

# CMGT 599: GLOBAL STORYTELLING: THE POWER OF NARRATIVE ACROSS CULTURE, MEDIA AND SOCIAL CHANGE

Annenberg School For Communication and Journalism



*"The universe is made up of stories, not atoms." – Muriel Rukeyser*

*"Telling stories is a quest for the meaning of life." – Ang Lee*

*"The most powerful thing you can hear, and the only thing that ever persuades any of us in our own lives, is [when] you meet somebody whose story contradicts the thing you think you know. At that point, it's possible to question what you know, because the authenticity of their experience is real enough to do it." – Ira Glass*

*"Storytelling is something [human] brains do, naturally and implicitly. Implicit storytelling has created our selves, and it should be no surprise that it pervades the entire fabric of human societies and cultures." – Antonio Damasio*

## **Instructor:**

Prof. Doe Mayer  
Mary Pickford Chair

## **Contacts:**

Email: dmayer@usc.edu  
Office phone: 213-740-7511  
Office Address: SCA Room 411

Student Assistant: Yueyang Zhang

Email: yueyangz@usc.edu  
Phone: 310-307-6067

## **Course Summary**

This course will enhance and broaden your understanding of the major components of stories by viewing storytelling through a global lens. We will be studying structure, theory, and the effects of culture on storytelling. You will develop skills to understand the power of stories more profoundly; to use them in your own lives and within the frameworks of work in organizations, marketing and advertising; to identify better social change strategies; and to become aware of all the new professional and academic fields that are recognizing the importance of storytelling to enhance effectiveness and emotional connection.

## Learning Objectives

- To have a deeper connection to the power of story and its creative attractiveness in terms of your own lives and your work. You will see how stories continue to have meaning in the present day in new forms like transmedia and webisodes, in older forms like oral storytelling, and in advertisements, marketing and messaging in both the profit and non-profit sectors.
- To understand and be able to differentiate between different forms of storytelling---fairytales, myths, fantasies, westerns, crime stories, comedies, science-fiction, horror, etc.
- To identify and articulate some of the most prevalent theories that help us to comprehend why storytelling is so important in all cultures worldwide.
- To understand how culture affects stories globally, from the fates and gods of the Greek dramas, to religious stories in all cultures, to the community-based frame in many societies, to the individual agency of a single protagonist in much of Western storytelling.
- To cultivate skills in how stories can strengthen strategies for social change and to apply those skills to your specific interests and passions.
- To enhance your collaborative creative abilities through group discussion, giving and responding to feedback, and collective brainstorming.
- To develop a stronger awareness of how narrative frames are being increasingly used in many academic and practical areas, including psychology, science, education, medicine, sociology, etc.

## Textbooks

Canning, D., & Reinsborough, P. (2010). *Re: Imagining change: How to use story-based strategy to win campaigns, build movements, and change the world*. PM Press.

Cole, J. (Ed.). (1983). *Best-loved folktales of the world*. Anchor.

Goodman, A. (2015). *Storytelling as Best Practice: How stories strengthen your organization, engage your audience, and advance your mission*. Goodman Center.

Haven, K. F. (2007). *Story proof: The science behind the startling power of story*. Greenwood Publishing Group.

## Course Requirements and Evaluation

The final course grade will be based on the following distribution:

Assignment #1	15%	(Paper: 10%; Oral presentation: 5%)
Assignment #2	15%	(Paper: 10%; Oral presentation: 5%)
Assignment #3	10%	(Oral presentation only – 10%)
Assignment #4	15%	(Paper: 10%; Oral presentation: 5%)
Assignment #5	20%	(Paper: 15%; Oral presentation: 5%)
Weekly reading summaries	10%	
Class Contribution	15%	
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	

**Class contribution** includes offering insightful comments during group discussions, asking thoughtful informed questions during question and answer sessions with guests, having read the weekly readings in advance, being prepared to speak about them in class.

**Weekly reading summaries:** Write a short paragraph reviewing each required reading in the syllabus. Describe two or three main points that you have picked up from the reading. Turn in the summary on Blackboard on each applicable Monday night by midnight.

**Class attendance** includes being on time to class and after the break. Tardiness is disrespectful to your instructor and your colleagues. Anyone not in class five minutes after the starting time or after the break will be considered late. Two times being late equals one unexcused absence. Written medical are required for excused absences, in advance (by email) except in case of emergency. Two unexcused absences result in a lowered grade; four absences are grounds for failing the class.

**Personal computers** and wireless Internet are a key part of today's technological culture, but they can also distract you from the class discussion and dampen participation. I expect you to use computers for note taking purposes only, and to avoid using other mobile devices during class time. Any deviation will result in laptops and other equipment being banned from the classroom and contribution grades being impacted.

