

English 367.05: The U.S. Folk Experience

The U.S. Folk Experience - Storytelling in Everyday Life

Prof. Dorothy Noyes Office Denney 517

Winter 2005 Off. hrs. T 12-2, W 1:30-3:30

MW 11:30-1:18 292-0387, 2-6065

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DE 209

In this course, we will examine some versions of folktales in the contemporary U.S. We'll look at how narrative can give meaningful shape to ambiguous realities, affect an audience, and transform the position of the storyteller. We'll also think about fact, fiction, and the variety of relationships between narratives and experience. In examining real-life instances of storytelling in a variety of media and cultural settings, you'll learn the basics of narrative analysis and the ethnography of communication. At the same time, we'll work on how to present your findings in clear, cohesive, and engaging essays.

Readings

Readings must be done before class on the day they are assigned. Please bring the readings to class so we can refer to them.

REQUIRED BOOKS

Mathias, Elizabeth, and Richard Raspa. 1985. *Italian Folktales in America. The Verbal Art of an Immigrant Woman*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press.

Alger, Horatio. 1986 (1868, 1890). *Ragged Dick and Struggling Upward*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.

REQUIRED COURSE PACK--Tuttle Park Cop-Ez.

You should also own a good college dictionary and a good handbook on grammar and usage, as you will frequently need to consult these.

Requirements

Papers 1 and 2 will be written in two drafts, both of which will be graded. Draft 1 will be graded for content and organization only; draft 2 will be graded for content, organization, and expression (grammar, mechanics, style, etc.). First drafts must be turned in with two extra copies for peer review.

PAPER 1: 5% PLUS 10% =15%

Find a story from the contemporary U.S. that is structured like a fairy tale. It can be from a book, a movie, a television program, a newspaper article, or wherever you like. Your paper will discuss how it builds upon and how it departs from the fairy tale genre. That is, it will explain how the particular qualities of your chosen text relate to the genre as a whole.

PAPER 2: 15% PLUS 15%=30% This is a memory paper based on your early childhood. Try to remember the first stories you ever heard, and the range of stories you were told as a young child. (That is, we are talking here about oral storytelling, including reading books aloud.) You'll probably focus on your parents, but other tellers may have been important. Try to define the genres of stories you were told, and their sources (books, TV, community or family tradition, etc.). What purpose did the tellers have in telling them to you? What do you think has made them memorable until today--and, conversely, what kinds of stories do you find hard to recall?

PAPER 3: 30%

For this paper, you will choose a stable interactional setting that you have regular opportunities to observe. Possibilities include a workplace, a group of friends who meet once a week at a bar, a household, a classroom, or a computer chat room. Take notes through the course of the quarter on the storytelling activities that take place in this setting. Your paper will offer a "thick description" and analysis of the storytelling generally, as well as a close reading of one story performance.

GROUP PRESENTATION: 10%

At the end of the quarter, you will be placed into small groups according to the setting explored in your third papers (leisure/social, family, religious, organizational, workplace, etc.). In the groups, you'll discuss your findings about the kind of storytelling which takes place in the setting. Together, you'll plan a presentation for the class exploring both the variety and the commonalities of your findings in order to reach more general insights on storytelling in context.

CLASS PARTICIPATION AND SHORT WRITING ASSIGNMENTS: 15%

I will give occasional short in-class or pre-class writing assignments. The general energy and quality of these and of your attendance and in-class participation will make up the balance of the grade.

Course Policies and Resources

ATTENDANCE: You are expected to be present in class in both flesh and spirit: this means that you arrive on time, don't disappear after the break, have done the reading, remain awake, and are engaged. More than two absences, except in documented cases of illness or death in the family, will lower your grade for the course by one half letter. Absences on peer review days will count double.

If you must miss a class or arrive late, it is your responsibility to check with another student to find out what you missed: there will often be announcements you need to hear in order to prepare for the next meeting.

DUE DATES: Because of the tight scheduling of the quarter system, we will all need to maintain our concentration or we will get hopelessly off schedule. **NOTHING MAY BE LATE.** I will not accept any late papers except in documented cases of serious illness or death in the family.

PLAGIARISM: Plagiarism is the representation of another's works 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 inappropriate unacknowledged use of another person's ideas. All cases of suspected plagiarism, in accordance with university rules, will be reported to the Committee on Academic Misconduct. And bear in mind: it is much harder to plagiarize convincingly than just to do the work yourself.

DISABILITIES: The Office for Disability Services, located in 150 Pomerene Hall, offers services for students with documented disabilities. Contact the ODS at 2-3307.

