**SYLLABUS**

**ANTH 163: ORIGINS OF STORYTELLING**

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“We must assume that storytelling is as old as mankind, at least as old as spoken language.”  
(Oates 1992:8)

“But if it’s a story, even in my head, I must be telling it to someone. You don’t tell a story only to yourself.” (Atwood 1985:52)

**Course Content:** Why do humans tell stories? We will address this question by exploring the hunter-gatherer context in which storytelling emerged. To a greater degree than other species, humans depend for their survival on social learning—i.e., information acquired from others. Accordingly, this course looks at storytelling as an early information technology. Drawing on evolutionary theory and related disciplines, we will explore the origins of storytelling in terms of the information demands of ancestral human environments. The first part of the course outlines the social and ecological conditions under which storytelling emerged, and the cognitive capacities that make social learning and storytelling possible. The second part examines cross-cultural themes in hunter-gatherer oral traditions—e.g., tricksters, monsters, warfare, mating—in relation to recurrent problems of hunter-gatherer life and the kinds of information required to solve them. Course readings include scientific articles and hunter-gatherer folktales.

**Format:** The course will consist of lectures and discussion

**Course Outcomes:** By the end of the term, students should be able to

1) understand and apply the scientific method as a critical thinking tool
2) describe the processes of natural selection and adaptation
3) describe key cognitive adaptations that make storytelling possible
4) describe the key components of narrative and what they tell us about its function
5) outline the evidence that enables us to date the emergence of storytelling
6) describe basic features of the socio-economic context in which storytelling emerged
7) outline key adaptive problems faced by our hunter-gatherer ancestors and the information sets needed to address these problems
8) explain the role that storytelling plays in transmitting these information sets
9) analyze stories from forager oral tradition in terms of these information sets
Course Canvas Site: You are responsible for checking the course Canvas site regularly for updates and other information. The syllabus, course readings, lectures, and announcements will be posted there.

Academic Honesty: Academic misconduct is a violation of the UO Student Conduct Code, which prohibits the “act of cheating, fabrication, and plagiarism. Examples: looking at another person’s exam, making up lab results, and failing to cite sources in a paper.” All work submitted for this course must be your own and produced exclusively for this class. Any student who engages in academic dishonesty risks failing the class.

Students With Disabilities: Appropriate accommodations will be provided for students with documented disabilities. If you anticipate needing accommodations in this course, please make arrangements with me asap. Please send a notification letter from Disability Services outlining your accommodations.

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COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Required Texts: Dylan Evans & Oscar Zarate, Introducing Evolutionary Psychology: A Graphic Guide. Any edition is fine, new or used is fine. Latest edition is available at the UO Bookstore. All other readings are posted on Canvas (see Schedule of Readings, below).

Readings: To access the readings, go to the home page on the course Canvas site. Readings are organized by week (see Schedule of Readings, below). The readings are scientific articles and stories from forager oral tradition. Most of the articles you read will be primary scientific research presented by those who conduct it, as opposed to a broad overview that might be found in a textbook. Because lectures are designed to explicate and review key points of the assigned texts, you are expected to do the reading before you come to class.

Discussion Sections: Since this is a science-credit course, the discussion sections are organized as labs, in which the objects you examine are texts. Each week you will be presented with several story passages, which you will analyze in terms of the foraging knowledge they contain (each week we will cover a different type of foraging knowledge). You must bring paper and a writing implement to discussion section with you.

Grading: Your course grade will be based on the total points you earn on the labs, midterm, and final exam. Labs are designed to review and apply important course concepts, and prepare you
for exams. Exams are multiple-choice and will cover lectures, readings, and films. The midterm will cover weeks 1 through 5; the final will be cumulative but will primarily focus on material from weeks 6 through 10. You will need a #2 pencil for each exam. Exams and assignments must be taken/turned in at the scheduled time—under no circumstances will make-up exams or assignment extensions be given without a documented excuse (e.g., signed note from your doctor). If you will not be able to take an exam or turn in an assignment at the scheduled time, you must notify me or your GTF in advance.

**Grading Rubric:** Grading is done on a straight percentage scale.

A+ = 100%  
A  = 93-99.9%  
A- = 90-92.9%

B+ = 87-89.9%  
B  = 83-86.9%  
B- = 80-82.9%

C+ = 77-79.9%  
C  = 73-76.9%  
C- = 70-72.9%

D+ = 67-69.9%  
D  = 63-66.9%  
D- = 60-62.9%

F  = < 59.9%

**Expected levels of performance:**

A+: Quality of student's performance significantly exceeds all requirements and expectations required for an A grade. Very few, if any, students receive this grade in a given course.

A: Quality of performance is outstanding relative to that required to meet course requirements; demonstrates mastery of course content at the highest level.

B: Quality of performance is significantly above that required to meet course requirements; demonstrates mastery of course content at a high level.

C: Quality of performance meets the course requirements in every respect; demonstrates adequate understanding of course content.

D: Quality of performance is at the minimal level necessary to pass the course, but does not fully meet the course requirements; demonstrates a marginal understanding of course content.

