



English 591:004
Graduate Introduction to Folklore
Fall 2020
M 7:20-10:00pm

Instructor: Prof. Benjamin Gatling
Email: bgatling@gmu.edu

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course offers a graduate-level introduction to the discipline of folklore studies. We will begin by exploring the basic definitional characteristics of folklore and the concepts that form the foundation for folklore research. We will go on to survey some of the major genres that folklorists use to classify the materials they study. The second half of the course looks in more depth at eight "keywords" for the study of expressive culture: group, aesthetics, genre, text, context, tradition, performance, and identity. We will explore the significance and influence of each of these keywords on folklore scholarship and use them as lenses through which to investigate a case study of your own choosing.

It seems that the university reminds us in every email that we are living in unprecedented times. The phrase has taken on folkloric qualities of its own. This semester we'll think through how core concepts in folklore studies might help us approach these "unprecedented times," including topics like COVID-19, dismantling white supremacy, and Trumpist politics.

ASSIGNMENTS

Discussion Leading: You will have one opportunity during the course of the semester to lead our class discussion with a partner on a day's assigned readings. You'll prepare questions that will inspire class discussion. Your guided discussion should last approximately half the class period. On your day, you are the expert on the readings. Your task is not to lecture, but rather to guide class discussion, pose questions about the readings, and help emphasize the broader implications of the concepts under discussion. You'll want to begin by helping us articulate the general projects of the readings. Then, you'll want to help the class think through the broader implications of the readings, suggest the readings' connections to topics we've already discussed, and offer critical evaluations of their content.

Reading Responses (RRs): Each week that you don't lead discussion, you'll craft a ~400 word reading response. Your response should bring out the main themes of the readings and highlight what you see as their broader implications, e.g. theoretical, methodological, etc. I'd especially like for you to connect the readings, where appropriate, to your own research and theoretical interests, evaluating their arguments in light of your work and suggesting how they might be useful to your ongoing projects. Lastly, pose some questions you'd like to see the class address in discussion. Post your RR on the course Blackboard discussion board by the beginning of class.

Genre Survey Paper: For this assignment, you will choose one genre of folklore and write a brief survey (~5-7 pages) of recent literature on that genre within the discipline of folklore studies. You will compile a bibliography of at least ten academic sources (journal articles, book chapters, and/or books); these are the sources that you'll draw on to write your survey paper. We'll discuss possible genres to choose from in class.

Term Paper and Presentation: Using theoretical perspectives found in course readings and from outside research, you'll write a term paper (~15-18 pages) connected in some way to your larger research project/interests. Your paper should foreground at least one of the keywords from the second half of the semester. Plan to meet with me by 11/2 to decide on a topic. You should come to our meeting with an abstract for your paper that conforms to AFS abstract writing guidelines: <http://www.afsnet.org/?AMAFSstyle>.

Special Note for MFA Students: In lieu of a term paper, MFA students may complete an alternative creative project. MFA students should submit at least ten pages (no maximum) of **NEW** creative writing (poetry, fiction, creative non-fiction, etc.). MFA students should also write a reflection and analysis (at least five pages) on the role our course material within their writing and writing process. In the reflection, students should comment on the insights they've gained from our course readings, discussions, etc. Students should refer directly to course readings in their reflection/analysis.

READINGS

You are required to have access to five texts:

1. McNeil, Lynne S. 2013. *Folklore Rules*. Logan: Utah State University Press. ISBN 978-0-97421-905-0
2. Kitta, Andrea. 2019. *The Kiss of Death*. Logan: Utah State University Press. ISBN 9781607329268. Available free online: <https://upcolorado.com/about-us/news-features/item/3825-free-resources-for-for-understanding-cultural-responses-to-the-covid19-outbreak>.
3. Orejuela, Fernando and Stephanie Shonekan eds. 2018. *Black Lives Matter and Music*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press. ISBN 9780253038425
4. Phillips, Whitney and Ryan M. Milner. 2017. *The Ambivalent Internet*. Malden: Polity. ISBN 9781509501274
5. Feintuch, Burt ed. 2003. *Eight Words for the Study of Expressive Culture*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press. ISBN 9780252071096

All other readings will be posted to Blackboard.

