

REL 324 Spring 2014  
**RELIGIONS AND STORYTELLING**  
TTh 2 - 3:20 HL 115

Instructor: Ann Grodzins Gold office: HL 507 voice mail: x-5717; dept.: x-3861  
email: [aggold@syr.edu](mailto:aggold@syr.edu) office hrs.: Tu 3:30 - 4:30 pm & by appointment

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In many religious traditions stories happily combine the virtues of entertainment and instruction. In this course we take advantage of stories to learn about several different religious worlds. We also think about why stories have the power to entrance and move human minds. Through studying stories and storytelling in various contexts, both "traditional" and "modern," we may hope to learn how stories transmit religious teachings but also question and sometimes transform them. Besides the primary focus on narrative dimensions of religious teachings, other topics touched on include gender roles, personal and political identities, quests and journeys, resistance and empowerment, and aesthetic aspects of narrative performances. This course fulfills a "*critical reflections*" requirement for the Liberal Arts Core.

### Success / Requirements

Requirements include extensive active participation in group discussions, frequent writing tasks based on the syllabus materials, and one story project using outside sources. Success will depend most of all on coming to class well prepared, having done the readings carefully, and demonstrating this attentiveness in your oral contributions and written work. I have not designated discussion days on the syllabus because I expect discussion to be our usual mode. Work breaks down into the following categories (see p. 5 of syllabus for additional information on each category):

participation	30%
5 response papers	30%
4 are 1-2 pages @ 5 each	
1 is 3-4 pages @ 10	
story project	25%
take-home final essay (4-5 pages)	15%

### Textbooks

Four required books are available for purchase at the **University** Bookstore and have been placed on two-hour reserve at Bird Library:

Bright, William, ed. 1993. *A Coyote Reader*. Berkeley: University of California Press.  
MacDonald, Margaret Read. 2006. *Ten Traditional Tellers*. University of Illinois Press.  
Rushdie, Salman *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*. Penguin.  
Narayan, Kirin. 1989 *Storytellers, Saints, and Scoundrels: Folk Narrative in Hindu Religious Teaching*. University of Pennsylvania Press.

Additional required readings (some TBA) will be available to download as PDFs on our merged Blackboard course web site under "content." These include:

- Beck, Brenda *et al.* 2012. *The Legend of Ponnivala*, selections TBA  
 Gold, Ann Grodzins. "Mother Ten's Stories"; "The Jungli Rani"  
 Hurston, Zora Neale. 1935. *Mules and Men*, selections TBA  
 Jackson, Bruce. 2007. "The Fate of Stories" and "The Stories People Tell," from *The Story is True: The Art and Meaning of Telling Stories*, pp.16-39 & 50-79. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.  
 Mohammad, Afsar 2010 Telling Stories: Hindu-Muslim Worship in South India. *Journal of Hindu Studies*.  
 Sawyer, Ruth. 1990 [1942] *The Way of the Storyteller*, pp. 219-315, 9 stories.  
 Wadley, Susan S. 2014. "*Likhiyā* Painting Women's Lives in Rural North India."

<u>Week/Date</u>	<u>Topic/Readings</u>
<i>Lives and Stories (2 weeks)</i>	
1 Tu 1/14	Organizational session / introduction / openings "Once upon a time"; "In a certain town"; "Long long ago"; "I went and saw for you, I give you a story"
Th 1/16	Stories, lives, values, morals, meanings <u>Read:</u> Rushdie, <i>Haroun</i> , at least through p. 60 <i>student self- introductions through stories</i> • hand-out for RP 1 • <b>Note:</b> After this all " <i>hand-outs</i> " will be paperless and available on Blackboard " <i>assignments</i> ."
2 Tu 1/21	More on stories and lives <u>Read:</u> continue Rushdie's <i>Haroun</i> , at least through p. 126 <i>introductions continue</i> • discussion leader self-enrollment groups ready to form on Blackboard •
Th 1/23	"What's the use of stories that aren't even true?" <u>Read:</u> finish Rushdie's <i>Haroun</i> ; <b>&amp; also</b> Jackson (BB pdf) •• RP 1 due ••

*Storytelling in South Asia: narrative and visual arts (4 weeks)*

a special unit in conjunction with the exhibit "*Mithila Painting: The Evolution of an Art Form*," running Jan. 30-March 16, 2014, at the SUArt Galleries  
[http://www.mithilapaintings-eaf.org/traveling\\_exhibition.html](http://www.mithilapaintings-eaf.org/traveling_exhibition.html)  
 and the conference: "*Transformations in South Asian Folk Arts, Aesthetics, and Commodities*" to take place at Syracuse Feb 27 - March 1 <http://mithila.syr.edu/>

