

English Composition I – 50:350:101:07 – Fall 2007
T/Th 8:00-9:20am

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Achilles to Anakin: Reflections on the Hero

Course Description

Henry Jackson: Hi, Peter!

Peter Parker: Hey, Henry! You've grown tall.

May Parker: You'll never guess who he wants to be... Spider-Man!

Peter Parker: Why?

May Parker: He knows a hero when he sees one. Too few characters out there, flying around like that, saving old girls like me. And Lord knows, kids like Henry need a hero. Courageous, self-sacrificing people. Setting examples for all of us. Everybody loves a hero. People line up for them, cheer them, scream their names. And years later, they'll tell how they stood in the rain for hours just to get a glimpse of the one who taught them how to hold on a second longer. I believe there's a hero in all of us, that keeps us honest, gives us strength, makes us noble, and finally allows us to die with pride, even though sometimes we have to be steady, and give up the thing we want the most. Even our dreams.

-From Spider-Man 2, Columbia Pictures, 2004.

May Parker expresses here—though rather briefly—the central aspects of the theme for this course: the hero. While “courageous” and “self-sacrificing” may serve as good starting points in defining what it means to be a hero, we may also find such descriptors rather lacking. In this course, we will attempt to clear up our understanding of what it means to be a hero. This includes

reflection on how cultural differences influence conceptions of heroism: what can we learn about a society by studying its heroes? In addition, we will also consider the popularity of heroes as subjects and why, as Aunt May says, "people line up for them, cheer them [and] scream their names." In recent years, many of our most popular films and television shows have been about heroes—again leading us to consider ourselves and our culture as they relate to heroism. Our continued fascination with heroes provides a fun and fascinating subject for this course.

We will examine the hero in several forms of fiction. Our course will focus on heroic epics and, following our discussion of this summer's reading selection, *Chocolat*, begins with *The Iliad* and its modern-day adaptation in the movie *Troy*. Departing the ancient Greeks, we will jump forward to the 20th Century and another yet vastly different epic hero, Bilbo Baggins in Tolkien's *The Hobbit*. From Bilbo we will move on to modern superheroes, beginning with *Spider-Man 2* and continuing with some philosophical perceptions of superheroes and our fascination with them. Finally, we will conclude with the greatest epic of our own time, *Star Wars*, and address Anakin Skywalker and the rise and fall of a hero.

Beyond our study of heroes, I have two primary goals for this course. The first is to teach you the craft of composition and prepare you for the kind of writing, thought and analysis required of you in college and beyond. This includes a strong focus on argumentative writing and peer collaboration and feedback. The second is that each of you realizes that you possess a voice and a place in the discussion both within this university community as well as in the community-at-large. This course seeks to help you clearly and eloquently express that voice through your writing and, in so doing, teach you how to think independently.

Required Texts:

The Iliad, Homer, Translated by Robert Fagles (Penguin Classics Edition; ISBN: 0-14-044592-7)

The Hobbit, J.R.R. Tolkien (Houghton Mifflin, ISBN: 0-618-00221-9)

Superheroes and Philosophy: Truth, Justice and the Socratic Way, Tom Morris and Matt Morris (ISBN: 0-8126-9573-9)

The Brief Penguin Handbook, Lester Faigley (ISBN: 0-321-24531-8) ***NOTE: Buy this text from the bookstore and keep the enclosed card with your MyCompLab registration number.**

A decent dictionary/thesaurus

Recommended Text:

The Hero with a Thousand Faces, Joseph Campbell (ISBN: 0-691-01784-0)

Requirements and Expectations:

Attendance and Participation

Excessive absence and lateness will hurt your final grade, up to and including failing the course. You are allotted 2 unexcused absences before I begin deducting from your final grade. Beginning with the 3rd unexcused absence, I will begin deducting from your final grade. After 6 absences, you will

fail the course. Attendance means *mental* presence as well as physical presence. If you are inattentive, sleeping, disruptive, texting/using your cell phone, etc. I count you as absent. If you are significantly late (15 minutes or more), I count you as absent. This applies on due dates as well; "printing problems" will not excuse your being late. If you are a few minutes late (i.e., you come in during or just after role), it is your responsibility to see me after class so I can mark you as late rather than absent. Your participation grade includes participation in class discussions, as well as all in-class assignments, workshops, short writing assignments and exercises, etc.

Writing Assignments & Essays

All work must be properly formatted and all citations must follow MLA format. Also, papers must be turned in on paper. This means I will not accept a floppy disk or thumb drive or other portable media storage device with your paper saved somewhere on it. Nor will I accept emailed papers or assignments. All papers **MUST** meet minimum length requirements—5 pages means 5 full pages of written work, not merely 5 sheets of paper. On due dates, you have until 4:00 p.m. that day to hand in your papers. Late papers will be penalized 1/3 of a grade for every day they are late.

Conferences and Workshops

You are required to meet with me during office hours at least twice during the semester to discuss your writing and progress. These appointments will probably benefit you most while you are working on earlier drafts rather than final submissions, but you may also use them to discuss a final grade on an assignment. I will also hold individual conferences with students during class time at different times during the semester (these do not count as the required office hours' appointment and are required). In addition, I strongly recommend that you take advantage of the Writing Assistance offered at the RLC as you work on your drafts. We will also hold several in-class workshops where you will evaluate and respond to each other's work. You will be graded on the quality of the feedback you provide your fellow students, so take this task seriously.