GRADING

This course will focus on qualitative not quantitative assessment. While you will get a final grade at the end of the term, I will not be grading individual assignments, but rather asking questions and making comments that engage your work. You will also be reflecting carefully on your own work. The intention here is to help you focus on working in a more organic way, as opposed to working as you think you're expected to. If this process causes more anxiety than it alleviates, see me at any point to confer about your progress in the course to date. If you are worried about your grade, your best strategy should be to join the discussions, do the reading, and complete the assignments. (Paragraph adapted from <https://www.jessestommel.com/why-i-dont-grade/>.)

You will write two directed self-reflections, one at the midterm of the semester and one at the end, that will allow you to participate in your self-assessment. I always reserve the right to change your grade as appropriate. The following offers a possible template:

25% RRs
15% Discussion Leading
20% Genre Survey Paper
40% Term Paper

95-100 A 80-82 B- 67-69 D+

90-94 A-	77-79 C+	63-66 D
87-89 B+	73-76 C	60-62 D-
83-86 B	70-72 C -	<59 F

COURSE POLICIES

Pandemic Teaching Guiding Principles:*

1. Nobody signed up for this.
 - Not for the sickness, not for the social distancing, not for the sudden end of our collective lives together on campus
 - Not for an online class, not for teaching remotely, not for learning from home, not for mastering new technologies, not for varied access to learning materials
2. The humane option is the best option.
 - We are going to prioritize supporting each other as humans
 - We are going to prioritize simple solutions that make sense for the most
 - We are going to prioritize sharing resources and communicating clearly
3. We cannot just do the same thing online.
 - Some expectations are no longer reasonable
 - Some objectives are no longer valuable
4. We will foster intellectual nourishment, social connection, and personal accommodation.
5. We will remain flexible and adjust to the situation.
 - Nobody knows where this is going and what we'll need to adapt
 - Everybody needs support and understanding in this unprecedented moment

(*Adapted from <https://www.chronicle.com/article/nobody-signed-up-for-this-one-professors-guidelines-for-an-interrupted-semester/>)

I will exercise the utmost flexibility in accommodating students who experience unexpected difficulties in their coursework during the Fall 2020 semester due to the effects of COVID 19. You should do your best to identify the specific issues you are encountering (difficulty in attending class due to the need to isolate, problems with technology, the onset of illness of self or dependents, and so on) as early as possible so that we can discuss alternatives.

Class Format/Zoom: Our class will meet synchronously online every Monday evening at 7:20pm on Zoom. For now, you can access the meeting here:

<https://gmu.zoom.us/j/3381479785?pwd=dU11NERGeU1BNk5MOWVvRIJaclFnZz09>

Meeting ID: 338 147 9785

Passcode: Folklore

You will need an authenticated Zoom account to join. For Mason Zoom support and access requirements, see: <https://its.gmu.edu/service/zoom/>.

Attendance/Participation: You are expected to attend every class. The course will be taught in a seminar format. This means that participation from you, the student, is vital to successful completion of the course. Participation includes: 1) doing the assigned readings and RRs and 2) participating actively in class discussions on Zoom. Participation also includes being able to access copies of each day's readings during our class meeting.

Plagiarism: I will follow all university procedures on academic misconduct. Plagiarism will not be tolerated. I encourage you to consult GMU's Writing Center's guide to avoiding plagiarism (<http://writingcenter.gmu.edu/?p=499>). For more information on GMU's Honor Code and its requirements, see <http://honorcode.gmu.edu> .

Special Accommodations: Students with disabilities who believe they may need accommodations in this class are encouraged to contact the Office of Disability Services (<http://ods.gmu.edu>) as soon as possible. I will adhere to all accommodation letters given to me from the Office of Disability Services. I will not ask students to disclose their disability.

