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## ENG 3009-002: Myth and Culture

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 English 3009 · Myth and Culture · Professor Michael Leddy · Spring 2007
 

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We often use the word myth quite casually, to dismiss a story or assertion as false (“That’s just a myth”). The work of this course will offer ways to think about myth as just the opposite—as a matter of powerful (though not objective) truth, a significant narrative that shapes a culture’s sense of life in the deepest, most fundamental ways. Principal questions: How do myths shape human cultures? How might a story shape a culture’s understanding of the world? What meanings did/do the particular texts we’re reading have for their cultures? What meanings might they have for us? Our reading will focus on primal stories. We’ll read the story of Gilgamesh (from ancient Mesopotamia, a combination of adventure story and spiritual quest), selections from the biblical Book of Genesis, and Homer’s

*Iliad* and *Odyssey* (from ancient Greece, epic poems of war and returning from war).

**TEXTS** Texts for the course are available from Textbook Rental: *Gilgamesh* (trans. N.K. Sandars), the King James Version of the Bible, Homer’s *Iliad* and *Odyssey* (trans. Stanley Lombardo), and Jonathan Shay’s *Achilles in Vietnam* and *Odysseus in America*.

A hardcover collegiate dictionary is a necessary reference for the course.

The works we’re reading contain material that some readers may find offensive or disturbing (language, sex, violence). In such cases, please consider taking another course.

**REQUIREMENTS** The course will require dedicated reading, quizzes (meant to be easy if you do the reading), several pieces of writing, and a final examination.

**ATTENDANCE** In the words of the poet and teacher Ted Berrigan, you should attend class as often as I do. You’re responsible for all assignments, whether or not you’re here when they’re announced. If

you must miss a class, you should get in touch with me beforehand to find out what you will miss.

**LATE, MAKE-UP WORK** Missed quizzes and writing cannot be made up. Late writing is okay only if you have my okay in advance. If you have a properly verified absence for illness, emergency, or participation in an official University activity, I’ll record a blank for a missed quiz, not a zero.

**DISABILITIES** If you have a documented disability and wish to receive academic accommodations, contact the coordinator of the Office of Disability Services (581–6583) as soon as possible.

**OFFICE HOURS** Talking to professors is one of the smartest things a college student can do. Feel free to come in to talk—about a question that you didn’t get to ask in class, an idea that you want to discuss, a writing problem, an assignment, a grade, etc. You don’t need to apologize for taking up someone’s time; office hours are part of a college professor’s work.

If you feel uneasy about talking to your

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professors during office hours, read “How to talk to a professor” (available from [leddysclass.blogspot.com](http://leddysclass.blogspot.com)).

E-MAIL Before you e-mail me, please read “How to e-mail a professor” (available from [leddysclass.blogspot.com](http://leddysclass.blogspot.com)).

Like many profs, I will read and respond to your e-mail only if it’s from a university address. If you don’t write from your [eiu.edu](http://eiu.edu) account, your e-mail will likely be marked as spam and deleted (not by me, by a spam-catching program).

DECORUM The atmosphere in our class should be serious—not somber or pretentious, but genuinely intellectual. No eating, talking, sleeping, wearing headphones, doing work for other classes, or other private business. Cell phones should be turned off and kept out of sight in our classroom.

DISCUSSION I like to ask questions that make people think. I also like it when people ask me such questions. So I think of discussion as a matter of asking questions to get at the substance of what we’re reading. Consider what the writer Thomas Merton says about a teacher he admired:

Most of the time he asked questions. His questions were very good, and if

you tried to answer them intelligently, you found yourself saying excellent things that you did not know you knew, and that you had not, in fact, known before. He had “educated” them from you by his question. His classes were literally “education”—they brought things out of you, they made your mind produce its own explicit ideas.

When I was a student I always felt patronized when someone replied to my contributions by saying something like “Very good” or “That’s interesting,” so when we talk, I try not to give those rote non-responses. If you say something and I then ask you a question, I’m doing so in the spirit of dialogue. You should be asking questions too, of me and of one another.

If you have qualms about talking in class, please talk to me during office hours.

GRADING Your grade will be based on your written work (40%), quizzes (40%), and a final exam (20%).

