SYLLABUS: ANTH 163 ORIGINS OF STORYTELLING ONLINE

Instructor: Dr. Michelle Scalise Sugiyama
Email: mscalise@uoregon.edu
Office Hours: by email & Zoom

GTF: Chris Harrington
Email: charrin3@uoregon.edu
Office Hours: by email & Zoom

“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., on knowledge acquired from others. Drawing on evolutionary theory and related disciplines, this course explores storytelling as one of humanity’s earliest information technologies. The first half outlines the evolutionary context in which storytelling emerged, the psychological capacities that make social learning and narrative possible, and the foundations of cultural transmission. The second half examines storytelling in terms of the information demands of ancestral human environments. We explore cross-cultural genres in Indigenous hunter-gatherer oral traditions (e.g., tricksters, monsters, heroes, shape-shifting animals) in terms of the traditional ecological knowledge they encode and the recurrent problems of hunter-gatherer life they address. As a science-credit fulfilling course, this class uses the scientific method as a critical thinking tool to interrogate Western views of literature and the role it plays in human societies. Course readings include scientific articles and hunter-gatherer narratives.

Course Requirements and Organization. All course materials (i.e., syllabus, readings, lectures, films, worksheets, quizzes) are posted on the course Canvas site and organized by week like the Schedule of Readings (see below). You are responsible for checking the course Canvas site regularly for updates and announcements. No extra credit allowed; no late work or make-ups allowed without instructor-approved legitimate excuse (see also Technical Difficulties). Each week you must complete the following:

1. **Readings.** Each week there is a set of articles and/or stories to be read before listening to the lectures (the lectures reference the readings, so lectures will be hard to follow if you haven’t done the reading first). The first slide of each lecture indicates which readings it covers.
2. **Lectures.** A set of lectures to be watched before taking the week’s quiz. For some weeks the lecture component of the course includes a film or video.
3. **Worksheet.** Each week you must complete a worksheet. These are open-book assignments designed to test your ability to apply important concepts and research presented in the week’s readings and lectures.
4. **Quiz.** Every week there is a 10-question, timed, closed book, multiple-choice, online quiz on the week’s readings and lectures. You are not allowed to look at the lectures, readings, or your notes or use translation programs while taking quizzes. Quizzes are designed to test your understanding of core course concepts and important research findings.
Academic Dishonesty: 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.” Listening to lectures, watching films, and studying with other students in the class is allowed and encouraged, but all quizzes and assignments must be done independently: 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 course.

Copyright—Do Not Post Class Materials for Sale: Materials written by your instructor are the instructor’s (or in some cases the UO’s) intellectual property. It is important that everyone respect each other’s rights. For instance, you should not copy and redistribute course materials without the instructor’s permission. The instructor may also post other copyrighted materials on the course site. It is the instructor’s responsibility for ensuring that such posting does not violate copyright law, but you should be aware that you do not have the right to make additional copies or redistribute these materials.

Make Copies of Your Work! Given that this is an online course, I recommend that you store all of your work on a personal external memory drive. The recommended workflow is to create all your work on a word processing document and then cut and paste into the forum on Canvas. Your instructor is not responsible for lost or missing coursework. Please be safe and back up your work!

Office Hours: I regularly check my email twice a day, once in the morning and again in the early evening. (I often check it at other times as well, but these are unpredictable.) This means that if you email me after 7:00 PM, I probably won’t see it until the next morning, and if you email me in the late morning or early afternoon, I probably won’t see it until that evening. If you would like to meet with me, contact me via email to schedule a virtual appointment.

Students With Disabilities: Appropriate accommodations will be provided for students with documented disabilities. If you anticipate needing accommodations in this course, please send me a notification letter from Disability Services outlining your accommodations so that I can put them in place as soon as possible.

Technical Difficulties: With online courses, technical failures inevitably occur. As I cannot monitor the course site continually, I depend on you to notify me of any tech issues as soon as they come to your attention. Don’t panic if I don’t respond to your email immediately (see Office Hours). When tech failures occur, deadlines will be extended as appropriate.

Course Goals: 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

**Grading Rubric:** Your course grade is based on the total points you earn on the worksheets and quizzes.

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**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**

Scalise Sugiyama (2005) “Reverse-engineering narrative”

Boyd et al. (2011) “The cultural niche”

**Week 2: Cultural Transmission**

Evans & Zarate (2005) *Introducing Evolutionary Psychology* (pp. 3-60)

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


Film: *The Human Spark, Part II*
**Week 3: Cognitive Foundations of Storytelling**

Evans & Zarate (pp. 87-104)

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

“Tugtovâk the moose, who duped the kayak man”

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

Film: *The Human Spark, Part III* (optional)

**Week 4: Cooperation & Conflict Management**

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

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

“Why Kwanyip never lacked guanacos”

“A tale about stingy reindeer-owners”

“Siligkeitkê who murdered the women of the village”


“Coyote marries the chief’s daughter”

“Coyote and the seven buffalo”

“Coyote kills Deer with his ceremony”

“Coyote and the expanding meat”

“Sendeh overeats and clings to a grape vine”

**Week 5: Mating**

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”

Evans & Zarate (pp. 81-86)

“Coyote marries the chief’s daughter”

“How a poor boy won his wives”

“The dog and the girl” (pp. 62-63)

“Double-Face tricks the girl” (pp. 49-50 only)

“Chief of the red tipi”

“The wronged woman”

**Week 6: Warfare & Heroes**


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”

“The girl who was stolen by an inlander”

“Clever Kaskoyuk”

“The origins of the Kiowa Apache”

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

Jobling 2001 “The psychological foundations of the hero-ogre story”

“The birth of Killer-of-Enemies and Child-of-the-Water” (pp. 47-77)

“Øeøemë, the child warrior”

“The Tale of La’la”

“Clever Kaskoyuk”

“How Bear Woman got her name”

“The old woman and the polar bear”

Film: *Adventure Time*
**Week 7: Hunting**

Barrett (2005) “Adaptations to predators and prey”

“A stubborn fisherman”

“Armadillo and Jaguar exchange teeth”

“The Child-Armadillo, the Jaguar, and the Millipede.”

“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)

Blurton-Jones & Konner (1976) “!Kung knowledge of animal behavior”

“Coyote visits the Red Ants”

“Hunting experiences” (I & IV)

“Tugtoväk the moose, who duped the kayak man”

“The wasps and the origin of peccaries”

“Pine Squirrel Criticizes Deer”

“Tapir tries to hide”

“Day and night”

**Week 8: Gathering**

Galef & Clark (1971) “Social factors in the poison avoidance and feeding behavior of wild and domesticated rat pups”

“Red Brocket and the false palm fruits”

“Caterpillar’s tobacco and the kernals of wild fruit”

“The war of the fishes with the Okanagon”

“Theft of fire”

“Fish Hawk invents implements” (pp. 72-74)
Week 9: Environmental Hazards Part I


“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”

“Mt. Mazama 1865”

“Oral history saves island from tsunami”

“The big fire”

“The story of the dolphins”

Week 10: Environmental Hazards Part II


“Qoa’qlqal”

“Omamë creates the mountains in his flight”

“How the land was distributed”

“The cannibals”

“Yakima are not smart west of the mountains”

Evans & Zarate (pp. 77-80)

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

“The child and the crocodile”

“Some neglected children are transformed into birds”

“The little girl who was kidnapped”
“Two children escape from an Atlatl’lia” (pp. 274-276)

“Spine Breaker” (#247)

“Wild Woman” (#45)