Availability and Office Hours: I will do my best to respond to each email within twenty-four hours. I am also more than happy to arrange a time to meet with you outside of class on Zoom. Please email me to schedule an appointment.

Blackboard Login Instructions: Access to [MyMason](#) and GMU email are required to participate successfully in this course. Please make sure to update your computer and prepare yourself to begin using the online format BEFORE the first day of class. Check [the IT Support Center](#) website. Navigate to [the Student Support page](#) for help and information about Blackboard. In the menu bar to the left you will find all the tools you need to become familiar with for this course. Take time to learn each. Make sure you run a system check a few days before class. Become familiar with the attributes of Blackboard and online learning.

Technology Requirements: You will need access to a Windows or Macintosh computer with at least 2 GB of RAM and access to a fast and reliable broadband internet connection (e.g., cable, DSL). You will need speakers or headphones to hear recorded content and a headset with a microphone is recommended for the best experience. You will need a browser and operating system that are listed compatible or certified with the Blackboard version available on the [myMason Portal](#). See [supported browsers and operating systems](#). You will need to be able to access Zoom. For Zoom access requirements, see: <https://its.gmu.edu/service/zoom/>.

COURSE SCHEDULE:

<p>WEEK 1: Aug. 24</p>	<p>COURSE INTRODUCTION</p> <p>Read: McNeill, <i>Folklore Rules</i></p>
<p>WEEK 2: Aug. 31</p>	<p>CORE CONCEPTS</p> <p>Read: Bronner, Simon. 2017. "What is folklore, and why does it matter?" In <i>Folklore: the basics</i>, pp. 16-47.</p> <p>Noyes, Dorothy. 2016. "Humble Theory," In <i>Grand Theory in Folkloristics</i>, pp. 71-77.</p> <p>Bauman, Richard. 2016, "The Philology of the Vernacular," In <i>Grand Theory in Folkloristics</i>, pp. 63-70.</p> <p>Moody-Turner, Shirley. 2013. "Introduction," In <i>Black Folklore and the Politics of Racial Representation</i>, pp. 3-17.</p> <p>Write: RR #1</p>
<p>WEEK 3 Sept. 14</p>	<p>GENRES I: STORY, TALE, PERSONAL NARRATIVE</p> <p>Read: Zipes, Jack. 2012. "Evolution of Storytelling and Fairy Tales," In <i>The Irresistible Fairy Tale</i>, pp. 1-20.</p> <p>Maria Tatar. 2003. "Sex and Violence: The Hard Core of Fairy Tales" In <i>The Hard Facts of the Grimms' Fairy Tales</i>, pp. 3-38.</p> <p>Shuman, Amy. 2005. "Small-World Stories," In <i>Other People's Stories</i>, pp. 89-119.</p> <p>Write: RR #2</p>
<p>WEEK 4 Sept. 21</p>	<p>GENRES II: BELIEVING, RUMOR, LEGEND</p> <p>Read: Kitta, <i>The Kiss of Death</i></p> <p>Watch: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x6gKUG6DTE&feature=youtu.be</p>

