

Anthropology 1130
Assignment 2: Analysis of a Story or Myth
Due in class Monday April 7, 2008

Introduction

This assignment is designed to give you experience analyzing a story or a myth as anthropologists do after they have recorded such stories as part of their fieldwork. The assignment requires that you identify a myth from a culture or religion of your choice, add contextual information about the culture, and then apply one of several possible lines of analysis to the story. Some library research is required. Details follow.

Operational Details

Your essay should be about 5 or 6 pages in length, double spaced. I am expecting 1200-1500 words. Citations and references are required in this paper. You may use the MLA or APA citation systems or the system that anthropologists use (see, for example, *American Anthropologist*, or the example at the end of this handout). Good writing counts. Please proof-read your paper and get someone else to do so too. (Make sure they can write!)

This assignment is due by in class on April 7, 2008. (Note: Your syllabus says the paper is due on April 2. You may still hand it in that day.) This paper is worth 25% of your grade and it will be marked out of 25. If you hand it in after April 7 and before April 13, it is considered late and you will lose 1.5 points (6%). If you hand it in after April 14, you will lose 3 points (12%).

Recommended Process: Summary Version

1. Identify a culture or religion that interests you.
2. Choose a story from that culture or religion using library research and/or the internet.
3. Read the story.
4. Research the religion or culture to learn about the cultural context of the myth.
5. Choose an approach for analyzing the myth.
6. Write an essay analyzing the myth. The analysis should include an ethnographic summary of the culture in question or a description of the religion.
7. Submit the essay and a copy of the myth.

Recommended Process: Detailed Version

1. Identify a culture or religion that interests you.

You may choose a culture or religion you are familiar with. Be aware that simply being interested in a culture, religion, or part of the world does not mean it will be easy to find information about that culture or religion. In some cases, there may not be any information at all.

2. Choose a story, myth, legend, or folktale from that culture or religion using library research and/or the internet.

Once you have identified the culture or religion you want to investigate, you need to find a story or a myth from that culture. In many cases, the easiest way to do this is to look at a few ethnographies from the culture in question and locate a myth in one of those books. This approach has the added advantage

of providing you with a library source to help you with the analysis of the myth. Oftentimes, the myths in your book will be written out separately from the rest of the text. They may be included in chapters on religion or as appendices as well

You may locate your myth or story on the internet. This comes with cautions. You may not find any contextual material for your myth on the internet – that is, the internet might not tell you where the story came from or who recorded it. That might be useful information, although you may still be able to find helpful information in the library.

Note: The story does not have to be religious. It does not have to involve the supernatural or religious symbols. Legends, folktales, and historical stories are all acceptable texts for this assignment.

I would recommend that you talk to me about your culture and myth choices once you have made them.

3. Read the story.

Read the myth or story and take notes about the central themes in it. What kind of myth is it? What is the myth talking about? You might refer to both your textbook and your notes from class for ideas about what to look for when you are doing your reading.

4. Research the religion or culture to learn about the cultural context of the myth.

With library research, learn about the political, economic, and kinship systems of the culture in question. You may also be interested in the organizational structure of the religion, including information about its specialists, rituals, and methods of social control. Read enough to be able to say what the myth is about and why it is important to this culture.

Note: you must refer to at least one published book or academic article in your write-up (and not your textbook). This is not to say that you must avoid using only the internet for your research. There are lots of useful websites on religion and different religions out there. You are welcome to use them in association with at least one library source.

Be clear, however, that many religious websites are meant to provide information to specific congregations or groups of followers. They may have particular biases that would be worth noting as part of your evaluation of the websites. And, as I am sure you know, all websites have their biases and not all websites are suitable for scholarly and academic work. I refer you to the information put out by Douglas College Library about evaluating websites.

http://www.douglas.bc.ca/library/evaluate_html.html

<http://www.lib.berkeley.edu/TeachingLib/Guides/Internet/Evaluate.html>

<http://lib.nmsu.edu/instruction/eval.html>

5. Choose an approach for analyzing the myth and apply the approach to your myth.

With reference to Chapter 2 in Stein and Stein and our lectures, choose one approach for analyzing the myth. Re-read the myth with your approach in mind and note the features of the myth that emerge with the approach you have chosen.

