



◆THE HERO'S QUEST◆
Religion, Mythology, and Harry Potter¹

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Instructor: Sandy Russell Jones

Office hours via Zoom: Mon/Weds 4:15 – 5:00pm

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Fall 2020

Fully remote, asynchronous



FALL 2020 NOTES:

- Obviously this semester will be different than any other! This section of the course will be fully remote and *asynchronous*, which means your work for the course will be done on your own schedule. You will not be required to be online at any particular time.
- There will, however, be regular opportunities to connect with me, the instructor, and some of your classmates on Zoom:
 - o My office hours (listed above)
 - o Three (3) check-ins with me to make sure you're on track and answer any questions you have: end of Sept; end of Oct; end of Nov

¹ Due to recent public statements made by Harry Potter author J.K. Rowling that have caused harm to the LGBTQ community, students **will not be required to purchase any Harry Potter books or materials**. We will still discuss and analyze the first book of the series, *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*, adopting the position of Daniel Radcliffe, the actor who played Harry Potter in all of the films and a major contributor to Trevor's Project, who stated: *"If these books taught you that love is the strongest force in the universe, capable of overcoming anything; if they taught you that strength is found in diversity, and that dogmatic ideas of pureness lead to the oppression of vulnerable groups; if you believe that a particular character is trans, non-binary, or gender fluid, or that they are gay or bisexual; if you found anything in these stories that resonated with you and helped you at any time in your life — then that is between you and the book that you read, and it is sacred. And in my opinion nobody can touch that."*

- Occasional student pairs or small group activities
- Due dates/times for each of the assignments will be clearly listed on the syllabus and also laid out every Monday in weekly email messages.
- A general framework of the course is given below. The detailed syllabus will be available in late August.
- If you have any questions at all, please email me at the address above and I will be happy to tell you whatever you need to know about the course. I hope to see you in September!

*But often, in the world's most crowded streets,
 But often, in the din of strife,
 There arises an unspeakable desire
 After the knowledge of our buried life;
 A thirst to spend our fire and restless force
 In tracking out our true, original course;
 A longing to inquire
 Into the mystery of this heart which beats
 So wild, so deep in us – to know
 Whence our lives come and where they go.*

- Matthew Arnold, from The Buried Life

This course will focus on a major theme found in the mythologies of nearly every major (and minor) world religious tradition: the hero's quest. This common theme appears in the narratives of religions as different as the animism of the Trobriand islanders to the strict monotheism of Islam. While the details differ, representations of the hero's quest follow a remarkably similar pattern across time and distance. We will examine this pattern step by step as it appears in various religious narratives. We will also see how people are still today telling this story, in new ways, with new characters and new adventures, adapting it to contemporary life. In movies, fiction writing, and TV, we humans continue to travel the path of the hero.

Through comparing these popular versions of the hero's quest to those found in formal religious traditions, we will explore the role that this theme plays in human society, both past and present, local and universal. As well as finding commonalities, we will also discover what differs among versions of this story, and think about and discuss what these differences might mean in terms of the ways in which beliefs, ideals, and morals are communicated through the telling of stories. At a general level, we will explore three types of belief systems: Western (Judaism, Christianity, Islam), Eastern (Hinduism and Taoism), and Native North American.

Learning Goals

Upon successful completion of the course, students will:

- have a comparative understanding of the basic characteristics of major world religions
- have an introductory understanding of selected religious studies analytical concepts
- have a firm grasp of the genre of the hero myth, and be able to analyze its role in communicating religious ideals and creating meaning out of a chaotic world
- be able to identify contemporary manifestations of the hero myth and evaluate their role in contemporary society

Required Materials

BOOKS:

The Neverending Story by **Michael Ende** (There is a film version of this story, but please acquire and read the book. We'll reference specific parts of the text in class. On the test you'll be asked to cite quotes.) ISBN: 9780140386332

The Bhagavad Gita, trans. **Barbara Stoller Miller** ISBN: 9780553213652

The Bhagavad Gita as it is, trans. **Swami Prabhupada** ISBN: 9780892131341

Illusions by **Richard Bach** ISBN:9780440204886

FILMS:

Finding Joe (2011) Available for rent on Amazon Prime and iTunes

Hunger Games (2012) Available for rent on Amazon Prime, iTunes

Groundhog Day (1993) Available on Netflix; Amazon Prime; iTunes

The Lego Movie (2014) Available for rent on Amazon Prime; iTunes

Some of the scholars whose work you will be reading:

Mary Douglas

Emile Durkheim

Mircea Eliade

Abraham Heschel

Bruce Lincoln

Russell McCutcheon

Ivan Strenski

Victor Turner

Course Requirements and Grading:

Please note: these are the standard course requirements during regular semesters. They will be adapted for the fully remote version during Fall 2020.

Blogs	10%
Wikis	10%
Test I	20%
Test II	20%
Test III	15%
Final short paper	15%
Class attendance & participation	10%