Storytelling: Ghosts, Monsters, and Stories of Wonder

ENCR 495
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“You should understand / the way it was / back then, / because it is the same / even now.”

“Okay go ahead laugh if you want but as I tell the story it will begin to happen.”

Leslie Marmon Silko

“the different season as season follows season, the climate different as well, / spring comes (not as brutal as it once was, back there, back then; / back there, back then: a thing fled, another house, another land, less tender / vaguely remembered, just a few papers and photographs left) / the sky another color, and other sounds, other heat, / more rain, and a different color to the trees (greener but a lighter green) / comes imperceptibly (the leaves not falling): / and birds, more birds, more living things (fireflies for instance, but in another season)”

Pascalle Monnier Bayart

“I always wanted to get people's stories and access to their lives. I feel I'm at the interface of biography and biology, person and person-hood.”

Oliver Sacks

Welcome. Our lives are stories. History itself is a grand story woven together of many stories. And what is your place in the fabric of stories—what stories do you hold that once shared will help others to see the world with new eyes? Traditional American Indian stories were told in deepest winter so the people could survive. Stories lifted the people from hunger, from death and made them see visions of perseverance and hope. Some traditional stories spun a furious wind of telling and stories would travel great distances at astonishing speeds revealing that story, voice, and the spoken breath is a mighty vehicle that possesses its own authority. And it is no different today then it was back then—we tell stories to survive. There has been a resurgence of storytelling in this country and around the world. Isabelle Allende, says, “A story is a living creature with its own destiny and my job is to allow it to tell itself.”

GHOSTS, MONSTERS, AND STORIES OF WONDER it is merely a focal lens for discovery. We will look at traditional and not so traditional ways of storytelling. We will seek out urban legends and ghost stories, monster stories, UFO and Sasquatch stories, humorous stories, gossip stories, and miraculous everyday stories. All the stories we will hear will create a firestorm of stories and with it new inspiration for writing and for living. This is a class for everyone, the writer, the storyteller, and the listener but come prepared for a life-changing event for stories are a powerful entity.

Course Goals:
  o To gain the skills to artfully and creatively communicate.
  o To gain further understanding of the elements of narrative craft.
  o To incorporate literary constructs in both oral and written stories.
  o Most of all, to learn the oldest survival skill – to gain an appreciation of the stories that can save you.
Texts:

We will be using several texts in this class to help direct the process of storytelling including in order:
- **WHAT IT IS**, BARRY (Guidebook)
- **THE UNCANNY READER**, Sandor
- **PIECES FROM THE LEFT HAND**, Lennon

Recommended:
- **WINTER IN THE BLOOD**, Welch
- **NOTES FROM NO MAN'S LAND**, Biss

Required | Graduate Students
- **VOICES IN THE NIGHT**, Milhauser

**REQUIREMENTS:**

1. **Active Participation:** Always be prepared to tell a story. Pay attention. Listen. In-class exercises/assignments and participation, including Memory Glimpse Assignments, account for 40% of your grade.

2. **Memory Glimpses/Short Prompts:** September 24 – October 29. Beginning September 24 thru October 29 you will turn in Memory Glimpses/Short Prompts for a six (6) week period. Undergraduates are responsible for turning in two (2) paragraphs per week. Graduate students are responsible for turning four (4) paragraphs per week. Overall, undergraduates will turn in a total of twelve (12) short prompts, and graduates twenty-four (24) short prompts. Refer to sample handout.

3. **Midterm and Synopsis:** October 15 – November 5. Midterms average between 10-15 (15 minutes is at the far limit.) I will be handing out mid-term synopsis forms on October 1. Midterms require props—lighting or background images, recorded sounds or, mood setting. It can be something as simple as an image on the screen, boxes set up to resemble a particular memory setting, or something as elaborate as a backup musician. If you think you might be presenting a video please let me know as soon as possible. The information you provide on the synopsis will help me set up the date of your presentation. It is rare that someone wants to be an early presenter and I will try to accommodate your desires. All students must present. Please see me if you wish to collaborate. Midterms account for 20% of your grade.

4. **Finals:** November 19 – December 10. Group Collaborations. We will close the semester with Stories of Wonder. Have you ever experienced a miracle or had an experience that was wondrously baffling? Have you ever asked yourself how could that have possibly happened? We will close the class with a joyous raucous storytelling final—music perhaps? Singing maybe? Dancing? Art installations, all welcome. The final will have collaborative groups, however, there will be a few choice spots for single storytellers elected by group nomination. The final is 20% of your grade.