## **Assignments**

All assignments for this class involve a paper and an oral presentation. You will not be able to read your paper. You must rehearse your presentation and figure out what will make the best explanation and story for the class audience, and tell it in a timed number of minutes depending on the assignment. You may use cards to remind yourself of the point, but you cannot read the assignment. You may use PowerPoint or slides or Prezi to enhance your oral presentation, but it is not required. All oral presentations will include being prepared to answer questions posed by your colleagues or the professor.

- **Assignment #1: Ancient Tales – Stories from the Past. Due Week 5 (9/23).**

Look at a myth, folktale, legend or origin story that has not been discussed in class thus far and is not from your own culture or background. Analyze it in terms of structure, values, and what it says about the society it represents. This assignment requires the use of at least three academic references that discuss the story you have chosen, as well as your own point of view about the story and what it reflects of the society that it depicts. Write a 4-5 page, double-spaced paper and be prepared to speak about your example in class (using PowerPoint or Prezi images if you would like) for a maximum of five minutes each. You're welcome to use an example from the text, *Best Loved Folktales of the World*, as your tale.

In your academic thinking you might want to consider where the story comes from and how that affects it, the historical timeframe of the story, whether the tale has traveled and changed in time or through diasporas, the specific cultural context (religion, philosophy of time, entertainment, ritual, sacred observance, housing, tools or attire of the culture), aspects of daily life or customs reflected in the tale.

- **Assignment #2: Storytelling and You. Due Week 7 (10/7).**

For this assignment, choose a story that is personal, autobiographical, or family framed. You may select a story that you've told many times, but try to construct it using what you have learned about structure, performance, and emotional connection. Please hand it in as a 3-4 page, double-spaced paper telling your story and discussing its history and meaning to you. Describe the process of what you learned in choosing to present this story. Also be prepared to present it orally (five minutes maximum) to the class without reading, including your understanding of the genesis and how you have changed it. Again you must rehearse in advance in order to do this well.

- **Assignment #3: Storytelling in Global Films. Due Week 9 (10/21).**

This collaborative assignment will involve the class breaking up into groups of three or four to view one of the following feature films from other countries and connect it to the content of the class in an oral presentation. You will have leeway in how you choose to do this, including analyzing

structure, how the story is told, whether you recognize universal myths, folktales or other components of our study earlier in the semester. Each group will have fifteen minutes to present this assignment to the class, including the possible use of film clips. Each member of the group must participate in the oral presentation. Organize and rehearse this in advance. For this project you must view together one of the following feature films representing another culture:

- Atanarjuat: The Fast Runner, Canadian Inuit, 2001
- The Official Story, Argentina, 1985
- The Battle of Algiers, France & Italy, 1966
- The Lunch Box, India, 2013
- Persona, Sweden, 1966
- Raise the Red Lantern, China, 1991
- Man on Wire, UK, 2009

- **Assignment #4: Storytelling in Other Media. Due Week 11 (11/4).**

This assignment requires you to find a story in a medium that we have not been discussing in the class. This might be a song, a dance, comics, posters, poetry, or any other media that you think can be effective for storytelling. Hand in a 3-5 page, double-spaced paper, discussing this example. Please apply what you have learned about structure, audience, creativity, values, and culture. Use at least 3-4 academic references in your research for the paper. You will also be required to present it to the class orally in five minutes, either showing the media or explaining it clearly, so the class audience can understand.

- **Assignment #5: Storytelling – What Intrigues You? Due Week 15 (12/2 and possibly 12/11 2-4pm, scheduled final time).**

**\*\*Discuss with Professor Mayer two weeks before this assignment is due.**

In this assignment, you can choose any one of a number of topics that have come up in the class and intrigued you. Either you can develop your own creative example or present a research paper (8-10 pages, double spaced) describing or analyzing the topic as appropriate. For instance, you could look at how narrative is being used in another discipline such as science or journalism. You could apply the storytelling techniques we have studied in the context of a not-for-profit organization or as a marketing strategy. You could design an advertisement or PSA using your new storytelling skills. You should discuss the process of developing this, as well as what you learned in the implementation. Your paper must include at least three academic references, whether your paper is a research paper or a creative work. In class you will present this assignment and be prepared to discuss it. You will have ten minutes to present, and an additional 2-4 minutes to answer questions.

**Late assignments/Emergencies:** No late assignments will be accepted. If you have a legitimate and verifiable emergency that makes it impossible to turn in your assignment you must:

- (1) email Prof. Mayer before the beginning of class the day the assignment is due to notify her of your emergency,
- (2) provide official proof (doctor's note or other evidence), and
- (3) arrange to email the assignment at a time to be determined.

