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### ENG 3099G-600: Myth and Culture Honors

Christopher Wixson

*Eastern Illinois University*

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# English 3099G: Myth and Culture

spring 2021 / Section 600

Dr. Chris Wixson

## 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 Mendulsund

[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 a mini-unit on the detective story, a kind of secular mythology that professes the presence of a superior order behind the chaos of appearances. These will set the stage for our reading of Mohsin Hamid’s *Exit West* (2017).

## 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; *Oedipus the King*, Sophocles; *The Piano Lesson*, August Wilson; *Exit West*, Mohsin Hamid; and Shorts from (among others): Barnes, Carson, Engle, Flipovic, Gottschall, Hammett, Kafka, Paumgarten, Pence, Phillips, Powers, Turtle, and Winterson

## contact information

Dr. Chris Wixson

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

**\*\*If you are on campus, the above are my face-to-face office hours. Please let me know you are coming *in advance*; in accordance with IBHE and public health directives, *masking is REQUIRED*, and the office space will be *properly socially-distanced*.**

**\*\*If you are not on campus or would prefer to meet virtually via Zoom for whatever reason, let me know, and we can make arrangements to do so, including finding 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.**

## an online course in practice

As we discovered last spring, the online experience is a change from traditional face-to-face learning but especially enhances creativity, self-direction, and articulate expression in writing, all **essential skills** in the professional world. This course may well involve slightly less reading than you expect but certainly more writing than you may be used to. The time and labor investment is the same, but their expressions will “look” different and feel more independent, as will our course schedule.

Each week of the term will have two sets of readings/viewings that are the equivalent of two “class sessions” along with prompts for varied remote course activities in response to those readings/viewings that must be completed and submitted via D2L. All course materials (except for the TRS textbooks) will be located on D2L/accessed on the internet. We may seek opportunities *if possible* for synchronous interaction, though **never** if it will disadvantage students who do not have reliable devices/access to strong Wifi signals or who have difficult schedules related to jobs or child/elder care. As we all navigate the challenging contours of the new normal, let’s work together to make the course a meaningful experience.

## assignments

\*Short pieces of writing (2-3 pages) called “seed papers” 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 via quizzes and discussion posts

\*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 Papers	20%
Critical Essay	20%
Midterm Essay	20%
Final Exam / Manifesto	20%
Six D2L Quizzes / Five Discussion Posts and Responses	20%

(Written feedback on the essay assignments will be sent via email.)

## class participation

Participation in an inquiry-based, general education course means careful, full preparation of the reading, insightful contributions to discussion threads, and risk-taking in writing and thinking. 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.

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.”** Quizzes and discussion postings are time-specific so cannot be made up. If you become ill or the victim of emergency circumstances, please email me as soon as possible and stay in touch.

## 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 9<sup>th</sup> Street Hall, Room 1302.

## special needs and situations

If you have a *documented* disability and are in need of academic accommodations, please contact me as soon as possible in order to discuss arrangements.

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## 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.

## 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.

# Eng 3099G: Myth and Culture

Dr. Chris Wixson

## course calendar

\*\* Because this schedule can and probably will change, it is imperative that you access it frequently on D2L so as to note any revisions. Please get into the habit of regularly checking email and D2L.

\*\* There will be *no* coursework due on any of the five “wellness” days the University has scheduled throughout the semester. This online course will also observe a *full week free of new assignments and due dates* in March.

\*\* Quizzes have a due date but are **NOT TIMED**; access their prompts *before* you do the reading. Prompts for discussion list posts and seed papers can all be found on D2L.

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### Week One (January 11) Stories we tell ourselves about ourselves

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

\*Directions for Tuesday session:

**Read:** “Four Course Caveats” / Syllabus, Schedule, and Participation Rubric (D2L)  
**Screen the following three short videos:**

*How the Grinch Stole Christmas* (1966) –  
<https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x3iht2g>

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s “The Danger of a Single Story” (TED Talk) –

[https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda\\_ngozi\\_adichie\\_the\\_danger\\_of\\_a\\_single\\_story?language=en](https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_ngozi_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story?language=en)

Lori Gottlieb’s “How Changing Your Story Can Change Your Life” (TED Talk) –

[https://www.ted.com/talks/lori\\_gottlieb\\_how\\_changing\\_your\\_story\\_can\\_change\\_your\\_life#t-136190](https://www.ted.com/talks/lori_gottlieb_how_changing_your_story_can_change_your_life#t-136190)

**Submit D2L Discussion Post #1 by Tuesday 1/12 11:59 PM:**

\*Directions for Thursday session:

**Read:** Jill Filipovic’s “If you’re hitting a wall...” (2020) (D2L)

**Screen:** Phil Hansen’s “Embrace the Shake” (TED Talk) –

[https://www.ted.com/talks/phil\\_hansen\\_embrace\\_the\\_shake?language=en](https://www.ted.com/talks/phil_hansen_embrace_the_shake?language=en)

**Submit D2L Discussion Post #2 by Thursday, 1/14 11:59 PM**

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## Week Two (January 18) The Storytelling Animal

\*Directions for Tuesday session:

**Read:** Excerpts from Charlotte Pence's *The Branches, the Axe, the Missing* (D2L)

**\*\*\*\*IGNORE PAGES 14 AND 26 IN PENCE'S PIECE\*\*\*\***

Gottschall's *The Storytelling Animal* (pages 21-32)

**Submit D2L Quiz #1 by Tuesday 1/19 at 11:59 PM**

\*Directions for Thursday session:

**Read:** Turkle's "The Documented Life" (D2L)

Armstrong's "What is a Myth?" (D2L)

**Submit D2L Quiz #2 by Thursday 1/21 at 11:59 PM**

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## Week Three (January 25) Accessing the Past

\*Directions for Tuesday session:

**Read:** Nick Paumgarten's *The Pull* (2010) (D2L)

Quotes from Martin Longman and Giacomo Lichtner (D2L)

**Submit D2L Quiz #3 by Tuesday 1/26 at 11:59 PM**

\*Directions for Thursday session

**Browse** the Wired.com *Covid Spring* web page at <https://www.wired.com/tag/covid-spring/> for examples of oral histories of the pandemic already being compiled.

