A folklorist is interested in describing and understanding living people and their traditions. Every item of folklore (a story, song, custom, or material culture) exists in variants: As it passes from person to person, from generation to generation, from place to place, folklore adapts to new contexts. Because folklore is common, widespread, and long lived, it is THE KEY to understanding who human beings are!

This class will focus on traditional literature:

- **Folktales** (sometimes called fairy tales) – stories about a fantasy world
- **Legends** – believable stories, set in the real world
- **Funny stories** (including for example jokes and anecdotes)
- **Proverbs** and **songs** (oral poetry)

We will read and listen to folklore “texts” (the words), and connect them to their “contexts” (the people who said the words in specific situations): What does folklore mean to the people who perform it? What function does folklore have in these people’s lives?

We will learn about folklorists, the people who have studied folklore from the late 1700’s to today. **How** did they collect the folklore texts we’re reading? **Why** did they study folklore? **What ideas** did they propose about humans and their traditions?

**Course objectives**

- **Learn classic examples** of folklore: folktales such as “Cinderella” and “Dragonslayer” along with their variants; legends about witches, ghosts, and folk heroes; the Finnish epic “Kalevala” and Lithuanian “dainos” (songs), etc.
- **Learn classic interpretations and research methods** related to the above examples. How did Grimm, Aarne, Thompson, Dorson, Dégh, Brunvand and others analyze folklore?
- **Read a classic book** in the international study of folklore: Richard Dorson’s *Bloodstoppers and Bearwalkers*. Identify his methods of documenting and understanding people and their traditions.
- **DO folklore studies**: Collect traditional stories and an oral poem. Transcribe oral texts, and add the contextual information that will make them come alive for future readers of your essays.

**Grades**

- (40%) **four tests** (3 midterms and a final exam) on assigned readings and lectures. The midterms will be written in assigned groups
- (10%) Participation in **class discussions** - both in person and online
- (40%) **four short writing assignments** during the quarter, revised and resubmitted in the final week.
- (10%) peer reviews of classmates’ writing assignments

**Required Readings**

- **Folklore Rules**, by Lynn McNeill [online book; login needed at UW Library website; hard copy also on sale at UW Bookstore]
- **Bloodstoppers and Bearwalkers**, by Richard Dorson [on sale at UW Bookstore]
- Selected readings posted on Canvas website.
How to succeed in this class:

See UW grading guidelines at [Link]. What grade do you plan to get?

Reading Assignments and Lecture Notes
Write notes as you read (Some assigned readings will not have all of the information listed below):

- **Remember folklore texts:**
  1. Note some typical examples of folklore; summarize in one sentence.
  2. How do these folklore texts relate to other items discussed today and this week?

- **Remember folklore contexts:**
  1. Who performed this text to a folklorist?
  2. What was this text’s “natural context”? (traditional time & place, audience)

- **Remember folklorists:**
  1. Who is the folklorist? (Who collected, edited, and printed the text that you’re reading?)
  2. How did the folklorist collect, edit and present folklore texts?
  3. Sometimes a reading assignment includes a folklorist’s commentary. Does she or he describe texts and contexts? Compare variants? Analyze function and/or meaning? What is the folklorist’s analytical “point”? Do you agree? (is the discussion of social and cultural contexts complete)?

Bring your reading notes to class. Revise and expand them with lecture materials. After the lecture, review the revised notes. What are some “takeaways” from today’s lecture? While reading before class, did you miss something important?

Class Participation (10%)

- In class: Short “quizzes” and discussions afterwards will ask you to respond to assigned readings, checking if you remember key examples and ideas (study your reading notes, described above).
- Online: Participate in discussions posted after classes. You should participate at least four times, distributed over the quarter.