F: Quality of performance in the course is unacceptable and does not meet the course requirements; demonstrates an inadequate understanding of course content.

**SCHEDULE OF READINGS**

**Week 1: Origins**

TUE  Scalise Sugiyama (2005) “Reverse-engineering narrative” (optional)

THR  Evans & Zarate (pp. 3-60)

Boyd et al. (2011) “The cultural niche”
**Week 2: Cultural Transmission**

TUE  Boulton & Smith (1992) “The social nature of play fighting and play chasing: mechanisms and strategies underlying cooperation and compromise”


Film: *The Human Spark, Episode 2*

**Week 3: Cognitive Foundations of Storytelling**

TUE  Evans & Zarate (pp. 87-95)

Onishi et al. (2007) “15-month-old infants detect violations in pretend scenarios”

“Tugtoväk the moose, who duped the kayak man”

THR  Evans & Zarate (pp. 96-104)

Schacter et al. (2007) “Remembering the past to imagine the future: the prospective brain”

Film: *The Human Spark, Episode 3*

**Week 4: Cooperation & Conflict Management**

TUE  Evans & Zarate (pp. 61-77, 143-150)

Boehm (1993) “Egalitarian behavior and reverse dominance hierarchy” (p. 227 to top of p. 236 only!)

“Why Kwanyip never lacked guanacos”

“A tale about stingy reindeer-owners”

“Siligtigkê who murdered the women of the village”


“Coyote and the seven buffalo”

“Coyote marries the chief’s daughter”

“Coyote kills Deer with his ceremony”

“Coyote and the expanding meat”

“Coyote loses the power to obtain food”

“Sendeh overeats and clings to a grape vine”
**Week 5: Mating**

TUE  Evans & Zarate (pp. 105-132)

“Puan takes a lover”

“The rival husbands”

“Two women”

“A Wasco woman deceives her husband”

“The Grizzly Bears and the Black Bears”

THR  Evans & Zarate 2005 (pp. 81-86)


“Coyote marries the chief’s daughter”

“How a poor boy won his wives”

“The dog and the girl” (pp. 62-63)

**Week 6: Warfare**

TUE  MIDTERM

In-class, closed book; bring #2 pencil


Biocca (1970) “The Karawetari attack” (pp. 31-37)

“A Cree, caught alone, is killed by the Beaver”

“Wonyoni escapes from the Cree”

“Those people”

“Mavaranaq”

“Clever Kaskoyuk”

“The origin of the Kiowa Apache”

“Kunuk the orphan boy” (pp. 132-135 only)

**Week 7: Heroes & Hunters**

TUE  Jobling 2001 “The psychological foundations of the hero-ogre story”
“The birth of Killer-of-Enemies and Child-of-the-Water” (pp. 47-77)
“Ôeôemë, the child warrior”
“The Tale of La-la”
“Clever Kaskoyuk”
“How Bear Woman got her name”
“The old woman and the polar bear”

THR Barrett (2005) “Adaptations to predators and prey”
Evans & Zarate (review pp. 50-56)
Hill & Hurtado 1995
“A stubborn fisherman”
“Armadillo and Jaguar exchange teeth”
“Leopard-hunting: the fatal adventure of !Kwai-kwa and his companion”
“How Bear Woman got her name”
“The crocodile they couldn’t kill”
“Adventures with buffalo”
“Wild Man” (#48)

**Week 8: Subsistence**

TUE Blurton-Jones & Konner (1976) “!Kung knowledge of animal behavior”
“Hunting experiences” (first story only)
“Enemy sorcerers turn into coatis”
“Pine Squirrel criticizes Deer”
“Tapir tries to hide”
“Day and night”

THR Evans & Zarate (review pp. 57-60)
“Caterpillar’s tobacco and the kernals of wild fruit”
“Red Brocket and the false palm fruits”
“The war of the fishes with the Okanagon”
“Fish Hawk invents implements” (pp. 72-74)

“Theft of fire”

**Week 9: Subsistence Stress**


“An entire band is killed by the Cree”

“Starving Beaver visit the Rocky Mountains”

“The bitter fruit: the lala myth”

“The famine” (pp. 500-501)

“A woman hides bear meat from her starving husband”

“Story of Big-Horned Owl”

“A famine at the Cascades”

THR Holiday

**Week 10: Wayfinding & Environmental Hazards**


“Qoa’qlqal”

Tennant & Bitar 1981 “Training for survival”


Dubois 1932 “Tidal Wave”

“Oral history saves island from tsunami”

“Crater Lake 1865”

“The big fire”

THR Evans & Zarate (pp. 77-80)

Tooley et al. (2006) “Generalising the Cinderella Effect to unintentional childhood fatalities”

“Some neglected children are transformed into birds”

“Two boys stranded on the ice”
“Wild Woman” (#45)

“The little girl who was kidnapped”

“Two children escape from an At!at’a’lia” (pp. 274-276)

**Week 11: Final Exam**

8:00-10:00 a.m. Monday, December 9th. Multiple choice; closed book; bring #2 pencil.