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.

Format: The course will consist of lectures and discussion

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

Course Canvas Site: You are responsible for checking the course Canvas site regularly for 
updates and other information. The syllabus, course readings, worksheets, lectures, and 
announcements will be posted there.

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

Course Requirements

Required Texts: Dylan Evans & Oscar Zarate, *Introducing Evolutionary Psychology: A Graphic Guide, 3rd ed.* Available at UO Bookstore. All other readings are posted on Canvas (see Schedule of Readings, below).

Readings: To access the readings, go to the home page on the course Canvas site. Readings are organized by week (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 come to class.

Worksheets: Since this is a science-credit course, the discussion sections are organized as labs, in which the objects you examine are texts. At each discussion section meeting, you will complete a worksheet that requires you to apply concepts presented in class that week. You must print out the worksheet and take it with you to discussion section. To access the worksheet for a given week, go to that week’s lesson on the course Canvas site.

Grading: Your course grade will be based on the total points you earn on the Worksheets, Midterm Exam, and Final Exam. Worksheets are designed to review and apply important course concepts, and prepare you for exams. Exams are multiple-choice and will cover lectures, readings, and films. The midterm will cover weeks 1 through 5; the final will be cumulative but will primarily focus on material from weeks 6 through 10. You will need a #2 pencil for each exam. Exams and assignments must be taken/turned in at the scheduled time—under no circumstances will make-up exams or assignment extensions be given without a documented excuse (e.g., signed note from your doctor). If you will not be able to take an exam or turn in an assignment at the scheduled time, you must notify me or your GTF in advance.

Grading Rubric: Grading is done on a straight percentage scale.

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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.

Schedule Of Readings

**Week 1: Origins**

TUE Scalise Sugiyama (2005) “Reverse-engineering narrative” (optional)

THR Evans & Zarate (pp. 3-60)

    Boyd et al. (2011) “The cultural niche”

**Week 2: Cultural Transmission**

TUE 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**

TUE Evans & Zarate (pp. 87-95)

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

        “Tugtoväk the moose, who duped the kayak man”

THR Evans & Zarate (pp. 96-104)

    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**

**TUE** Evans & Zarate (pp. 61-77, 143-150)

Boehm (1993) “Egalitarian behavior and reverse dominance hierarchy” (p. 227 to top of p. 236 only!)

“Why Kwanyip never lacked guanacos”

“A tale about stingy reindeer-owners”

“Siligtigkê who murdered the women of the village”

**THR** Marshall (1976) “Sharing, talking, and giving: relief of social tensions among the !Kung”

“Coyote and the seven buffalo”

“Coyote marries the chief’s daughter”

“Coyote kills Deer with his ceremony”

“Coyote and the expanding meat”

“Coyote loses the power to obtain food”

“Sendeh overeats and clings to a grape vine”

**Week 5: Mating**

**TUE** Evans & Zarate (pp. 105-132)

“Puan takes a lover”

“The rival husbands”

“Two women”

“A Wasco woman deceives her husband”

“The Grizzly Bears and the Black Bears”

**THR** Evans & Zarate 2005 (pp. 81-86)


“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**

**TUE** MIDTERM

In-class, closed book; bring #2 pencil


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 origin of the Kiowa Apache”

“Kunuk the orphan boy” (pp. 132-135 only)

**Week 7: Heroes & Hunters**

**TUE** Jobling 2001 “The psychological foundations of the hero-ogre story”

“The birth of Killer-of-Enemies and Child-of-the-Water” (pp. 47-77)

“Ôeõemë, the child warrior”

“The Tale of La-la”

“Clever Kaskoyuk”

“How Bear Woman got her name”

“The old woman and the polar bear”

**THR** Barrett (2005) “Adaptations to predators and prey”

Evans & Zarate (review pp. 50-56)

Hill & Hurtado 1995
“A stubborn fisherman”
“Armadillo and Jaguar exchange teeth”
“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**

**TUE**  Blurton-Jones & Konner (1976) “!Kung knowledge of animal behavior”
“Coyote visits the Red Ants”
“Hunting experiences” (first story only)
“Tugtoväk the moose, who duped the kayak man”
“Enemy sorcerers turn into coatis”
“Pine Squirrel criticizes Deer”
“Tapir tries to hide”
“Day and night”

**THR**  Galef & Clark (1971) “Social factors in the poison avoidance and feeding behavior of wild and domesticated rat pups”
Evans & Zarate (review pp. 57-60)
“Caterpillar’s tobacco and the kernals of wild fruit”
“Red Brocket and the false palm fruits”
“The war of the fishes with the Okanagon”
“Fish Hawk invents implements” (pp. 72-74)
“Theft of fire”

**Week 9: Subsistence Stress**

**TUE**  Sobel & Bettles (2000) “Winter hunger, winter myths: subsistence risk and mythology among the Klamath and Modoc”
“An entire band is killed by the Cree”
“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”

THR  Holiday

**Week 10: Wayfinding & Environmental Hazards**


“Qoa’qlqal”

“How the land was distributed” (pp. 65-67 only)

Tennant & Bitar 1981 “Training for survival”


“Tidal Wave”

“Oral history saves island from tsunami”

“Crater Lake 1865”

“The big fire”

“The story of the dolphins”

THR  Evans & Zarate (pp. 77-80)

Tooley et al. (2006) “Generalising the Cinderella Effect to unintentional childhood fatalities”

“Some neglected children are transformed into birds”

“Two boys stranded on the ice”

“Wild Woman” (#45)

“The little girl who was kidnapped”

“Two children escape from an At!at’a’lia” (pp. 274-276)
Week 11: Final Exam

12:30-2:30 Wednesday, December 9th. Comprehensive, closed book; bring #2 pencil.