6. Write an essay analyzing the myth.

Your essay should include the following components:

<u>Section</u>	<u>Inclusions</u>	<u>Suggested Length</u>
Introduction	Include, at minimum, the name of the group or religion, its location, and the approach to analysis you will use	1 paragraph
Ethnographic Background	Tell me enough about the culture or religion to be able to understand the myth. This background material will be based on academic books and articles available in the library. As noted above, it may also be based on internet research. (The cautions listed above also apply.)	2 pages
Myth Analysis	Analyze the myth using the approach you've chosen. Ask yourself: what features of the myth are most significant given your approach? What do you learn about the myth and about the culture with the approach you use? This section is the main focus of the paper and should be based on your own ideas. Those ideas will come from the myth or story AND from the background to the culture or religion that you have read.	3 pages
Conclusion	Summarize your findings and, if necessary, remind me about the connections between your analysis and the ethnographic background.	1 paragraph

Note: the above components and lengths are meant as a guide. Creativity and modifications are recommended.

7. Submit the essay and a copy of the myth.

Other Notes

- Use examples from class and the text to guide your research and writing.
- Citations and references must be provided. You may use the MLA or APA citation systems or the system that anthropologists use. An example of that system of internal referencing is appended at the end of this handout.
- To reiterate the point in the last bullet: You must use references and citations. Do not copy blocks of text out of websites and paste them into a paper as your own work. Do not copy blocks of text out of books and re-write them in your paper. You can, of course, use the ideas of other people. You are expected to. But, you must note where the ideas came from with a system of citations within the text and a bibliography at the end of the text.
- While I have said that you must have a minimum of 1 book or academic article source, you may need more than one source to write this paper.
- Good writing counts. Please proof-read your paper and get someone else to do so too. (Make sure they can write!)

A Short Guide to Citations and Bibliographies in Anthropology

Anthropologists use a system of ‘internal footnoting’ in their writing. The sources of all direct quotations must be cited in this way, as should any information paraphrased by you. Quotations of three lines or more should be offset from the rest of the text, as below. Then, only the sources actually cited in the paper are listed on the ‘References Cited’ page at the end of your essay. The general style is illustrated with the following example from a research paper.

Sample Text

First, Ellen and Harris say that the representation of traditional ecological knowledge results in its presentation *outside* of culture, despite a regular call to stop separating this knowledge from the people and situations in which it is generated, reproduced and transformed (Ellen and Harris 2000:25-26). In my mind, the sum of the data points on topographical maps is not equal to the entire social context despite the fact that the data is often used that way. Second, it is assumed that the value of TEK is “derived from lived experience” (Kuhn and Duerden 1996:74). Nadasdy comments:

... there are those who do not subscribe to this rigid distinction between humans and the environment [and] ... in the absence of a strict separation between humans and the environment, the very idea of separating ‘ecological’ from ‘non-ecological’ knowledge becomes nonsensical (Nadasdy 1999:4).

To use a Western definition of the physical environment denies native peoples the opportunity to teach us about their knowledge and conception of the world.

Explanations

Citations are offered after quoted and paraphrased material. Direct quotations shorter than three sentences are typed directly into the essay text and offset with quotation marks. Direct quotations longer than three lines are set off from the rest of the text using single spacing and indentations.

References Cited

- Ellen, Roy F. and Holly Harris 2000 Introduction. In *Indigenous Environmental Knowledge and its Transformations: Critical Anthropological Perspectives*, Roy F. Ellen, Peter Parkes, and Alan Bisker, eds. Toronto: Harwood Academic Publishers, pp 1-35.
- Kuhn, Richard G. and Frank Duerden 1996 A Review of Traditional Environmental Knowledge: An Interdisciplinary Canadian Perspective. *Culture* 16(1):71-84.
- Maffi, Luisa 2001 *On Biocultural Diversity: Linking Language, Knowledge, and the Environment*. Washington DC: Smithsonian Institution Press.
- Nadasdy, Paul. 1999. The Politics of TEK: Power and the ‘Integration’ of Knowledge. *Arctic Anthropology*. 36(1-2):1-18.