5. **Cabinets of Wonders, Cabinets of Curiosities, Wunderkammers, and Inventory List:** Finals week meeting / December 17, 7:40-9:40. For purposes of this class, I will call them Cabinets of Wonder. Ok, I lie. I love Wunderkammers, and Museums of Personal Fascinations—many many names. Your Cabinet of Curiosity is 10% of your grade. I urge you to began thinking about this project now. It is the spark of your creativity and will help define the stories you share with the class.

6. **Class attendance is required.** If possible, please email me when you cannot attend class. Because this class requires hands on participation you will not be able to make-up missed exercises. If you are absent for more than two (2) classes it will affect your grade. If you miss more than three (3) classes, you will fail the class. Unique circumstances arise from time to time and allowances will be made when necessary if emergency or illness is documented.

**Note:** Independence and creative thinking is the directive of this class. Please begin brainstorming about your midterm presentation now. If you wish to interview someone or make a short video or stage a play or
dance routine or? I’d begin planning now. Do not wait. Depending on your presentation, you may want to try out the equipment in the room, have a practice run with the projector or computer, to alleviate any problems or glitches. The earlier you begin thinking about your presentation, the more enjoyable your time will be.

Course Policies
1. All papers must be typed. Work that is not typed will be returned without credit. Story Glimpses should be numbered and single-space. Please use standard fonts in 12 pica. Please keep back-up copies of all the work you turn in. Written work is due at the beginning of class. Place your papers on the side bench to the right of the entry. (If the bench is on your left as you arrive, the bench we use is on the other side of the stage.)
2. Also, always type your name, the course number, and the due date on the top right of the page. Papers should be professional without scribbles or last minute additions.
3. Please respect your colleagues and do not disrupt the class by late arrival. If you must arrive late, please make sure you seat yourself in the first desk immediately available to you so as not to disrupt the class. Once the presentation is complete feel free to find a more suitable desk.

General Information

- Plagiarism – See University Catalog.
- Deadlines: Before the course has begun or during the first three (3) weeks of the semester you can drop the course on Cyberbear – http://cyberbear.umt.edu. The last day to drop/add, change option is noted in the course catalog. Please make sure that you are aware of the important dates that affect you. Undergraduates must obtain advisor’s signature after the drop date. After the 30th instructional day has passed, you must petition to drop.
- Finals - We will meet during finals week at the assigned time: Thursday, December 18, 7:40 – 9:40. Please keep this date in mind when making travel arrangements.
- Students with Disabilities: All students are welcome and will be treated fairly and with respect. Qualified students with disabilities will receive appropriate accommodations in this course. Please come and see me if you require additional assistance. If it is necessary, please be prepared to provide a letter from your DSS Coordinator.

Class Protocol:
Expect the unexpected and prepare for it. The emotional tone of the class is never cast—what may be funny or sad to you might appear sad or hilarious to an audience. Roll with the punches. Own the story that you tell in class. If it is a story with harrowing or heartbreaking aspects expect that you may become emotional but take a moment, collect yourself, and go on. It is important, however, that you do not use the class as a counseling session. A story can be heart rendering but if it goes on for even a beat too long it can have a devastating effect on a class as audience. The act of telling a story is a physical thing with physical consequences. A story reverberates in a classroom.

The National Storytelling Network explains:
“Storytelling is interactive. Storytelling involves a two-way interaction between storyteller and listener. The response of the listener influences the telling of the story. In fact, storytelling emerges from the interaction and cooperative, coordinated efforts of teller and audience… The completed story happens in the mind of the listener, a unique
and personalized individual. The listener becomes, therefore, a co-creator of the story as experienced.”

Be mindful of your story’s impact on others. You are more than welcome to tell a difficult story but do not wallow in troubled times as bad times have a way of resurrecting in the moment. Be kind. Remember to include the good or interesting memories that buoy up troubled events in storytelling.

- Be respectful and act respectfully. No one wishes to tell an important story to someone who is not paying attention. Let the presenter know you are listening fully to his or her story.
- Computers are unnecessary in class unless you are using them for a presentation or you have a disability that necessitates use. Please put your computer away so you do not have a shield between you and the class.
- Turn off your cell phones as you enter the class and stow them.

This syllabus is subject to change.