3 Tu 1/28	Introduction to Hindu mythology (lecture) <u>Read:</u> Narayan, Introduction and chapter 1 • hand-out for all remaining response papers •
Th 1/30	A Hindu guru teaches through stories and humor <u>Read:</u> Narayan, chapters 2-3
4 Tu 2/4	Masters, disciples, pretenders <u>Read:</u> Narayan, Chapters 4-6

- Th 2/6      Death and the afterlife in Hindu stories (discuss); introduction to India's regional epic performance traditions (lecture)  
Read: Narayan, Chapters 7-8 and Chapter 11  
 •• RP 2 due ••
- 5 Tu 2/11    The great wild boar and many other things  
 Guest in the classroom: Dr. Brenda Beck, Department of Anthropology,  
 University of Toronto & President of the Sophia Hilton Foundation of Canada  
 explore: <http://www.ponnivala.com/story/>  
Read: Beck et al.. (BB pdf)
- Th 2/13      Gender, power and storytelling in India  
Read: Wadley (BB pdf); Gold, Jungli Rani (BB pdf)  
*we will visit the Mithila Art exhibit together around 2:40*
- 6 Tu 2/18    Gender, Power and Storytelling in India (continued)  
 Film: Mithila Painters (40 minutes)  
Read: Gold, Purdah is as Purdah's Kept (BB pdf)  
 • hand-out on story projects •
- Th 2/20      Guest in the classroom: lecture demonstration by visiting Mithila artist Rani Jha  
 (Professor Gold will be out of town; Duygu will collect papers and introduce our visitor)  
 •• RP 3 due ••

*Trickster tales on American ground (2 weeks)*

- 7 Tu 2/25    Introducing Coyote and fellow tricksters in the context of indigenous religions  
Read: Bright, 1-34
- Th 2/27      Coyote's many talents  
Read: Bright, 35-83  
 •• story project topic and preliminary source list due ••

*This weekend: Strongly recommended event with extra credit potential: conference on "Transformations in South Asian Folk Arts, Aesthetics, and Commodities"*

- 8 Tu 3/4      ... and susceptibilities  
Read: Bright, 65-120
- Th 3/6      "You sure Coyote is a myth?"  
Read: Bright, 121-184 **and** MacDonald, 181-189 ("Coyote and the Field Mice")  
 •• RP 4 due date ••

**9      SPRING BREAK**

*Morals, meanings, rituals, communities: performed narratives in diverse cultural contexts (3 weeks)*

- 10 Tu 3/18    Good deeds, faith, blessings and other Christian themes  
Read: Sawyer, *Way of the Storyteller* (BB pdf, first 5 stories)

Th 3/20 Christian themes, continued  
Read: Sawyer, *Way of the Storyteller* (BB, 1 PDF, last 4 stories)

*Tu 3/25, 12:30 pm Strongly recommended event with extra credit potential: South Asia seminar by Afsar Mohammad title and location TBA*

11 Tu 3/25 Telling stories of saints and martyrs in a mixed Hindu-Muslim cultural context  
Read: Mohammad (BB pdf)

Th 3/27 Class to be taught by Duygu Yeni  
Read: TBA

12 Tu 4/1 Guest in the classroom: Arthur Flowers, storyteller (and Professor of English, Syracuse University) see his cyberhoodoo webspace:  
<http://rootsblog.typepad.com/rootsblog/>

Th 4/3 discussion of the relationship between scriptures, stories, and religions  
Read: Hurston, *Mules and Men*, selections TBA (BB pdf)  
•• RP 5 due date ••

*Global storytelling, local origins (2 weeks)*

13 Tu 4/8 Native American, Tibetan  
Read: MacDonald, 1-36

Th 4/10 Brazilian, Thai, Hawaiian  
Read: MacDonald, 37-95

14 Tu 4/15 Liberian, New Caledonian, Alaskan  
Read: MacDonald, 96-148

Th 4/17 Ghanean, Native American  
Read: MacDonald, 149-206

*performative projects (1 ½ weeks)*

15 Tu 4/22 student *performative projects*  
•• all written components of story projects due in class ••

Th 4/24 *performative projects*  
• hand-out for take-home final essay •

16 Tu 4/29 Conclusion, evaluations, food stories  
"The story has ended."  
"And they all lived safely . . ."; "They are there, we are here."  
"This is the place that my story ends. The matter as I understand it, that's what I give to you."  
"One spot out, one spot in, My little tale is done."

•• Your take-home essays are due Friday, May 2 at noon ••

*more about requirements*

**Participation** means:

1) **All students** are expected to come to **every** class prepared to talk about the day's reading assignment.

