

SYMBOLIC ANTHROPOLOGY

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Scope of the Course

What are symbols? They have been described as "switch points" between inner experience and the world "out there." Symbols are mediators between individual consciousness and the social life of the community. Through symbolization human thought and feeling are culturally constituted, while culture is itself constantly redefined. This course explores the variety of human symbolic processes, using techniques of analysis and interpretation developed by anthropologists.

Readings

- Paul Apak Angilirq: *Atanarjuat: the fast runner* (required)
- George Lakoff & Mark Johnson: *Metaphors We Live By* (required)
- Steven Feld: *Sound and Sentiment* by(recommended; a few chapters will be required)
- A set of articles and book chapters posted on Blackboard.

Writing Assignments

This is a Writing Intensive Course. In addition to the readings you will have a series of writing assignments of different kinds, including peer review,* discussion board and two in-class presentations. (The good news is that there will be no midterm or final exams!

The assignments are as follows:

- Attend class and participate in discussions (10%)
- Weekly discussion board (10%)
- Reflective Essay: Important Symbols in my Life. (10%)
- Research paper (with peer review* and in-class presentation): Animal Symbolism (30%, which breaks down as follows: Paper 20%, Peer Review 5% , Presentation 5%)
- Mask and Analytical Essay, with in-class presentation (15%; of which the presentation is 5%)
- Mini- Ethnography (15%)
- Critical Essay, drawn from discussion board (10%)

A schedule and detailed descriptions of the assignments will be posted on Blackboard.

*Students who are not registered as WID may opt out of the peer review process.

SCHEDULE OF TOPICS AND ASSIGNMENTS

Some reading assignments and due dates may be revised.

You should check Blackboard regularly for the most up-to-date information.

THE VARIETIES OF SYMBOLS [Sept. 10 - 24]

Focus: *Animals and Human Culture*

Ideas: Metaphor, metonymy and other tropes. Collective representations. Meaning as emergent in social life. Intersubjectivity.

Reading Assignments:

- **Sept.10:** J. Fernandez, "Persuasions and Performances" (Blackboard)
- **Sept. 12:** *Sound & Sentiment*, chapter 1 (Blackboard). **Recommended:** Durkheim, excerpt from *Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*
- **Sept. 17:** *Metaphors We Live By*, chapters 1-3. Ann Fienup-Riordan, "Metaphors To Live By: the boy who went to live with the seals" (Blackboard)
- **Sept. 19:** *Metaphors...* chapters 4-7 and 11. **Recommended:** A. Marshak, "The Evolution of the Symbolic Capacity (Blackboard)
- **Sept.24:** C. Geertz, "Ethos, Worldview and the Analysis of Sacred Symbols;" G. Bateson, "Metalogue: Why Do Things Have Outlines?" (Blackboard)

CREATING VALUE (Sept.26-Oct.3)

Focus: *Love, Money and Health*

Ideas: Exchange as the basis of social life. Mana. Taboo. Commodification.

Reading Assignments: (class-by-class schedule will be posted on Blackboard)

- M. Mauss, excerpt from *The Gift* (all are on Blackboard)
- K. Marx, "Commodity Fetishism"
- *Metaphors...* chapter 13
- M. Douglas, "Taboo"
- J. Dubisch, "You Are What You Eat"
- M.Foucault, "The Panopticon" (tentative)

ORIENTING OURSELVES IN SPACE, AND TIME [Oct.8-17]

Focus: *House and Cosmos*

Ideas: Naming things. Framing things. Finding our way around. Habitus

Reading Assignment:

- Guss, "Culture and Ethos: A Play of Forces"
- Hallowell, "Cultural Factors for Spatial Organization"
- Allen, "The Incas Have Gone Inside"
- *Atanarjuat*, Ethnographic Commentary (pp.197-229)

MODES OF THOUGHT AND ACTION [Oct. 22-24]

Focus: *Art and Technology*

Ideas: Concrete and Abstract? Bricolage. Orality and Literacy. Form and Meaning.

Reading Assignment:

- Levi-Strauss, “The Science of the Concrete”
- *Metaphor...* chapters 19-22

THE DRAMA OF SOCIAL LIFE [Oct. 29 - Nov. 14]

Focus: *Masks*

Ideas: Emergence of the “self” in social interaction.

Reading Assignment:

- V. Turner, *Betwixt and Between*
- E. Goffman, “On Face Work”
- J. Oosten, “Representing the spirits: the masks of the Alaskan Inuit”
- *Sound and Sentiment*, chapter 6: “In the form of a Bird”

THE ETHNOGRAPHER’S MAGIC [Nov. 19, 26, Dec. 3-10]

No class Nov.21 (day before Thanksgiving)

No class Nov.28 (AAA meetings here in D.C.!)

Focus: “*Writing culture*”

Ideas: Objectivity-subjectivity, reflexivity, thick description

Reading Assignment:

- *Atanarjuat*, screenplay
- *Sound and Sentiment*, Postscript
- *Metaphors...* chapters 25-30

REMINDERS!

Cell phones should be turned off.

No wandering in and out once class has started.

Be mindful of the University’s Code of Academic Honesty.