	<p>Write: RR #3</p>
<p>WEEK 5 Sept. 28</p>	<p>GENRES III: FOLKLIFE, MUSIC, MATERIAL CULTURE</p> <p>Read: Orejuela and Shonekan eds. <i>Black Lives Matter and Music</i></p> <p>Write: RR #4</p>
<p>WEEK 6 Oct. 5</p>	<p>GENRES IV: INTERNET FOLKLORE, HUMOR</p> <p>Read: Phillips and Milner, <i>The Ambivalent Internet</i></p> <p>Peck, Andrew. 2020 "A Problem of Amplification," <i>Journal of American Folklore</i> 133(529): 329-551.</p> <p>Write: RR #5</p>
<p>WEEK 7 Oct. 13*</p> <p>*Fall Break Schedule Change</p>	<p>GENRES V: FESTIVAL, FOODWAYS</p> <p>Read: Stoeltje, Beverly.1993. "Power and the Ritual Genres: American Rodeo." <i>Western Folklore</i> 52 (2/4): 135-56.</p> <p>Cadaval, Olivia. 1991. "Making a Place Home: The Latino Festival." In <i>Creative Ethnicity: Symbols and Strategies of Contemporary Life</i>, pp. 204-22.</p> <p>Long, Lucy. 2007. "Green Bean Casserole and Midwestern Identity: A Regional Foodways Aesthetic and Ethos." <i>Midwestern Folklore</i> 33(1): 29-44.</p> <p>Kim, Sojin and R. Mark Livengood. 1995. "Ramen Noodles and Spam: Popular Foods, Significant Tastes," In <i>Digest</i> 15: 2-11.</p> <p>Write: RR #6</p>
<p>WEEK 8 Oct. 19</p>	<p>CONFERENCES</p> <p>Write: Genre Survey Paper and Self Reflection Due</p>
<p>WEEK 9 Oct. 26</p>	<p>KEYWORDS I: GROUP, AESTHETICS</p>

	<p>Read: "Group," in <i>Eight Words</i>, pp. 7-41</p> <p>Noyes, Dorothy. 2014. "Aesthetic Is the Opposite of Anaesthetic: On Tradition and Attention." <i>Journal of Folklore Research</i> 51(2): 125-75.</p> <p>Lindquist, Danille Christensen. 2006. "'Locating' the Nation: Football Game Day and American Dreams in Central Ohio," <i>Journal of American Folklore</i> 119(474): 444-88.</p> <p>(Special for Halloween!) Santino, Jack. 1983. "Halloween in America: Contemporary Customs and Performances." <i>Western Folklore</i> 42(1): 1-20.</p> <p>Write: RR #8</p>
<p>WEEK 10 Nov. 2</p>	<p>KEYWORDS II: TEXT, GENRE</p> <p>Read: "Text" and "Genre" in <i>Eight Words</i>, pp. 69-120.</p> <p>Foster, Michael Dylan. 2016. "The Challenge of the Folkloresque," In <i>The Folkloresque</i>, pp. 3-33.</p> <p>Write: RR #9</p> <p>Term Paper Abstract due. Students should meet with me about their final paper by 11/2.</p>
<p>WEEK 11 Nov. 9</p>	<p>KEYWORDS III: PERFORMANCE, CONTEXT</p> <p>Read: "Performance" and "Context" in <i>Eight Words</i>, pp. 121-175.</p> <p>Cashman, Ray. 2011. Selections from <i>Storytelling on the Northern Irish Border</i></p> <p>Garlough, Christine. 2011. "Folklore and Performing Political Protest: Calls of Conscience at the 2011 Wisconsin Labor Protests," <i>Western Folklore</i>, 70(3/4): 337-370.</p> <p>Write: RR #10</p>
<p>WEEK 12 Nov. 16</p>	<p>KEYWORDS IV: TRADITION, IDENTITY</p>

	<p>Read: "Tradition" and "Identity" in <i>Eight Words</i>, pp. 176-222.</p> <p>Hafstein, Valdimar Tr. 2018. "Intangible Heritage as a Festival," <i>Journal of American Folklore</i> 131(520): 127-149.</p> <p>Bock Sheila and Katherine Borland. 2011. "Exotic Identities: Dance, Difference, and Self-Fashioning," <i>Journal of Folklore Research</i> 48(1): 1-36.</p> <p>Write: RR #11</p>
<p>WEEK 13 Nov. 23</p>	<p>STUDENT PRESENTATIONS</p>
<p>WEEK 14 Nov. 30</p>	<p>STUDENT PRESENTATIONS</p> <p>Write: Term Paper and Final Self Reflection Due by 12/4</p>