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### ENG 3009G-001: Myth and Culture

Chris Wixson

*Eastern Illinois University*

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# English 3009G: Myth and Culture

fall 2022 / Section 001

Dr. Chris Wixson (*he/him/his*)

## syllabus

The world, as we read it, is made of fragments. Discontinuous points—discrete and dispersed. . . . And what we understand of it we understand by cobbling these pieces together—synthesizing them over time. It is the synthesis we know. (It is all we know.) —Peter Mendiusund

[The study of myth can provide us with] a clue to how we live, how we have been living, how we have been led to imagine ourselves, how our language has trapped as well as liberated us. —Adrienne Rich

## course philosophy

This course explores the ways in which myth and myth-making across cultures relate to issues of identity, desire, language, epistemology, and violence. Put another way, this course considers not only how we “map” ourselves as individuals but also what binds people together, what keeps them together, what flings them apart, and what keeps them apart. Myths will be approached as organizing narratives engaged in the production of social meaning and metaphysical understanding. They are the stories we tell ourselves about ourselves as we strive to make imaginative sense of the universe around us — stories that function as frames of reference within which we put together identities, systems of values, and a body of “knowledge.” We will begin our conversations with short readings about storytelling across a variety of contexts, including mini-units on the superhero and secular love mythology. These will set the stage for our readings of two larger “capstone” texts: August Wilson’s *The Piano Lesson* (1987) and Rivers Solomon’s *The Deep* (2019).

## Learning Goals

1. To provide opportunities for reading and appreciating complex and challenging texts for the insight they provide about the cultures that produced them as well as our own.
2. To allow each member of the class to engage with the significant issues and questions raised by the texts through writing and class discussion.
3. To assist in the development of skills of critical thinking, interpretive analysis, and argumentative writing.

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## course texts

*The Speckled Band*, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle; *The Storytelling Animal*, Jonathan Gottschall; *The Piano Lesson*, August Wilson; *The Deep*, Rivers Solomon; and Shorts from (among others): Barnes, Carson, Engle, Gottschall, Hammett, Kafka, Paumgarten, Pence, Phillips, Powers, Turkle, and Winterson

## contact information:

[cmwixson@eiu.edu](mailto:cmwixson@eiu.edu)

\*\*I check email very frequently so please don't hesitate to contact me with questions. However, I tend to go to sleep around 9:00 PM CST. As such, if you have a question that needs answering that night, get it to me by 8:30; otherwise, your answer will be in your mailbox around 6:30 AM CST the following morning.

## office hours

DFAC 1351

TR 8:00-10:30 AM, W 12-1 PM, and by appointment

**\*\*On campus, the above are my face-to-face office hours. Please let me know you are coming *in advance* so that way, if you wish, we can make any desired adjustments with regard to masking and social distancing.**

**\*\*If you would prefer to meet virtually via Zoom for whatever reason, just let me know, and we can make an appointment to do so at a mutually convenient time. Email too can be a good and safe way to get questions answered, feedback on your writing, and guidance during the process of assignments.**

## assignments

\*Short pieces of writing (2-3 pages) called "seed assignments" that sometimes respond to a prompt and sometimes produce self-generated topics but *always* should be grounded in *specific* passages from our reading.

\*A critical paper (5-7 pages) that is engaged, engaging, original, and articulate

\*Active, Engaged Participation during class discussion

\*A Midterm Essay and a Final Exam

**\*\*WARNING:** The intellectual pre-writing work for these assignments will be challenging and time-consuming. The prompts are available so that you may (and should) start early. In addition, because these are challenging, it is expected that you will be working closely with me during your writing process for each. **The goal for all of them is to demonstrate your understanding of the course readings and your adeptness at applying/synthesizing that knowledge in new ways.**

## final grades

Your final grade in the course will be determined by your performance on the following assignments:

Five Seed Assignments	25%
Critical Essay	20%
Midterm Essay	20%
Final Exam / Manifesto	25%
Class Participation (including in-class writings)	10%

(Written feedback on the major assignments will be sent via email. Late work may not receive feedback.)

