

◆THE HERO'S QUEST◆
Religion, Mythology, and Harry Potter

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Instructor: Sandy Russell Jones

Office hours: Thurs 12 – 3pm

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Tues 3:20 – 4:40pm

Beck 101

*But often, in the world's most crowded streets,
But often, in the din of strife,
There arises an unspeakable desire
After the knowledge of our buried life;
A thirst to spend our fire and restless force
In tracking out our true, original course;
A longing to inquire
Into the mystery of this heart which beats
So wild, so deep in us – to know
Whence our lives come and where they go.
- Matthew Arnold, from The Buried Life*

This course will focus on a major theme found in the mythologies of nearly every major (and minor) world religious tradition: the hero's quest. This common theme appears in the narratives of religions as different as the animism of the Trobriand islanders to the strict monotheism of Islam. While the details differ, representations of the hero's quest follow a remarkably similar pattern across time and distance. We will examine this pattern step by step as it appears in various religious narratives. We will also see how people are still today telling this story, in new ways, with new characters and new adventures, adapting it to contemporary life. In movies, fiction writing, and TV, we humans continue to travel the path of the hero.

Through comparing these popular versions of the hero's quest to those found in formal religious traditions, we will explore the role that this theme plays in human society, both past and present, local and universal. As well as finding commonalities, we will also discover what differs among versions of this story, and think about and discuss what these differences might mean. At a general and broad level, we will explore three types of belief systems: Western (Judaism, Christianity, Islam), Eastern (Hinduism, Buddhism, and Taoism), and what we will refer to as Nature Traditions (Native North American, African, and Australian Aborigine).

Required Books:

The Sacred and the Profane by Mircea Eliade, ISBN-13: 978-0-15-679201-1 ; ISBN-10: 0-15-679201-X

The Neverending Story by Michael Ende, ISBN-10: 0140386335 ISBN-13: 978-0140386332

A Wrinkle in Time by Madeleine L'Engle, ISBN-10: 0312367546 ISBN-13: 978-0312367541

Mutant Message Down Under, Marlo Morgan, ISBN

The Bhagavad Gita, trans. Stephen Mitchell

Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone by J.K. Rowling, ISBN

Introduction to Mythology, Eva Thury, ISBN

Learning Goals

Upon successful completion of the course, students will:

- have a comparative understanding of the basic characteristics of major world religions'
- have a firm grasp of the genre of the hero myth, and be able to analyze its role in communicating religious ideals and creating meaning out of a chaotic world
- be able to identify contemporary manifestations of the hero myth, especially in fantasy novels and films, and evaluate their role in contemporary society

Course Requirements and Grading:

Students are required to keep a weekly blog on the course Sakai site. There will be a new question each week about that week's material, and will ask students to consider various conceptual themes presented in class or in course texts. There will also be a series of three short tests that will consist of short essay questions, and a final short paper that will ask students to choose one or more of the theoretical concepts presented in the course and apply it to one hero myth of a formal religion, and one example of a contemporary interpretation of the hero myth in literature, film or TV.

Weekly blogs	15%
Test 1	20%
Test 2	20%
Test 3	20%
Attendance & Participation	15%
Final short paper	10%

Absences for religious observance and medical emergencies are fully excusable, but must be documented.

COURSE SCHEDULE

January 20 **Introduction to the course**

For Jan 22:

- Blog, Week 1: Introductions
- Acquire books

◆DEFINITIONS◆

January 22 **Why study the Hero myth? *Finding Joe***

For Jan 27:

- Read Ring Ch 1 (on SAKAI in "Resources")
- Read *Harry Potter*, Chs 1 - 4

January 27 **What is Religion?**

For Jan 29:

- Read Ring Ch 6 (SAKAI)
- Read Thury, Ch 1
- Read *Harry Potter*, Ch 5

January 29

What is Myth?

For Feb 3:

- Blog, Week 2: Making Meaning
- Read Thury Ch 2, Intro to Part 2A, Chs 5 & 6
- Read *Harry Potter*, Chs 6 & 7

◆The WESTERN Tradition◆

February 3

Creation Myths

For Feb 5:

- Read Eliade Introduction, Ch 1 to p. 32
- Read *Harry Potter*, Chs 8 & 9

February 5

Sacred Space

For Feb 10:

- Blog, Week 3: Sacred Space
- Read Thury Intro to Part 3, Ch 15
- Read *Harry Potter*, Chs 10 - 15

Feb 10

The Hero's Journey

For Feb 12:

- Thury Ch 16 first half
- Finish *Harry Potter*

Feb 12

Refusal of the Call: *Rise of the Guardians*

For Feb 17:

- Read Campbell H.O.
- Blog, Week 4: Refusal of the Call
- Finish Thury Ch 16

Feb 17

finish *Rise of the Guardians* / discuss Harry, Gilgamesh, and Jack Frost

- study for Test I

Feb 19

TEST I

For Feb 24:

- Read Eliade Ch 2 pp. 68 – 104
- Read *Neverending Story*, Prologue, Chs 1 - 3

◆EASTERN Traditions◆

Feb 24

Sacred Time

- Read L'Engle (SAKAI)
- Read *Neverending Story*, Chs 4 – 7
- Blog, Week 6: Sacred Time

Feb 26

A Glimpse at Hinduism

- Read Eliade pp. 104 – 113

- Read Thury Ch 18
 - Read *Neverending Story*, Chs 8 – 9
- Mar 3 **The Ramayana**
- Read *Neverending Story*, Chs 10 – 11
 - Read *Wrinkle in Time*, Chs 1 – 2
- Mar 5 **Who is “The Special?” *The Lego Movie***
- finish *Wrinkle in Time*
 - Read *Neverending Story*, Ch 12
 - Blog, Week 7: “The Special”
- Mar 10 **“The Year is a circle around the world”**
- Read *The Bhagavad Gita*
 - Read *Neverending Story*, 13 - 21
- March 12, 17, 19 **SPRING BREAK**
- March 24 **Doing your Duty: *The Bhagavad Gita***
For Mar 26:
- Blog, Week 9: Axis Mundi
 - Read *Neverending Story* Ch 22
- Mar 26 **A Glimpse at Taoism**
For Mar 31:
- finish *The Neverending Story*
 - Blog, Week 9: Wishes
- Mar 31 **Analysis: *The Neverending Story***
- study for Test II
- Apr 2 **TEST II**
- Read Thury Ch 8
- ◆NATURE RELIGIONS◆**
- April 7 **Creation Myths: North America**
- Read Thury Ch 9
- Apr 9 **Creation Myths: Africa**
- Read Thury Ch 23
 - Read TBD (SAKAI)
 - Blog, Week 11
- Apr 14 **Heroes and Tricksters: North America**
- Read Thury Ch 24
 - Read Mutant Message

Apr 16 **Heroes and Tricksters: Africa**

- Read Ring Ch 4
- Blog, Week 12

Apr 21 **Ritual: Rites of Passage**

- finish *Mutant Message*
- Blog, Week 13

Apr 23 *Mutant Message Down Under*

Apr 28 **Review**

Apr 30 **TEST III**

May 8 **FINAL DUE AT 3PM**

*** * * Have a great summer! May you always find your Center... * * ***