SYLLABUS
ANTH 163: ORIGINS OF STORYTELLING

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“We must assume that storytelling is as old as mankind, at least as old as spoken language.”
--Oates (1992:8)

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 information acquired from others. Drawing on evolutionary theory and related disciplines, this course explores the origins of literature in terms of the information demands of ancestral human environments. The first half outlines the evolutionary context in which narrative emerged, the adaptations that make social learning and narrative possible, and the foundations of cultural transmission. The second half examines cross-cultural themes in hunter-gatherer oral traditions—e.g., tricksters, monsters, warfare, mating—in relation to recurrent problems of forager life and the kinds of information required to solve them. Course readings include scientific articles and hunter-gatherer folktales.

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

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 feel that you need to meet with me in person, email me to schedule an appointment.

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.

Students With Disabilities: Appropriate accommodations will be provided for students with documented disabilities. If you anticipate needing accommodations in this course, please contact
me asap and send me a notification letter from Disability Services outlining your accommodations.

Course Requirements

Readings: To access readings and all other class materials, click on “Weekly Lessons” in the left-hand Blackboard menu, then go to the appropriate week’s lesson (see Schedule of Readings, below). The readings are scientific articles and stories from forager oral tradition. Most of what you read will be primary scientific research presented by those who conduct it, as opposed to a broad overview that might be found in a textbook. Because lectures are designed to explicate and review key points of the assigned texts, you are expected to do the reading before you listen to the lectures.

Grading: Your course grade will be based on the total points you earn on the Labs, Quizzes, Midterm Exam, and Final Exam. The Labs constitute the Discussion Section component of the course. They are short-answer assignments designed to test your ability to apply important course concepts and prepare you for exams. Quizzes and exams are timed, multiple-choice, closed-book tests. Each quiz covers the reading assignments and lectures for that week, and is designed to measure your understanding of core concepts and important research findings. Exams are cumulative: the midterm will cover Weeks 1 through 5; the final will primarily focus on Weeks 6 through 10. No late work or make-ups allowed (for exceptions, see Technical Difficulties).

Grading Rubric: Grading is done on a straight percentage scale so theoretically there is no reason that everyone cannot get As.

A+ = 97-100%  A = 93-96.9%  A- = 90-92.9%
B+ = 87-89.9%  B = 83-86.9%  B- = 80-82.9%
C+ = 77-79.9%  C = 73-76.9%  C- = 70-72.9%
D+ = 67-69.9%  D = 63-66.9%  D- = 60-62.9%
F = < 59.9%

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.

**Academic Honesty:** 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 tests 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 class.

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**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, Episode 2*

**Week 3: Cognitive Foundations of Storytelling**

Evans & Zarate (pp. 87-104)

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

“Tugtoväk 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, Episode 3*

**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”
“Siligtkê 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. 81-86, 105-132)
“Puan takes a lover”
“The rival husbands”
“Two women”
“A Wasco woman deceives her husband”
“The Grizzly Bears and the Black Bears”
“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**

**MIDTERM: Due by 11:59 p.m. on Sunday of Week 6**
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)

**Week 7: Heroes & Hunters**

Jobling 2001 “The psychological foundations of the hero-ogre story”
“The birth of Killer-of-Enemies and Child-of-the-Water” (pp. 47-77)
“Œéemë, 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*

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)

**Week 8: Subsistence**
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”

“Enemy sorcerers turn into coatis”

“Pine Squirrel Criticizes Deer”

“Tapir tries to hide”

“Day and night”

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”

“Crater Lake 1865”

“Oral history saves island from tsunami”

“The big fire”

“The story of the dolphins”
Week 10: Environmental Hazards Part II


“Qoa’qlqal”

“Omamē 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”

“Some neglected children are transformed into birds”

“The child and the crocodile”

“The little girl who was kidnapped”

“Two children escape from an At!at!a’lia” (pp. 274-276)

“Spine Breaker” (#247)

“Wild Woman” (#45)

Week 11: Final Exam

Due by 11:59 p.m. on Friday of Week 11