ENG 3009G-006-007: Myth and Culture

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We'll read works that seek answers to abiding human questions: Who am I? Why am I here? Where am I going? Our work will range from the distant past (which is not so distant at all, when you think about it) to the near present, and will include Gilgamesh (the oldest story we have), the Bhagavad-Gita (an ancient Hindu text on duty and self-discipline), The Life of Milarepa (a Tibetan Buddhist story of wrongdoing and redemption), The Life of Elizabeth Ashbridge (a Quaker autobiography), Leslie Silko's Ceremony (a novel of war and recovery), and Ralph Ellison's Invisible Man (a novel of American identity). We'll also watch Louis Malle's film My Dinner with Andre.

TEXTS Texts for the course are available from Textbook Rental, except for The Life of Elizabeth Ashbridge, which will be available as a .pdf.

Michael Harvey's The Nuts and Bolts of College Writing (also available from Textbook Rental) supplements the work of the course.

OFFICE HOURS Talking to professors is one of the smartest things a college student can do. Please, come in to ask questions and talk about your work in the class.

If you feel uneasy about talking to your professors during office hours, read “How to talk to a professor” (http://leddysclass.blogspot.com).

E-MAIL Like many professors, I read and respond to student e-mail only if it's from a university address.

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

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.

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 “educed” 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 (The Seven Storey Mountain).

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 as soon as possible.

GRADING Your grade will be based on your written work (40%), quizzes (30%), a final exam (20%), and participation (10%).

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). Participation in the course receives one of five grades: 100 (consistent, relevant, informed), 85 (frequent, relevant, informed), 75 (less frequent or less informed), 50 (occasional), 0 (little or no participation). “Informed” participation is simply participation that comes from having done the reading. You may check on quizzes and participation 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 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 “getting ideas” from Spark Notes 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 complete a course in ethics administered by Judicial Affairs, whose staff will keep your misconduct on record and notify your other professors 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. But 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 (numbers = weeks)

1: Introduction to the course
2–3: Gilgamesh
4–5: Bhagavad-Gita
6–7: The Life of Milarepa
7–8: The Life of Elizabeth Ashbridge
9–11: Ceremony
12–14: Invisible Man
15: My Dinner with André