Four tests (40%)

- These exams will check if you remember basic concepts and examples of folklore
- Tests 1 to 3 (short-answer), will be written in groups assigned on the day of the exam
- The final exam (multiple-choice), will be comprehensive, covering all ten weeks of material. The final exam will be done individually, not in groups.
**Ethnographic projects (40%)**

1. **Due Friday, Jan 18**: (1-2 pages) Record and transcribe the text of an orally told, entertaining story (joke, anecdote, or folktale). Describe the “texture” of the spoken text: How is this oral story different from written literature? Describe the narrator: Who is the teller or tellers? Are they an active or passive bearer of the tradition? Do they have more stories in their repertoire? Document contexts in which they heard and told this story. Describe audience: Was it followed by laughter or “unlaughter”? How is the story related to the teller’s and listeners’ world and worldview?

2. **Due Friday, Feb 8**: (1-2 pages) Comparative folktale analysis. Describe the text of a folktale that you encountered in a recent storytelling occasion (not necessarily “oral”). It could be in a storybook read to children, a poem, a film, etc. Compare the text to the tale type, and to another variant of that type, to identify unique details. What do we know about the storytellers and audiences of the variants? How was the tale adapted to different contexts, and how do meanings change from variant to variant?

3. **Due Friday, March 1**: (1-2 pages) Document a traditional legend you have encountered in the natural context. Using the Motif-Index, identify a traditional motif, to prove it is traditional. If you have encountered variants, describe them. Describe context: Who performed it, where, when? Are there more legends in the person’s repertoire? How is this legend related to the teller’s beliefs?

4. **Due Friday, March 15**: (1-2 pages) Function and meaning of oral poetry. Document a song, rhyme or proverb you’ve heard in unofficial oral tradition. Transcribe the words, compare variants if appropriate. Describe natural context: Who performed it, where, when? Are there more songs (or proverbs) in the person’s repertoire? Describe poetic form (texture). Analyze function (what does oral poetry do for the performer?) and meaning (what does the performer think about while performing?)

5. **Due before the final exam on March 22**: Folklore portfolio. Revise projects #1-#4, and combine everything into one file. Write a one-page introduction: What is folklore, and why do folklorists study it? Summarize your four projects, and state what you are contributing to folklore studies.

**Peer Reviews (10%)**

A day after a written ethnographic project is due, you will be assigned a peer review. Post a short critique of your classmate’s project. Begin with a one-sentence summary of the project. Then critique: (Did they follow directions? Do you see connections to ideas from readings or lectures not mentioned by the author? Do you see meanings or functions not mentioned?).

- Your goal is to help improve your colleague’s project. Good ethnography is never “finished” – it can always be improved.
- Over the four assignments, you will critique four different persons’ work.
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<th>Week</th>
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| Week 1 (Jan 8-10) | Introduction: What is folklore? How do folklorists study it? Who are folk?  
- Examples mentioned in this lecture are not required reading, but may be useful when you study for the exam:  
- Children’s counting-out rhymes  
- Leary, Yah, Hei (1991) Scandinavian jokes |
| Week 2 (Jan 15-17) | Entering the field. What are the storytelling traditions?  
- Dorson, “Background of this Book,” B&B 1-12  
- Dorson, “Tall Tales” in B&B, 143-146  
- Funny stories told by Norwegian narrator Olav Austad [class website] | Group exercise, Field assignment #1 (groups assigned today)  
If you have voice recorder on your phone, bring it to class! |
| Week 3 (Jan 22-24) | Individual and International Traditions. Functions and meanings.  
- "Polish Wonder Tales of Joe Woods," in B&B, 313-333  
- Boris & Yuri Sokolov, “In Search of Folktales and Songs,” in *International Folkloristics*, 73-82 [class website]  
  - Texts: Stories by Grigor Medvedev (recorded by Sokolovs) and Natalia Osipovna Vinokurova (recorded by Mark Azadovsky)  
  - Zsuzsanna Palko, “Snake Husband” | Exam 1: Basic Concepts in Folklore Studies (groups assigned today)  
International Stories: Introducing folklore genres; the ATU Index, and Motif-Index  
- A tool for folk narrative research: The Motif-Index  
- A tool for folktale research: Aarne-Thompson-Uther, *Types of the Folktale*  
- Resource for folktale research: D.L. Ashliman, *Folklore and Mythology e-texts* |
| Week 4 (Jan 29-31) | Interpreting folktales  
- Danish folktale, *“King Lindorm”*  
- Ancient Indian folktale from *Panchatantra*, "EnchantedBrahman’s Son"  
- Lithuanian tale, *“Egle Queen of Snakes”*  
- Bruno Bettelheim, Uses of Enchantment (excerpts)  
- Background: Holbek, “Quest for Meaning” [Link] | From Oral to Literary to film tales  
- Finnish folktale, “The Pig Girl” [class website], and Cinderella variants by Perrault (1697) and Grimm (1812)  
- Cinderella, a movie  
  - Reference: International Fairy-Tale Filmography, [Link] |
| Week 5 (Feb 5-7) | Children’s stories? How?  
- Winther, Introduction and Pancake House [class website]  
- Grimms, “Hansel and Gretel” [class website]  
- Jane Muncy, “Merrywise” [sound recording and written transcript]  
- Optional extra work: Latvian (children’s?) film, Golden Horse (85 min.) | Group exercise, Field assignment #2 (groups assigned today)  
Stories and people, real, fake and imagined  
- Dorson, “Indians Stuffed and Live” B&B 15-25  
- Dorson, “Lumberjacks” B&B 186-210 |