2) Beginning the third week of class, 3-4 students will take **pre-arranged**, rotating turns at being "point-persons" also known as discussion leaders. A point-person gives a **brief** (under 3 minutes) opening presentation of the assigned readings. This is **not** a summary, but more of an oral response. Its main purpose is to **get a general discussion going among all class members**. Ideally, you would conclude with questions, addressed to fellow students (not your professor). Sometimes this will be an opportunity to practice storytelling. *Any and all creative strategies are encouraged!* Please consult one another and cooperate to prepare. Self-enroll groups will be available on Blackboard to facilitate this process. **Everyone must take at least two turns in the course of the semester!**

Your participation is assessed largely on presence and preparation; discussion leadership is a major component. Everyone starts with a B (22 points). You will maintain it through fulfilling the conditions detailed above. Consistently well-prepared discussion and near-perfect attendance can of course raise this grade; evident negligence and no-shows on your discussion leader turn day can lower it.

- **attendance counts**, but I don't want unwilling prisoners. Therefore, missing three or fewer classes will not affect your grade. Each absence over three will take 2 points off your participation score. Duygu, as TA, will do her best to keep an accurate written record of student attendance, beginning January 23. *But it is your responsibility to sign the sheet!*

Note 1: Only documented medical and family *emergencies*, religious holidays (or, for participants in athletic programs, documented, prearranged events) will not count against your attendance record.

Note 2: Students missing class for whatever reason are themselves responsible for finding out what they missed, turning in their work, and obtaining assignments. Contact instructor or TA by email; always look on Blackboard!

**Response papers** are just that: a chance for you to respond to each unit of readings. They may be written informally, and in the first person -- but that does *not* mean you may neglect correct grammar and spelling. Out of 5 response papers, 4 will be at least 2 pages; 1 will be at least 4 pages. You may choose among papers 3-4-5 which one you will write as the longer assignment.

**Story project** Process and options will be detailed in a later hand-out. In general, options will include: traditional library research on a topic selected in consultation with the instructor; performance such as dramatizations of stories or other creative events in the classroom; other artistic representations of stories or storytelling; story collection, transcription and interpretation. Performance, artistic and collection projects may be collaborative, and will include some analytic writing, but significantly less than the library research option.

**Take-home final essay** should demonstrate your knowledge and understanding of syllabus materials and your ability to link different units through themes raised over the whole semester.

## Learning Outcomes

In keeping with University-wide concerns to assess learning outcomes in undergraduate courses, the religion department advises all students of the following goals. You will learn:

- to understand better what we mean by "religion" and to think more critically about the subject;
- to become more aware of a diversity of perspectives within the study of religion;
- to know and understand better diverse manifestations of religion within human cultures and societies, and be able to describe and interpret them.

Your grades in this course, based on written and classroom performance, will reflect your achievement of these goals, at the broadest level.

### **IMPORTANT NOTICES REGARDING FAITH TRADITION OBSERVANCES, DISABILITY, INTEGRITY AND COURTESY: PLEASE READ CAREFULLY**

*faith tradition observances* SU's religious observances policy recognizes the diversity of faiths represented among the campus community and protects the rights of students, faculty, and staff to observe religious holy days according to their tradition. Under the policy, students are provided an opportunity to make up any examination, study, or work requirements that may be missed due to a religious observance provided they notify their instructors before the end of the second week of classes. For fall and spring semesters, an online notification process is available through MySlice/Student Services/Enrollment/My Religious Observances from the first day of class until the end of the second week of class. If you need to miss class during the spring semester due to a faith tradition observance, **please make sure to take care of filing your notification(s) immediately.** See: [http://supolicies.syr.edu/emp\\_ben/religious\\_observance.htm](http://supolicies.syr.edu/emp_ben/religious_observance.htm)

*disability* Students who are in need of disability-related academic accommodations must register with the Office of Disability Services (ODS), 804 University Avenue, Room 309, 315-443-4498. Students with authorized disability-related accommodations should provide a current Accommodation Authorization Letter from ODS to the instructor and review those accommodations with the instructor. Accommodations, such as exam administration, are not provided retroactively; therefore, planning for accommodations as early as possible is necessary. For further information, see <http://disabilityservices.syr.edu>

*academic integrity* The Syracuse University Academic Integrity Policy holds students accountable for the integrity of the work they submit. Students should be familiar with the Policy and know that it is their responsibility to learn about instructor and general academic expectations with regard to proper citation of sources in written work. The policy also governs the integrity of work submitted in exams and assignments as well as the veracity of signatures on attendance sheets and other verifications of participation in class activities. Serious sanctions can result from academic dishonesty of any sort. Students in REL 324 found violating academic integrity in any aspect of their class work will receive the grade F for that assignment. Students have a right to appeal. Please see <http://academicintegrity.syr.edu/>

*academic courtesy* All students are expected to follow simple rules of academic courtesy to fellow students and instructors. Please arrive on time to avoid disrupting the class. Once class begins, you must refrain from personal conversations. You must put away all non-course reading materials (e.g. newspapers). Turn off and put away all cell phones and MP3 players. Refrain from using computers for any non-course related activities. Please avoid premature preparations to leave class; your instructor will let you know when class is over. You may be asked to leave the class for the day if you do not follow these rules.