WRITING CENTER: The Writing Center staff can help you with general writing strategies as well as specific assignments. You can schedule an appointment by calling 688-4291. The Writing Center is located at 485 Mendenhall Labs.

Syllabus

1/3	Introduction
1/5	What is a story? What is a genre?
1/10	The structure of the fairy tale
Read	M and R: Read the following fairy tales or <i>Märchen</i> : “Barbarina and the Black Snake,” “The Cats Under the Sea,” “The Gourd of Blood,” “Margherita,” and “The Three Brothers and the Fig Tree.”
1/12	The fairy tale in its social world; fairy tale and personal narrative
Read	M and R: Foreword; Pt I through “The Storyteller in Italy;” Pt.II.; Pt. III “Narratives of Personal Experience”
1/17	NO CLASS. Martin Luther King Jr. holiday
1/19	From rags to riches: an American fairy tale?
Read	Alger, <i>Ragged Dick</i> and <i>Struggling Upward</i> . (Read <i>Ragged Dick</i> more carefully.)
Due	Paper #1, draft #1 due, with two extra copies for peer review
1/24	Storytelling, performance, power
Read	Bauman, Richard and Donald Braid. 1998. “The Ethnography of Performance in the Study of Oral Traditions.” In <i>Teaching Oral Traditions</i> , ed. John Miles Foley, pp.106-122. New York: Modern Language Association of America.

- Film** “Swapping Stories: Folktales from Louisiana,” dir. Patrick Mire (1998).
- Due** Comments on the two peer papers (bring one copy for me, one for the author)
1/26 Learning to tell stories
- Read** Heath, Shirley Brice. 1982. “What No Bedtime Story Means”: Narrative Skills at Home and School.” *Language in Society* 11:49-76.
1/31 Paper conferences
- 2/2** Family stories
- Read** Morgan, Kathryn L. 1973. “Caddy Buffers: Legends of a Middle-Class Negro Family in Philadelphia.” In *Mother Wit From the Laughing Barrel*, ed. Alan Dundes, pp.595-610. Englewood Cliffs NJ: Prentice-Hall.
Due Revised paper 1
- 2/7** Immigration stories: when the fairy tale breaks down “El Norte,” dir. Gregory Nava (1983)
- Film** **2/9** Persuasive storytelling
- Read** Westerman, William. 1998. “Central American Refugee Testimonies and Performed Life Histories in the Sanctuary Movement.” In *The Oral History Reader*, ed. Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson, pp. 224-234. London and New York: Routledge.
2/14 Public storytelling in a diverse society
- Film** "Gathering Up Again: Fiesta in Santa Fe" (Jeanette DeBouzek and Diane Reyna, dirs., 1992).
Due Paper 2, draft 1, with two copies for peer reviewers
- 2/16** Tales of anxiety I: locating responsibility
- Read** Fine, Gary Alan. 1992. “The Kentucky Fried Rat: Legends and Modern Society.” In *Manufacturing Tales*, ch. 6. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press.
- 2/21** Tales of anxiety II: just because you’re paranoid doesn’t mean they’re not out to get you
- Read** Turner, Patricia A. 1992. *Ambivalent Patrons: The Role of Rumor and*

- Contemporary Legends in African-American Consumer Decisions." *Journal of American Folklore* 105:424-441.
- Due**
- Campion-Vincent, Véronique. 1990. "The Baby-Parts Story: A New Latin American Legend." *Western Folklore* 49:9-25.
- Peer review comments
- 2/23** **Tales of anxiety III: supernatural frameworks**
- Read**
- Hawes, Bess Lomax. 1968. "La Llorona in Juvenile Hall." *Western Folklore* 27:155-170.
- Due**
- Edwards, Lynda. 1997. "Myths Over Miami." *Miami New Times*, June 5 (distributed electronically).
- Paper 2, final draft
- 2/28** Tales of chaos
- Read**
- Bendix, Regina 1990. "Reflections on Earthquake Narratives." *Western Folklore* 49:331-347.
- Oring, Elliot. 1987. "Jokes and the Discourse on Disaster" *Journal of American Folklore* 100:276-286.
- Due**
- Abstract/topic outline of paper 3
- Group presentation meetings
- 3/2** Visionary tales
- Read**
- Brady, Margaret K.. 1987. "Transformations of Power: Mormon Women's Visionary Narratives." *Journal of American Folklore* 100: 461-468.
- Group presentation meetings
- 3/7** **Group presentations**
- 3/9** Tales of alienation
- Film**
- "Kidnapped by UFOs?" (*Nova*, WGBH, 1996).
- Conclusion and evaluations
- 3/14**
- Due**
- Paper 3 (electronically or in my mailbox in Denney 421 by 5:00)