

ANT/REL 353: Folklore and Mythology

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Linfield College

REQUIRED TEXTS:

Elliott Oring, ed., *Folk Groups and Folklore Genres: An Introduction*
Elliott Oring, ed., *Folk Groups and Folklore Genres: A Reader*

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

This course will be divided into three modules. The first module (one week) will focus on various definitions of folklore over the past 150 years, and what folklore is, how we recognize it, and when and where it often occurs. In the second module (two weeks) we will discuss various genres of folklore – folk narratives, ballads and folksongs, riddles and proverbs, and folk objects (material culture). And in the third and final module (two weeks) we will discuss some of the most common folk groups that are studied by folklorists – ethnic groups, religious groups, occupational/work groups, and children. In this way students should gain a broad understanding of the history of the study of folklore, the various genres of folklore which will be seen as artistic verbal, ritual, and material expressions of different people/groups, and the group or shared nature of folklore genres and how group ideas/ideals can be expressed in various traditional forms.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND GRADING:

SHORT PAPERS:

There will be three (3) short papers due during the course of this class. The topics and due dates will be given in the syllabus below. These short papers must be 2-3 pages in length, double-spaced, using 12-point font, and written using Microsoft Word. Papers must be submitted through WebCT – and late papers will be penalized one full grade. Each paper will be worth 10 points of your final grade (total 30 points).

RESEARCH PROJECT:

There will be a longer research project due at the end of the term. In this paper you must present a body of folklore that you have collected from another person or group. You should discuss the topic of your project with me at the latest by the third week of this course. These papers must be a minimum of eight (8) pages in length, double-spaced, using 12-point font, and written using Microsoft Word. Late papers will be penalized one full grade. These papers will be worth 50 points of your final grade.

DISCUSSION:

Discussion of the readings will be an important component of this class. Everyone must actively participate in the discussion through WebCT of the material we read. Discussion will be worth 20 points of your final grade.

ACADEMIC HONESTY: Academic work is evaluated on the assumption that the work presented is the student's own, unless designated otherwise. Anything less is unacceptable and is considered academically dishonest. Any student found to be engaging in such activities is subject to disciplinary action. Further definitions of academic dishonesty may be found in your Student Handbook in the Academic Policies chapter. In this class the most important point to note is that all writing is assumed to be your own UNLESS you clearly mark passages cited from other sources with quotation marks ("x") and then cite the source being used (Oring, *Introduction*, 27).

****DENOTES REQUIRED READING**

MODULE #1 (Week #1) – FOLKLORE – HOW CAN WE RECONGIZE IT?

- ** <http://www.afsnet.org/> -- website for the American Folklore Society which was established in 1888. Read about the AFS – its history and current status.
- ** <http://www.folklife.si.edu/index.html> -- website for the Smithsonian Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage. Read about its history and various activities.
- ** <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Folklore> -- read and follow any links that interest you.
- **Oring, *Introduction*, pp. 225-254 (chap 10) & pp. 1-22 (chap 1)
- **Oring, *Reader*, pp. 339-349, pp. 21-37 & pp. 43-51

OPTIONAL READING:

If you are familiar with the *Foxfire* books (there are at least twelve that have been published) then read through one or two of them. If you are not familiar with them you might want to find them in your local library.

FIRST SHORT PAPER: I want this first short paper to be a clear concise discussion of the term "folklore" and how it has changed/evolved over time. It is due noon on Sunday – the last day of Week #1.

MODULE #2 (Weeks #2 & #3) – GENRES OF FOLKLORE

Week #2

- **Oring, *Introduction*, pp. 121-145 (chap 6) & pp. 147-174 (chap 7)
- **Oring, *Reader*, pp. 224-235 & pp. 236-243

OPTIONAL READING:

- ## <http://urbanlegends.about.com/> -- discussion of modern urban legends – a very popular area of study today.
- ## <http://www.pitt.edu/~dash/folktexts.html> -- links to many texts that present folktales, legends, and myths.
- ## <http://www.folklore.org/index.py> -- I will list this site again under Occupational Folklore (chap 4). It is a collection of oral narratives about the people and culture of Apple (Macintosh) computers.
- ## <http://solar-center.stanford.edu/folklore/> -- a collection of solar folklore from around the world. Interesting in that the site focuses on folklore of a celestial object.

http://www.nanzan-u.ac.jp/SHUBUNKEN/publications/jjrs/jjrs_cumulative_list.htm -- the website for the *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* in which I have published two articles on Japanese new religions and their use of personal experience narratives (*taiken* – testimonies). If interested scroll down to articles #377 & #424 and click on my name to read the article. This site will be listed once again under Religious Folklore (chap 3).