## class participation

Participation in an inquiry-based, general education course means careful, full preparation of the reading, insightful contributions to class discussions, and meaningful, substantive in-class writing and thinking. Merely saying you are "frustrated" with the reading and thus have nothing to contribute is intellectually lazy and irresponsible. Consult the participation rubric on D2L for a sense of how I approach assessing the contributions you make. In-class writings, except in the case of excused absences (accompanied by appropriate medical, legal, or university documentation), cannot be made up.

These texts are demanding but rewarding; while there will be frustration with their complexity at times, this course understands that complexity as part of the challenge to which we aspire to rise during the semester. You may not *like* this class or all of the readings we discuss — which is fine. You won't like everything you have to do in life to move forward. College is a time to develop the skills to learn what is required in a professional, respectful manner and demonstrate to your professors that you grasp the course content.

## academic integrity

Any paper/posting with your name on it signifies that you are the author—that the wording and major ideas are yours, with exceptions indicated by either quotation marks and/or citations. Plagiarism is the unacknowledged use (appropriation and/or imitation) of others' materials (words and ideas). Evidence of plagiarism will result in one or more of the following: a failing grade for the assignment, an F in the course, and a report filed with the Student Standards Office.

## late assignments

These are no fun for me to keep track of and only put you further behind. For each day beyond the scheduled due date, the assignment will be penalized a third of a letter grade. **After a week, I will no longer accept the assignment, and it becomes a "0."** If you become ill or the victim of emergency circumstances, please email me as soon as possible and stay in touch.

## special needs and situations

If you have a *documented* disability and are in need of academic accommodations, please contact the Office of Disability Services ([studentdisability@eiu.edu](mailto:studentdisability@eiu.edu) or 581-6583) or visit McAfee 1210 as soon as possible in order to receive approval. Then please contact me as soon as possible in order to discuss arrangements.

## writing center

If you would like assistance with writing assignments in this course or any other, go to [www.eiu.edu/writing](http://www.eiu.edu/writing). To make an appointment. The Writing Center works with students from all majors and academic backgrounds and can help you with assignments at any stage of the writing process from brainstorming to final revisions.

## student success center

Students who are having difficulty achieving their academic goals are encouraged to contact the Student Success Center ([www.eiu.edu/~success](http://www.eiu.edu/~success)) for assistance with time management, test taking, note taking, avoiding procrastination, setting goals, and other skills to support academic achievement. The Student Success Center provides individualized consultations. To make an appointment, call 217-581-6696, or go to McAfee 1301.

## student well-being

Please note that, while reading and writing can be very personal acts, this class is not a therapeutic environment and should not be taken in place of therapy. EIU is committed to supporting and advancing the mental health and well-being of our students. Students may experience stressors that can impact both their academic experience and their personal mental health and well-being. These may include academic pressure and challenges associated with relationships, anxiety, depression, alcohol/drugs, identities, and finances. If you are experiencing concerns, seeking help is a courageous thing to do for yourself and those who care about you. Below is a list of available campus resources to assist with student well-being:

- EIU Counseling Clinic: Human Services Building, 1<sup>st</sup> floor; 217-581-3413; for after-hours urgent support, call 1-866-567-2400. The Counseling Clinic offers individual and group counseling, emergency services, and resources.
- Online Mental Health Screening: online, private screening tool for depression, anxiety, eating disorders, and alcohol and substance misuse.
- EIU Health Clinic: Human Services Building, 1<sup>st</sup> floor; 217-581-3013. The Health Clinic services include lab work, pharmacy, and women's health and men's health programs.
- Health Education Resource Center (HERC): 2201 Blair Hall; 217-581-7786. The HERC offers health programming in the areas of alcohol, tobacco and other drug prevention and education, flu and cold prevention and education, nutritional analysis and education, and sexual health education, in addition to other health-related topics.
- Center for Gender and Sexual Diversity (GSD): Stevenson Hall, lower level; 217-581-7117. The GSD Center provides services such as the Trans\*formation Station, a large library full of books and movies, year-round programming, and a comprehensive Safe Zone Training program.
- EIU Campus Food Pantry: 1347 McAfee. The EIU Campus Food Pantry is a means to support students and the campus community by alleviating barriers to consistent, adequate, and healthful food. Anyone with a Panther Card can visit the pantry two times per month.
- Student Legal Service: MLK Jr University Union Room 2420; 217-581-6054. Student Legal Service can assist with off-campus housing issues, traffic violations, misdemeanor criminal offenses, municipal ordinance violations, and expungement.
- Financial Aid and Scholarships: Student Services Building East Wing; 217-581-6405, Fax: 217-581-6422, [finaid@eiu.edu](mailto:finaid@eiu.edu). The Office of Financial Aid and Scholarships provides information and guidance to secure the necessary financial resources to meet educational goals and financial obligations to the university.

## tech support

If you need assistance with D2L, call D2L Support toll free at 1-877-325-7778. Support is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Email and Chat options are also available on the "My Home" page after logging in to D2L. Other D2L resources including a D2L Orientation course for students are available on the same page. For technical questions regarding other software, hardware, network issues, EIU NetID/password, or Panthermail, contact the ITS Helpdesk at 217-581-4357 during regular business hours or submit a help ticket at <https://techsupport.eiu.edu/>. If you have a question regarding course content, contact me.

# Eng 3009: Myth and Culture

Dr. Chris Wixson

## course calendar

\*\*Because this schedule can and probably will change, it is imperative that you note any revisions at each class session. Please get into the habit of regularly checking email and the course's D2L website.

### Week One – Stories we tell ourselves about ourselves

Mythologies are stories we use to make the world and our lives intelligible and meaningful. Our identities are stories we tell ourselves and each other, often most explicitly via social media.

\*Tuesday, August 23:

**Read:** "Four Course Caveats" / Syllabus, Schedule, and Participation Rubric (D2L)  
Armstrong's "What is a Myth?" (D2L)  
In-Class Screening and Discussion

\*Thursday, August 25:

**Read:** Turkle's "The Documented Life" (D2L)  
In-Class Screenings and Discussion

### Week Two – Mythologizing Identity and Existence

\*Tuesday, August 30:

**Read:** Gottschall's *The Storytelling Animal* (pages 21-32) (D2L)  
Excerpts from Charlotte Pence's *The Branches, the Axe, the Missing* (D2L)  
**\*\*\*IGNORE PAGES 14 AND 26 IN PENCE'S PIECE\*\*\***

\*Thursday, September 1:

**Read:** Paumgarten's *The Pull* (D2L)  
Kafka's "The Top" (D2L)

### Week Three – Superhero Mythologies

\*Tuesday, September 6:

**Read:** Gary Engle's "What Makes Superman so Darned American?" (D2L)  
In-class Screening and Discussion

\*Thursday, September 8:

**Read:** Doyle's "The Speckled Band" (D2L)

**\*\*In-class SEED Assignment #1 due by 1:45 PM\*\***

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## Week Four – Mythologies and Culture 1

\*Tuesday, September 13:

**Read:** Sophocles' *Oedipus the King* (D2L)

\*Thursday, September 15:

**Read:** Dashiell Hammett's *The Maltese Falcon* – **READ ONLY pages 33-34** (D2L)

(Sam Spade's story about Flitcraft)

In-class Screening and Discussion

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## Week Five – Mythologies and Culture 2

**\*\*SEED Assignment #2 due to D2L dropbox Monday 9/19 by 11:59 PM\*\***

\*Tuesday, September 20:

**Read:** Russell's *St. Lucy's Home for Girls Raised by Wolves* (D2L)

\*Thursday, September 22:

**Read:** Parks' "3 Constants" (D2L)

Powers' "Letter Composed During a Lull in the Fighting" (D2L)

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## Week Six – The Mythologies of Romantic Love

\*Tuesday, September 27:

**Read:** Seed #3 Prompt (D2L)

Jeanette Winterson / Julian Barnes excerpts (D2L)

• Souls never touch their objects: An innavigable sea washes with silent waves between us and the things we aim at and converse with. –*Ralph Waldo Emerson*

When there is no desire, all things are at peace. *The Tao* 37

\*Thursday, September 29:

**Read:** Anne Carson's "Finding the Edge" (D2L)

**\*\*Seed Assignment #3 due to D2L dropbox Friday, 9/30 by 11:59 PM**

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## Week Seven – Mythologies in Creative Practice / Midterm Essay Brainstorming

\*Tuesday, October 4:

**Read:** Arthur Phillips' *The Song is You* (2009) pp. 3-11 (D2L)

\*Thursday, October 6: In-class Screenings and Workshop

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## Week Eight – Midterm Essay Planning and Writing

\*Tuesday, October 11 and Thursday, October 13:

**Read:** Midterm Assignment Sheet / Writing Guidelines (D2L)  
In-class Midterm Workshops

**\*\*Midterm DUE to D2L dropbox Friday, October 14 by 11:59 PM**

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## Week Nine – *The Deep*

\*Tuesday, October 18:

**Read:** Solomon's *The Deep* (2019) / Chapters 1-3

\*Thursday, October 20:

**Read:** Solomon's *The Deep* / Chapter 4

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## Week Ten – *The Deep* / Critical Essay Topic Workshop

\*Tuesday, October 25:

**Read:** Solomon's *The Deep* / Chapters 5-7

\*Thursday, October 27:

**Read:** Critical Paper Assignment Sheet / Course Writing Guidelines (D2L)  
In-class Screening and Critical Essay Topic Workshop

**\*\*Critical Paper Topic DUE to D2L dropbox Friday, October 28 by 11:59 PM**

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## Week Eleven – *The Deep*

\*Tuesday, November 1:

**Read:** Solomon's *The Deep* Chapters 8 and 9  
Seed Assignment #4 Prompt (D2L)

\*Thursday, November 3:

**Read:** "Afterword" (pp. 157-163)  
In class: Drexciya's Music / clipping's "The Deep" / Solomon's *The Deep*

**\*\*Submit SEED Assignment #4 Friday 11/4 by 11:59 PM.**

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## Week Twelve – Critical Paper Reading Week

\*Tuesday, November 8: **NO CLASS DUE TO GENERAL ELECTION DAY HOLIDAY**

\*Thursday, November 10:

**Read:** Critical Paper Assignment Sheet. / Course Writing Guidelines (D2L)  
In-class Critical Paper Workshops

**\*\*Finish Research for Critical Paper / Assess Sources and Develop Writing Plan**

### Week Thirteen – Critical Paper Writing Week

\*Tuesday, November 15 and Thursday, November 17:

**Read:** Final Exam Essay/Manifesto Assignment Sheet (D2L)

**Review:** Critical Paper Assignment Sheet. / Course Writing Guidelines (D2L)  
In-class Critical Paper and Final Exam Workshops

**\*\*Critical Paper Due to D2L dropbox Friday 11/18 by 11:59 PM**

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HAPPY THANKSGIVING BREAK!!!!

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### Week Fourteen – Wilson's *The Piano Lesson*

\*Tuesday, November 29 and Thursday, December 1:

**Read:** August Wilson's *The Piano Lesson* (1987) / Seed #5 Prompt (D2L)

**In-Class Screening of *The Piano Lesson* (1995)**

**\*\*Submit Seed Assignment #5 to D2L dropbox Friday 12/2 by 11:59 PM**

### Week Fifteen – Final Exam Planning and Writing Week

\*Tuesday, December 6:

**Read:** Final Exam/Manifesto Assignment Sheet (D2L)

In-class Screening and Final Exam Workshop

\*Thursday, December 8: TBA

**\*\*Final Exam and Manifesto Due to the D2L Dropbox by Wednesday, December 14<sup>th</sup> at 11:59 PM\*\***