Writing assignments receive letter grades. Missing writing receives a zero. Quizzes receive numerical grades. A quiz average of, say, 103% counts as 103 and not as an A (95); a quiz average of, say, 40% counts as

40 and not as an F (55). You may check on quizzes at any time.

To calculate semester grades, I use numerical equivalents for letter grades:

|      |       |       |      |       |       |
|------|-------|-------|------|-------|-------|
| A 95 | A- 92 | B+ 87 | B 85 | B- 82 | C+ 77 |
| C 75 | C- 72 | D+ 67 | D 65 | D- 62 | F 55  |

Sometimes when I grade an essay I’ll compromise—e.g., B+/A-, which falls between the two grades (89.5).

For semester grades, 90 or above is an A; 80 or above, a B; 70 or above, a C; 60 or above, a D; below 60, an F.

EWP English 3009 is considered a “writing-intensive” course, so you may include work from the course in your Electronic Writing Portfolio. Please make sure that you understand the EWP requirements and fulfill them in a timely way. You can find more information about the EWP at [www.eiu.edu/~assess/](http://www.eiu.edu/~assess/).

PLAGIARISM The English Department’s statement on plagiarism says that “Any teacher who discovers an act of plagiarism—‘The appropriation or imitation of the language, ideas, and/or thoughts of another author, and the representation of them as one’s original work’ (*Random House Dictionary of the*

*English Language*)—has the right and responsibility to impose upon the guilty student an appropriate penalty, up to and including immediate assignment of a grade of F for the course.”

**ACADEMIC INTEGRITY** Any breach of academic integrity—from cheating on a quiz to submitting a wholly unoriginal essay—is a serious matter and will get you a serious penalty. The Judicial Affairs office recommends an F for the course. You will also be required to take a course in ethics administered by Judicial Affairs, whose staff will keep your misconduct on record and notify your other profs that one of their students has violated academic integrity.

You should be familiar with Eastern’s statement on academic integrity (posted in classrooms) and should ask if you have any questions about quoting from and/or documenting sources. Because the work of the course is to be an expression of your own ideas in your own words (aside from words and ideas derived from the works we’re reading), questions of plagiarism and collusion should never arise. Do not “borrow” work or give your work to anyone (allowing someone else to make use of your work is also a breach of academic integrity and will also get you a serious penalty, up to and including an F

for the course).

#### PROVISIONAL OUTLINE

(AV = *Achilles in Vietnam*, OA = *Odysseus in America*)

- 1.10 How to do well
- 1.12 Myth, culture
- 1.15 M.L. King: no class
- 1.17 *Gilgamesh*
- 1.19 *Gilgamesh*
- 1.22 *Gilgamesh*
- 1.24 In-class writing
- 1.26 Genesis
- 1.29 Genesis
- 1.31 Genesis
- 2.02 Genesis (writing due)
- 2.05 *Iliad* 1, AV 3–21
- 2.07 *Iliad* 2–3
- 2.09 *Iliad* 4–5
- 2.12 *Iliad* 6 (in-class writing)
- 2.14 *Iliad* 7–8
- 2.16 A. Lincoln: no class
- 2.19 *Iliad* 9–10, AV 23–38
- 2.21 *Iliad* 11–12
- 2.23 *Iliad* 13–14

- 2.26 *Iliad* 15–16, AV 39–68
- 2.28 *Iliad* 17–18, AV 69–75
- 3.02 *Iliad* 19–20
- 3.05 *Iliad* 21–22, AV 77–99
- 3.07 *Iliad* 23–34
- 3.09 Writing due
- 3.19 *Odyssey* 1–2
- 3.21 *Odyssey* 3–4
- 3.23 *Odyssey* 5–6
- 3.26 *Odyssey* 7–8, OA 11–18
- 3.28 *Odyssey* 9–10
- 3.30 *Odyssey* 11–12.
- 4.02 OA 19–75
- 4.04 OA 76–119 (writing due)
- 4.06 *Odyssey* 13–14
- 4.09 *Odyssey* 15–16
- 4.11 *Odyssey* 17–18
- 4.13 *Odyssey* 19–20
- 4.16 *Odyssey* 21–22
- 4.18 *Odyssey* 23–34
- 4.20 OA 120–146 (writing due)
- 4.23 Last things
- 4.25 Last things
- 4.27 Last class