Week #3

**Oring, *Introduction*, pp. 175-197 (chap 8) & pp. 199-223 (chap 9)

**Oring, *Reader*, pp. 302-307, pp. 308-314 & pp. 329-338

OPTIONAL READING:

<http://www.questia.com/PM.qst?a=o&d=5001935390&er=deny> -- an article that I published in *Asian Folklore Studies* on the political uses of religious votive tablets (*ema*) in Shinto shrines in Japan in the mid- to late-19th century. I will list this site again under Religious Folklore (chap 3).

SECOND SHORT PAPER: I want this second short paper to be your collection and discussion of some genre (your choice) of folklore – e.g., personal experience narrative, joke(s), proverbs, some form of material culture, etc. You must annotate this item(s) of folklore (refer to chapter 10 in *Introduction* for how to annotate) – i.e., giving the name of the informant, when and where you collected this folklore, under what circumstances (e.g., casual conversation, interview), and a brief discussion of the item and its importance to the informant. This paper is due at noon on Sunday at the end of Week #3.

MODULE #3 (Weeks #4 & #5) – FOLK GROUPS

Week #4

**Oring, *Introduction*, pp. 23-44 (chap 2) & pp. 45-69 (chap 3)

**Oring, *Reader*, pp. 63-77, pp. 78-86, pp. 99-113 & pp. 124-135

OPTIONAL READING:

http://www.nanzan-u.ac.jp/SHUBUNKEN/publications/jjrs/jjrs_cumulative_list.htm -- the website for the *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* in which I have published two articles on Japanese new religions and their use of personal experience narratives (*taiken* – testimonies). If interested scroll down to articles #377 & #424 and click on my name to read the article. Previously, this site was listed under Folk Narratives (chap 6).

<http://www.questia.com/PM.qst?a=o&d=5001935390&er=deny> -- an article that I published in *Asian Folklore Studies* on the political uses of religious votive tablets (*ema*) in Shinto shrines in Japan in the mid- to late-19th century. Previously, this site was listed under Folk Objects (chap 9).

THIRD SHORT PAPER: For this third short paper I want you to collect some folklore (again the genre is your choice) from some group. You must annotate the item(s) of

folklore and give me some general information about the group – most importantly what brings these people together and makes them a group. Since you will have your longer paper due at the end of the fifth week of class – let’s make this short paper due at noon on Sunday of Week #4.

Week #5

**Oring, *Introduction*, pp. 71-89 (chap 4) & pp. 91-120 (chap 5)

**Oring, *Reader*, pp. 137-145, pp. 146-157, pp. 169-177 & pp. 178-184

OPTIONAL READING:

<http://www.folklore.org/index.py> -- Previously, this site was listed under Folk Narratives (chap 6). It is a collection of oral narratives about the people and culture of Apple (Macintosh) computers.

RESEARCH PROJECT: In this research project you must collect a body of folklore (i.e., more than one item) from a single person (other than yourself) OR group of people. The single person can be a family member or friend – and if you want to collect from a group it would be best if you had some previous knowledge/connection to the group. The group could be your family, a sports team, classmates, workmates, or some other group. Decide what kind of folklore you will collect from the person/group and then get together with them to discuss your project. Informants should always know what you are doing and that you will write up what they say/do in a report. Do not hide this fact from them as they have the right to deny your use of their material. After collecting the lore talk to them (the folk) and elicit as much information as you can from the informant(s) concerning when he/she/they perform/do what you collect, the context (audience and place) that he/she/they chose to perform for/in, and why he/she/they chose to perform/do this particular form of folklore. This project is due at noon on Sunday of Week #5.

OPTIONAL READING:

Martha C. Sims & Martine Stephens, *Living Folklore: An Introduction to the Study of People and Their Traditions*, pp. 225-272 (chap 8) lists four different examples of folklore projects – 1) an ethnography of a fire station, 2) gay rituals and culture, 3) roadside memorials for people who have been killed, 4) gunsmithing (see <http://madonna.edu/pages/mmissuesixteen.cfm> -- and click on Kevin Eyster, “The Art of Gunsmithing in Central Ohio”).