**Read:** Garrett Graff's short article about the project (D2L)

**Submit Seed Paper #1 to D2L dropbox by Friday, 1/29 11:59 PM**

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## Week Four (February 1) Myth and Culture

\*Directions for Wednesday session:

**Read:** Sophocles' *Oedipus the King* (429 B.C.)

**Submit D2L Quiz #4 by Wednesday, 2/3 11:59 PM**

\*Directions for Thursday session:

**Read:** Gary Engle's "What Makes Superman so Darned American?" (D2L)

**Screen:** Christopher Bell's "Bring on the Female Superheroes!" (TED talk)

[https://www.ted.com/talks/christopher\\_bell\\_bring\\_on\\_the\\_female\\_superheroes?language=en](https://www.ted.com/talks/christopher_bell_bring_on_the_female_superheroes?language=en)

**Submit D2L Discussion Post #3 by Friday 2/5 at 11:59 PM**

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## Week Five (February 8) Detecting Trouble

**First, read** "The Speckled Band" (pages 152-173) in the book of Sherlock Holmes stories that came with your TRS textbooks.

Second, read, in the same book, the first part of John A. Hodgson's essay "The Recoil of *The Speckled Band*" (pages 335- last full paragraph on 338).

Submit Seed Paper #2 to D2L dropbox Thursday 2/11 by 11:59 PM

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### Week Six (February 15) Mythmaking America

\*Directions for Tuesday session:

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

**Screen:** Anand Giridharadas' TED talk "A Tale of Two Americas":

[https://www.ted.com/talks/anand\\_giridharadas\\_a\\_tale\\_of\\_two\\_americas\\_and\\_the\\_mini\\_mart\\_where\\_they\\_collided?language=en](https://www.ted.com/talks/anand_giridharadas_a_tale_of_two_americas_and_the_mini_mart_where_they_collided?language=en)

Submit D2L Quiz #5 by Tuesday, 2/16 11:59 PM

\*Directions for Thursday session:

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

Submit D2L Quiz #6 by Thursday, 2/18 11:59 PM

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### Week Seven (February 22) The Mythologies of Romantic Love

Directions for Tuesday session:

**Read:** Kevin Powers, "Letter Composed During a Lull in the Fighting" (2014) (D2L)  
Lecture Notes on Powers and Romantic Mythology (D2L)  
Jeanette Winterson / Julian Barnes excerpts (D2L)  
Anne Carson's *Finding the Edge* (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*

Submit Seed Paper #3 to D2L by Friday, 2/26 11:59 PM

Directions for Thursday session:

**Read:** Arthur Phillips' *The Song is You* (2009) pp. 3-11  
Midterm Essay Assignment Sheet

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### Week Eight (March 1)

Midterm Essay DUE to D2L Friday, March 5 by 11:59 PM

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## Week Nine (March 8)

**Read:** Critical Paper Assignment Sheet / Course Writing Guidelines (D2L)  
Choose Topic and Begin Research

Critical Paper Topic DUE to D2L Friday, March 12 by 11:59 PM

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## WEEK OF MARCH 15 — “WELLNESS” WEEK / NO NEW ASSIGNMENTS OR DUE DATES

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## Week Ten (March 22) Mapping the Mythological Self

**Read:** Hamid's *Exit West* (2017) / Chapters #1-4  
Gottschall's *The Storytelling Animal* pages 117-125  
“Exit West” Guide (D2L)  
**Submit D2L Discussion Post #4 by Friday 3/26 at 11:59 PM.**

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## Week Eleven (March 29)

**Read:** Hamid's *Exit West* (2017) / Chapters #5-8  
“Exit West” Guide (D2L)  
**Submit Seed Paper #4 to D2L by Friday 4/2 11:59 PM**

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## Week Twelve (April 5)

**Read:** Hamid's *Exit West* (2017) / Chapters #9-12  
“Exit West” Guide (D2L)  
**Submit D2L Discussion Post #5 by Friday 4/9 at 11:59 PM.**  
**Finish: Research for Critical Paper / Assess Sources and Develop Writing Plan**

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## Week Thirteen (April 12)

**Read:** Critical Paper Assignment Sheet. / Course Writing Guidelines (D2L)  
Final Exam Essay/Manifesto Assignment Sheet (D2L)

Critical Paper DUE Friday, 4/16 by 11:59 PM

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## Week Fourteen (April 19)

**Read:** August Wilson's *The Piano Lesson*  
**Screen:** *The Piano Lesson* (1995)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RgXmTMFzp3E>

**Submit Seed Paper #5 to D2L by Friday, 4/23 at 11:59 PM**

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## Week Fifteen (April 26) – Final Exam and Manifesto Planning and Writing Week

**\*\*Final Exam and Manifesto Due to the D2L Dropbox by Wednesday, May 5<sup>th</sup> at 11:59 PM\*\***