## **READING AND ASSIGNMENT SCHEDULE**

\*\*Readings and assignments are subject to further change. Other than the required textbooks, all other readings can be accessed on Blackboard or via the Internet.

### **Week 1: Why Stories? (8/26)**

What is a story? Story versus narrative, what are the distinctions and does they matter? Why are stories so powerful?

### **Week 2: How Stories Make Us Human (9/2)**

#### **Readings:**

Gottschall, J. (2012). *The storytelling animal: How stories make us human*. New York, NY: Houghton Mifflin. pp. 1-67.

Haven, K. F. (2007). *Story proof: The science behind the startling power of story*. Santa Barbara, CA: Greenwood Publishing Group. Chap 1-2 pp. 1-20

### **Week 3: Reviewing Theory: How Storytelling Makes Sense (9/9)**

Theories of why storytelling is powerful, including communications, social science, critical thinking, and neuroscience.

#### **Readings:**

Haven, K. F. (2007). *Story proof: The science behind the startling power of story*. Santa Barbara, CA: Greenwood Publishing Group. Chap 3- 5 pp. 21-65

Kallas, C. (2010). *Creative screenwriting: Understanding emotional structure*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan. pp. 17-35.

Hinyard, L. J., & Kreuter, M. W. (2007). Using narrative communication as a tool for health behavior change: a conceptual, theoretical, and empirical overview. *Health Education & Behavior*. pp. 777-789

### **Week 4: Stories of Origins, Myths, Folktales, Heroes and Villains (9/16)**

**Guest Speaker: Prof. Jed Dannenbaum, The Origins of Storytelling.**

#### **Readings:**

Gopnik, A. (2009). *The Philosophical Baby*. New York, NY: Picador. Chap 1-2 pp. 19-73

Cole, J. (Ed.). (1983). *Best-loved folktales of the world*. Anchor.

- pp. xvii (introduction)
- Cinderella (France), pp. 3-8;
- Jack and the Beanstalk (Britain), pp. 193-198;
- Aladdin and the Wonderful Lamp (Arabian Nights), pp. 467-476;
- Anansi and his Visitor (Ashanti Tribe), pp. 615-617;
- Simple Wang (China), pp. 528-531.

### Week 5: Ancient Tales – Stories from the Past (9/23)

#### Readings:

Haven, K. F. (2007). *Story proof: The science behind the startling power of story*. Greenwood Publishing Group. Chaps 6-7 pp. 66-80

**Assignment #1 Due:** Analysis of myth, folktale, legend, origin story.

### Week 6: Stories from a Personal Point of View (9/30)

Stories from a personal point of view – autobiographical, personal or family framed.

#### Readings:

Lambert, J. (2013). *Digital storytelling: Capturing lives, creating community*. New York, NY: Routledge. Chapter 2: Stories in our lives, pp. 15-24.

Simmons, A. (2006). *The story factor: Secrets of influence from the art of storytelling*. New York, NY: Basic books. Chapter 1: The six stories you need to know, pp. 1-26. & Chapter 9: Storyteller dos and donts, pp. 199-218.

**Center for Digital Storytelling** (<http://storycenter.org/>): peruse website and select 1 video to discuss in class.

### Week 7: Storytelling and You (10/7)

#### Readings:

Haven, K. F. (2007). *Story proof: The science behind the startling power of story*. Greenwood Publishing Group. Chaps. 8-9 pp. 81-122

**Assignment #2 Due:** Reconstructing the personal story.

**\*\* Between Week 7 and 8, all students meet individually with Professor Mayer for mid-term assessment.**

### Week 8: Stories in Theater and Film (10/14)

**Guest Speaker:** Prof. Brent Blair, Storytelling for social change in theater.

#### Readings:

**Reading per Prof. Blair TBA**

McKee, R. (1999). *Story: Substance, structure, style, and the principles of screenwriting*. London: Methuen. Chapter 2: The structure spectrum, pp. 31-66 & Chapter 4: Structure and Genre, pp. 79-99.

Dannenbaum, J., Hodge, C., & Mayer, D. (2003). *Creative filmmaking from the inside out: Five keys to the art of making inspired movies and television*. New York, NY: Fireside. Embedded values questionnaire, pp. 189-192.

Suggested reading:

Howard, D., & Mabley, E. (1993). *The tools of screenwriting: A writer's guide to the craft and elements of a screenplay*. New York, NY: St. Martin's Press. pp. 3-94.

## Week 9: Storytelling for Social Change (10/21)

### Readings:

Canning, D., & Reinsborough, P. (2010). Re: Imagining Change. *An introduction to story-based strategy*. Portland: PM Press Verlag, pp. 11-65.

Singhal, A., Wang, H., & Rogers, E. M. (2012). The rising tide of entertainment-education in communication campaigns. *Public communication campaigns*, pp. 321-333.

