

Diane Chapin – English 122: Introduction to Mythology



English 122, Introduction to Mythology, examines a selection of mythic literature from various historical eras and geographical areas. It begins in the Middle East 5,000 years ago and travels around the world to India, China, Polynesia, and Meso America. Some myths reflect a particular historical period; others are more difficult to date and have origins in the distant past. In this class, we identify the types of myths and study various patterns that repeat across cultural lines. We relate this to Carl Jung's theory of the collective unconscious and to the work of Joseph Campbell, the foremost American mythologist. However, Campbell's and Jung's theories are reflected

differently in each culture. And therein lies my interest.

I focused on the following Global Learning Outcomes:

1. Have a deep, comparative knowledge of the world's peoples and problems, including history and cultural contributions;
2. Understand the historical legacies that have created the dynamics and tensions of the world;
3. Ability to see and communicate multiple perspectives and cultural differences.

I would like to give students a more in-depth examination of the relationship between myths and cultural values and the degree to which these values both reflect and guide a society's response to historical challenges. I would also like them to see how contemporary values and myths are likewise related and reflected in today's world. In particular, I want students to understand that all values are relative, not absolute, and relate to the culture from which they spring.



To achieve this, I am adding a new signature assignment integrated into the module on each culture we study as well as two additions to the introductory unit:

- Students will be asked to present family stories that have been told for generations, initially in a share/pair, but ultimately in a class-wide discussion of the behaviors or values encouraged by these stories.
- Students will be asked to evaluate one contemporary fairy tale seen from a variety of cultural perspectives (for example Little Red Riding Hood). Subsequent discussion will focus on why these different perspectives on a similar theme may have arisen. What do they tell us about that culture?



As a major signature assignment, each student will be asked to select and develop a presentation with visuals on one myth and relate it to the culture that produced it. In addition to identifying key themes in the myth, they will be asked to present a brief historical perspective on the culture that produced the myth, identify key values projected in the myth, and advance their idea of how those values relate to what was happening in that culture.

To assess how this revised approach impacts student understanding of culture and values, I will use a first day and final day short reflective essay on culture and values, comparing them to determine how student perceptions changed. I will also use short essay questions on both the midterm and final exams to evaluate whether students grasp the connection between culture and values in specific myths.