Pop Quizzes

There will be a minimum of three pop quizzes during the semester—there may be more, but only your top three quiz grades will count in your final grade. You may not make up a missed quiz. Quiz grades will be added to your attendance and participation grade.

Read and Keep Up with the Syllabus

Seems obvious, but I've learned it apparently is not. Bring it to class with you in case changes are made.

Final Portfolio

All Composition students are required to complete a portfolio as a final requirement the course. Details for the portfolio will be provided later in the semester.

Do Not Plagiarize!!

Original work is required. Plagiarism—the theft of someone else's work **or ideas** and passing it off as your own—will result in a failing grade on the assignment and possibly the course and can also lead to serious disciplinary action from the university.

Grading Policies

Essay 1 - Compare and Contrast - 2-3 pages	20%
Essay 2 - Argumentative Essay - 5-7 pages	20%
Essay 3 - Analytical Essay with minimal research - 5-7 pages	20%
Attendance and Participation	20%
Final Portfolio	20%

Students must complete all assignments and earn a C or better on the final portfolio to establish readiness for 102. You may repeat this course if you have not successfully mastered academic writing.

Schedule

The schedule is tentative and subject to change; bring your syllabus to each class in case changes occur. Complete all assigned readings before the assigned class to be ready for discussions and possible quizzes. *ER* = Electronic Reserve: these readings are available through the library's website.

Tue 9/4	Introduction to the course and to each other
Thu 9/6	<i>Reading Effectively in Order to Write Effectively</i> . Read Faigley, Chapter 6, pp. 71-81; Begin discussion of <i>Chocolat</i>
Tue 9/11	<i>In the Beginning: Invention and Pre-writing</i> : Read <i>Patterns</i> , Chapter 2 (ER); Continue <i>Chocolat</i>
Thu 9/13	<i>Invention</i> cont'd: Read Faigley, pp. 36-38; Continue <i>Chocolat</i> - View film version of <i>Chocolat</i> on your own; Brief Introduction to <i>The Iliad</i> ; Due : Personal Essay on a personal hero
Tue 9/18	<i>Organization and Arrangement</i> : Read <i>Patterns</i> , Chapter 3 (ER); Read Book 1 of <i>The Iliad</i>
Thu 9/20	<i>Drafting and Revising</i> : Read <i>Patterns</i> , Chapter 4 (ER); Read Books 6 and 9 of <i>The Iliad</i>
Tue 9/25	<i>Drafting and Revising</i> cont'd: Read Faigley, Chapters 4, pp. 43-60; Read Books 16 and 18 of <i>The Iliad</i>
Thu 9/27	<i>Comparing and Contrasting</i> : Read <i>Patterns</i> , Chapter 11 (ER); Read Books 22 and 24 of <i>The Iliad</i>
Tue 10/2	Viewing of <i>Troy</i>

- Thu 10/4 *Troy* concluded
- Tue 10/9 *Keys to Stronger Writing*: **Read** Faigley, Chapters 26 & 27, pp. 379-391, and George Orwell, "Politics and the English Language" (ER); **Due: First Draft of Essay 1 - Workshop (Bring a min. of 4 copies of your draft)**
- Thu 10/11 Conferences
- Tue 10/16 Conferences
- Thu 10/18 *The Structure of Argument*: **Read** *Patterns*, Chapter 14, pp. 555-566 (ER); **Bring** in a letter to the editor to share and discuss with the class; Begin discussion of *The Hobbit*
- Tue 10/23 *The Structure of Argument* cont'd: **Read** *Patterns*, Chapter 14, pp. 566-580 (ER); Continue *The Hobbit*
- Thu 10/25 **Library Session**: Meet in the lobby of the Paul Robeson Library; **Due: Final Draft of Essay 1**
- Tue 10/30 *Using and Incorporating Scholarly Sources*: **Read** "Taking Notes" (ER), Faigley, Chapters 18 & 19, pp. 216-235 and Chapter 20c, pp. 236-240; Continue *The Hobbit*
- Thu 11/1 **Due: First Draft of Essay 2 - Workshop (Bring a min. of 4 copies of your draft)**
- Tue 11/6 Conclude *The Hobbit*; Presentations from *Superheroes and Philosophy*
- Thu 11/8 Presentations Cont'd; **In Focus**: *Stronger Introductions and Conclusions*
- Tue 11/13 *The Hero's Choice: Why be a Hero Anyway?*: Begin Viewing of *Spider-Man 2*
- Thu 11/15 *Spider-Man 2* concluded; **Due: Final Draft of Essay 2**
- Tue 11/20 **In Focus**: Topic TBA
- Thu 11/22 Thanksgiving Recess - No Class
- Tue 11/27 **Due: First Draft of Essay 3 - Workshop (Bring a min. of 4 copies of your draft)**
- Thu 11/29 *Final Steps: Honing Your Craft*; Introduction to the tragic hero: View *Star Wars, Episode I* and *Episode II* on your own by this point
- Tue 12/4 *Tragedy and Fall: Anakin Skywalker*: Begin *Star Wars: ROTJ*

Thu 12/6 *Conclude ROTS*

Tue 12/11 **Conclusions and Wrap-up; Due: Final Draft of Essay 3**

Thu 12/20 - Final Exam Period - 2:00-5:00 in our classroom

Happy Holidays!