**Comminit.com** (<http://www.comminit.com/global/spaces-frontpage>): peruse this global communication site and find three case studies that emphasize stories that interest you.

**Assignment #3 Due:** Group oral report on film from another culture.

## Week 10: Storytelling in Other Media (10/28)

### Possible Guest Speaker

We will look at additional media including transmedia efforts and other digital forms, music, dance, comics, posters, communication campaigns, etc.

### Readings:

Jenkins, H. (2006). *Convergence culture: Where old and new media collide*. NYU press. Chapter 3 Searching for the Origami Unicorn: The matrix and transmedia storytelling, pp. 93-130. (eBook available at USC Libraries)

Reed, T.V. (2005). *The Art of Protest: Culture and activism from the civil rights movement to the streets of Seattle*. Chapter 6: We are Not the World, pp. 156-178 (eBook available at USC Libraries)

View this feature film before class:

*Amandla! A Revolution in Four Part Harmony* (2002)

## Week 11: Storytelling in Other Media II (11/4)

### Readings:

Haven, K. F. (2007). *Story proof: The science behind the startling power of story*. Greenwood Publishing Group. Chapter 10 pp. 123-128

**Assignment #4 Due:** Show examples of stories in other media.

## Week 12: Storytelling for Non Profits (11/11)

### Guest Speaker: Andy Goodman

### Readings:

Goodman, A. (2015). *Storytelling as Best Practice: How stories strengthen your organization, engage your audience, and advance your mission*. Goodman Center. pp. 1-65.

Canning, D., & Reinsborough, P. (2010). Re:Imagining Change. *An introduction to story-based strategy*. Portland: PM Press Verlag, pp. 67-110.

**Adbusters .org** (<https://www.adbusters.org/>): peruse this site and find 2 or 3 examples that interest you.

<b>Week 13: Storytelling in Other Disciplines (11/18)</b>
---

We will look at how narrative studies have informed disciplines from medicine, psychology, and sociology, and science.

**Readings:**

- Berger, R. J., & Quinney, R. (Eds.). (2005). *Storytelling sociology: Narrative as social inquiry*. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers. Chapter 1: The narrative turn in social inquiry, pp. 1-11.
- Murphy, S. T., Frank, L. B., Chatterjee, J. S., & Baezconde-Garbanati, L. (2013). Narrative versus nonnarrative: The role of identification, transportation, and emotion in reducing health disparities. *Journal of Communication*, 63(1), 116-137.
- Wilson, T. D. (2011). *Redirect: The surprising new science of psychological change*. New York, NY: Little, Brown and Company. Chapter 1-3, pp. 3-74.

<b>Week 14: THANKSGIVING – no class</b>
---

<b>Week 15: Storytelling – What Intrigues You? (12/2 and possibly 12/11 2-4pm scheduled USC exam time)</b>
--

Since presentations and discussion will be longer, this assignment may take place over the last class and final exam period if needed.

Discussion of what we have learned from these stories.



## **Statement on Academic Conduct and Support Systems**

### **Academic Conduct**

- Plagiarism – presenting someone else’s ideas as your own, either verbatim or recast in your own words – is a serious academic offense with serious consequences. Please familiarize yourself with the discussion of plagiarism in *SCampus* in Section 11, *Behavior Violating University Standards* <https://scampus.usc.edu/1100-behavior-violating-university-standards-and-appropriate-sanctions>
- Other forms of academic dishonesty are equally unacceptable. See additional information in *SCampus* and university policies on scientific misconduct, <http://policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct>.
- Discrimination, sexual assault, and harassment are not tolerated by the university.
- You are encouraged to report any incidents to the *Office of Equity and Diversity* <http://equity.usc.edu> or to the *Department of Public Safety* <http://capsnet.usc.edu/departement/departement-public-safety/online-forms/contact-us>.
- This is important for the safety of the whole USC community. Another member of the university community – such as a friend, classmate, advisor, or faculty member – can help initiate the report, or can initiate the report on behalf of another person. *The Center for Women and Men* <http://www.usc.edu/student-affairs/cwm/> provides 24/7 confidential support, and the sexual assault resource center webpage <http://sarc.usc.edu> describes reporting options and other resources.

### **Support Systems**

- *The Office of Disability Services and Programs* [http://sait.usc.edu/academicsupport/centerprograms/dsp/home\\_index.html](http://sait.usc.edu/academicsupport/centerprograms/dsp/home_index.html) provides certification for students with disabilities and helps arrange the relevant accommodations.
- If an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible, *USC Emergency Information* <http://emergency.usc.edu> will provide safety and other updates, including ways in which instruction will be continued by means of blackboard, teleconferencing, and other technology.