

Essay Assignment 1 **The Functions of Mythology**

Keeping in mind our in-class readings and discussion, compose a 5-7 page essay which explores the role mythology plays in the lives of individuals and society. For a model, you should follow the basic format for a classical essay as discussed in class. You may pick one of the following options as the general topic of your paper.

Option 1: Creation Myths

- A. Develop an essay in the form of an extended comparison between two or three creation or flood myths, each of which illustrates fundamental values and beliefs about gods, humans, and the natural world. How do the differences reflect the particular cultural and social values of the community in which the tale was told?
- B. Contrast the two stories of creation in Genesis 1 and 2. Today, most biblical scholars accept the "documentary hypothesis" which asserts that the Pentateuch (which includes the book of Genesis) was written by a group of authors over a period of centuries, each writing with the goal of promoting his or her own religious views. Do you agree with this hypothesis?
- C. Creation myths make significant comments on the roles and status of the sexes in various cultures. Write an essay in which you compare and contrast the roles of sex and gender in two or three different creation myths from different cultures.
- D. Compare the ways that two or three different creation myths from different cultures show the relationship between humans and nature. How harmonious a part of nature or how much at odds with nature do humans seem in the various myths? How are animals involved in the act of creation? Does part of the natural world need to be destroyed for creation to be completed?

Option 2: Urban Legends

- A. Select a theme or motif in an older piece of folklore from a folklore collection you find in the library or online, then analyze how that theme or motif is developed in the older folklore and how it is treated in a corresponding urban legend. Discuss both the similarities and the differences in the two developments of your theme or motif. Then, explain why you think the treatments are similar or different. What has or hasn't changed in our culture to produce that result? Your thesis should read something like:

"I'm going to examine the theme of a young woman's rite of passage in Red Riding Hood and in the babysitter urban legends. Though there are many similarities in the two treatments of the theme, the urban legend shows that we believe young women today to be more in charge of their own futures."

- B. Pick one or two stories within a general category of urban legends (e.g. "The Hook," "Creepy Contaminations," etc.) and write an essay that defines the essential elements or motifs of that category. Then discuss what function or role the category plays in the community. You may want to begin by looking through Jan Brunvand's book, *The Vanishing Hitchhiker*, on reserve in the library.

Option 3: Mythology and Modern Culture

In his essay "Mythological Themes in Creative Literature and Art" (course packet), Joseph Campbell states that both the cosmological and social functions of mythology have been weakened through modern advances in science and technology. Write an essay in which you either support or refute Campbell's assertion that the reliance on science and technology have diminished the power of the human spirit that myths embody. You may also wish to read Jung's essay "The Spiritual Problem of Modern Man" in his book *Modern Man in Search of a Soul* on reserve in the library.

Writing Requirements

Length: 5-7 pages.

Sources: At least three, with at least one source coming from the readings in our course packet. Always keep in mind that the sources you use reflect on how seriously you approached your research, and you will be evaluated on their applicability and strength.

Due Dates

Mon. Feb. 5: Peer draft (bring three copies).

Mon. Feb. 12: Final draft.

Submitting Your Work

Essays must be submitted in a plain, 2-pocket folder with your name clearly written on the outside. Plastic folders or folders containing school logos or other decorative art will not be accepted. The following items must be included inside your folder:

- Final draft of essay, stapled, in a pocket by itself.
- First draft of essay I reviewed.
- Completed Peer Evaluation Forms.
- Essay Grade Sheet (available in the "Notes & Forms" section of the Web site).

Penalties: Failure to turn in a peer draft on the due date will result in a one half letter grade penalty on your final paper. Failure to turn in peer evaluations on the due date will result in a one half letter grade penalty on your final paper. If late, your final draft will be docked one half letter grade for being late, then another half grade for each calendar day it's late.

Grading Criteria

When assigning grades, I reserve "A" for exceptional papers; you do not get an "A" simply by addressing the topic in a standard way and avoiding mechanical errors. (See the "Course Policies" section of the Web site for a more complete description of grading policies.)

I will assess you in the following three areas:

Invention

Introduction and Thesis: Are these components of your essay clearly written, easily identifiable, and effective in presenting the topic, providing direction to the paper as a whole, and discussing the significance of the topic?

Accuracy, Wording, and Research: Have you used the required outside sources to support your argument, and when using these sources, do you express their concepts fairly and accurately? NOTE: Failure to meet research requirements may result in an 'E' for the essay. Have you integrated quotes smoothly? If you are paraphrasing, do you use your own words yet still remain faithful to the author's original meaning? Have you expressed your ideas clearly and concisely? Is the essay in your own words?

Lines of Argument: Have you clearly and extensively defined necessary terms? Have you illustrated your criteria with specific examples and, if necessary, contrasting examples? Have you established ethical, logical, and emotional reasons (evidence) in support of your thesis, in order of importance?

Revision: Are there substantial changes between the draft and final versions of the essay? Does your final version meet the length requirements?

Organization

Beginning: Have you followed the organizational plan discussed in class? Have you offered an introduction in which you explain the issue and show why it is relevant? Have you presented a clear thesis that guides and unifies the essay?

Middle: Are your paragraphs focused and well developed? Do your paragraphs contain topic sentences? Have you revised for clarity and worked on eliminating wordy, unclear, and/or repetitive areas in your essay? Have you included transitional words between sentences and paragraphs to make your ideas flow more smoothly?

End: Do you offer a conclusion which does more than merely repeat your major ideas?

Style

Format: Does your paper adhere to MLA format, including font and point size? Have you correctly cited from your sources and inserted a parenthetical citation after each quote? Have you introduced the quote in an effective way? Have you correctly used MLA formatting and included a "Works Cited" page? NOTE: Failure to observe proper MLA format may result in a zero (0) style grade.

Tone: Is your tone appropriate for the chosen audience?

Grammar/Sentences: Is your paper free from grammatical errors such as sentence fragments, fused sentences, comma splices, mixed constructions, apostrophe errors, subject/verb and pronoun/antecedent disagreement? Is the essay free from spelling errors? NOTE: Five (5) or more grammar/sentence errors may result in a zero (0) style grade.