entertaining.)

Week 6 *Introduction to Fieldwork Project; Midterm exam*

***** MIDTERM EXAM ON WEDNESDAY 2/6/08 *****

Week 7 *Folk Custom*

Readings to be discussed:

- O'Connor, Bonnie and David Hufford. "Understanding Folk Medicine"
- Toelken, Barre. "The Hózhó Factor: The Logic of Navajo Healing"

- Ancelet, Barry. "Mardi Gras"

Week 8 *Folk Art and Material Culture*

Readings to be discussed:

- Bronner, Simon. "Folk Objects"
- Glassie, Henry. "The Potter's Art"

Week 9 *Fieldwork Projects*

***** FIELDWORK PROJECTS DUE, FRIDAY 2/29 *****

Week 10 *Folklore and Worldview; Review for the Final Exam*

Readings to be discussed:

- Dundes, Alan. "Thinking Ahead: A Folkloristic Reflection of the Future Orientation in American Worldview"
- Toelken, Barre. "Folklore and Cultural Worldview"

***** FINAL EXAM is Wednesday, March 12, 1:30-3:18 *****