Due Friday evening, Jan 18: Fieldwork Assignment #1: Documenting a Funny Story  
Due Friday evening, Feb 8: Fieldwork Assignment #2: Comparative folktale analysis
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| Week 6 (Feb 12-14) | Legends about shape shifters...  
  - Richard Dorson, “Bearwalkers”, in B&B, 26-37  
  - Scandinavian werewolf legends in *Scandinavian Folk Belief and Legend*, p. 74-80  
  - Excerpt from Harry Potter, *The Prisoner of Azkaban* [class website] | Ghost and spirit legends, past and present  
  - Two Irish fairy legends collected by Henry Glassie [texts and recordings on class website]  
  - Scandinavian ghost legends, 93-109 in *Scandinavian Folk Belief and Legend*  
  - Linda Degh, *Legend and Belief*, excerpts [class website]  
  - E. Bird, *Playing with Fear: Interpreting the Adolescent Legend Trip* [Link] |
| Week 7 (Feb 19-21) | Public Folklore and Fieldwork in the Upper Midwest  
  Guest lecture, Marcus Cederstrom (University of Wisconsin)  
  Dorson, “Tricksters & Thunders” in B&B 38-68  
  (less reading assigned today—read ahead for Thursday’s lecture!) | Believable stories: Legends  
  - Richard Dorson, “Bloodstoppers” B&B 150-165  
  - Scandinavian witch legends (numbers 34.3, 36.1, 38.1, 38.6, 39.3, 43.1) in *Scandinavian Folk Belief and Legend*, 157-200  
  - Linda Degh, about oral & internet legends (excerpt from Legend & Belief)  
  - Andrew Peck, “*Tall, Dark and Loathsome*” (2015) |
| Week 8 (Feb 26-28) | Legend-telling in the modern world: Truth, fiction, entertainment?  
  - Dorson, “Sagamen”, B&B 249-272  
  - Background: Jan Brunvand, “Introduction,” pages xxiii-xxiv in *Encyclopedia of Urban Legends*  
  **Group exercise, Field assignment #3 (groups assigned today)** | The Mission: History and Identity of a People  
  - Dorson, “Townsfolk”; special attention to “McDonald Boys” song on page 174. Look also at pages 5-6!  
  - Ivan Walton, Ballad of the McDonald Boys [Link]  
  - Selected Danish historical ballads |

**Due Friday evening, March 1: Fieldwork Assignment #3: Legend and Belief**

**Due Friday, March 15: Fieldwork #4, Function & Meaning of Oral Poetry**  
**Due any time before the final exam, March 22: Portfolio, Assignments 1-4.**
Introduction to Folklore: Group seating

(you will have different group numbers for various exams and assignments)