

**Capstone Seminar: "Into the Woods"**  
**ENGL467001, UNCP554101**  
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Bruno Bettelheim claims, in his landmark study of fairy tales, The Uses of Enchantment, that as human beings seek to find meaning in their lives, there is no better source of enrichment and enlightenment than the fairy tale. In fact, the German poet Schiller wrote, "Deeper meaning resides in the fairy tales taught to me in my childhood than in the truth taught by life." Fairy tales are a unique art form, and their deepest meanings are as varied as their readers. But all readers, young, old and in between, share the experience of wonder when confronted with them.

The splendor of the fairy tale is its ability to speak to both our pleasure in the fantastic, and to our concerns about the real world. The dimension of wonder creates a huge theater of possibility: anything can happen in the world. This very boundlessness serves the moral purpose of the tale: it enables a person to consider the nature of boundaries and responsibilities. Dreaming, of course, gives pleasure in its own right. In addition, it allows us an arena in which to experiment, and to learn from our mistakes.

Fairy tales entertain and teach by their use of metaphor. Little Red Riding Hood journeys into the woods in order to visit her grandmother. She leaves behind her indulgent mother; she dawdles and she takes risks along the way. There are many dangers in the woods, but Little Red Riding Hood learns quite a bit about life, and wolves, during her journey. In most of the versions, her knowledge enables her to free her grandmother and herself (without the help of the hunter) and she is then ready to embark upon the rest of her life. Fairy tales do not bring about total closure. Instead, they suggest possibilities. The characters, one always imagines, return to ordinary life. The genre is characterized by a "heroic optimism."

Wallace Stevens believed that fantasy worlds help us to visualize actual worlds. The metaphor of the journey into the woods seems like an ideal one for our students to consider as they prepare to leave Boston College. In order for

each student to evaluate his/her experience in the "woods," he/she will have to look backwards, as well as forwards.

Looking backwards we will ask: Who was I before I came to Boston College? What place did I come from? What does "place" even mean?

What was my connection with place? Has that changed in the last few years?

What were my expectations in coming to Boston College? Why did I choose this place for my journey? Have I been connected to the Boston College community, or is my sense of place connected to the larger city of Boston?

How have I participated in shaping my education? What does my transcript reflect about my experience here?

The metaphor of the journey through the woods is also a helpful one in our assessments of our relationships:

How have my relationships changed since coming to Boston College? How do I envision these relationships in the future?

What do I think about the idea of "going home" now?

The hero of the fairy tale leaves the woods with a renewed commitment to his community. We will ask our students how they plan to negotiate their transitions from the Boston College community into society, as well as to consider the way in which faith, or spiritual understanding is essential to negotiating any journey through the woods.

## **Methods and Requirements**

While this is a Capstone course, it is also an English course, which fulfills an English requirement for some of you. Others may have chosen this course because they were excited about the reading material. For these reasons we will be spending some time analyzing the books we read and the films we see. We will treat them as literature in addition to devices for self exploration. Along with personal reflections, there will be oral presentations and written assignments about the texts. Small groups will be assigned topics and questions to prepare and research in order to lead classroom discussions. The papers you write will vary depending on the focus of our discussions. For the most part, they will be personal responses to the assignments.

Of course, you are expected to attend **all** classes and to fulfill **all** your oral and written assignments **on time**. If, for some critical reason, you cannot, you need to contact me to discuss your problem **in advance of the due date**. In this class we are all responsible for helping each other learn and grow. Your absence not only undermines your own chance to learn, but also the opportunity of your classmates.

While this Capstone course is different from others, no student is allowed to take more than one Capstone course at Boston College, whether listed as a UN course or cross-listed in a department.

## *Integrity*

You are expected to have high standards of integrity in this classroom. That relates to the personal information you will discover about each other, the way you treat each other, and the written work you do. Submitting work that is not your own is plagiarism. It is a violation of the nature of this course and the requirements of the University. Suspected cases of academic integrity violations will be reported to your class dean and investigated by the Academic Integrity Committee.

## *Grades*

Your course grade will be based on **all** the work done during the semester: group reports, class discussions and participation, papers, assignments, etc. Your writing assignments may be rewritten and will be handed in again at the end of the semester in the form of a portfolio. In addition, there will be a long final paper due with the portfolio, in which you sum up your discoveries about yourself and relate your self understanding to the works you have read during the course and the papers you have written about them. There will be a midterm evaluation of your participation in the course and your writing assignments up to that time.

The quality and frequency of your class participation, including your reports on the assigned readings, will be 30% of your grade. Your written work during the semester and your final paper and portfolio will be 60% of your final grade. The final paper itself is 20% of that 60%. Your canvas reflections will be worth 10% of your grade. Please note that the posts close at 12:00AM on their end date and I have no ability to post for anyone other than myself.

## **Requests for Accommodations**

If you are a student with a documented disability seeking reasonable accommodations in this course, please contact Kathy Duggan (617 552-8093) at the Connors Family Learning Center regarding learning disabilities or Paulette Durrett (617 552-3470) in the Disability Services Office regarding all other types of disabilities.

The **texts** will include a wide range of fairy tale materials:

**Folk and Fairy Tales-fourth edition**

**Don't Bet on the Prince**

**The Alchemist**

**Midsummer Night's Dream**

**Into the Woods**, by James Lapine and Stephen Sondheim

**Kissing the Witch** by Emma Donoghue

The basic premise for this Capstone seminar will be for all of us to explore the nature of the journey "Into the Woods," and to figure out exactly how we hope to live "happily ever after."

**Into the woods-you have to grope,  
But that's the way you learn to cope.  
Into the woods to find there's hope  
Of getting through the journey.**

**Into the woods, each time you go,  
There's more to learn of what you know.  
Into the woods, but not too slow-  
Into the woods it's nearing midnight-**

**Into the woods  
To mind the wolf,  
To heed the witch,  
To honor the giant,  
To mind,  
To heed,  
To find,  
To think,  
To teach,  
To join,  
To go to the Festival!**

**Into the woods,  
Into the woods,  
Into the woods,  
Then out of the woods-  
And happy ever after!**

James Lapine

## Weekly Schedule

This schedule is tentative. If we need more time, or even less, I will let you know in class or by email. Thanks for your patience.

- August 29 Introduction- Questions: interview - F and Ft p.277- 281  
What is a fairy tale?  
Who are we?  
What do those things have to do with each other?  
Corey Test #1
- September 5 Folk and Fairy Tales, p.15-23, p.27-40, 67-78, 97-110,  
12 F and Ft- p. 139-155 ,169-191, 220-243  
19 Folk and Fairy Tales, Hans Christian Anderson-p.237-240,  
161, and canvas site for Little Mermaid  
26 "The Company of Wolves" F and Ft p.47
- October 3 Don't Bet on the Prince p.39, 62,81,95, F and Ft p. 117  
10 Into the Woods Act I  
17 Into the Woods Act II  
24 The Alchemist
- October 31 Midsummer Night's Dream
- November 7 Anne Sexton poems, F and Ft p. 135, D B on P, p. 114  
14 Kissing the Witch  
21 Thanksgiving  
28 catch up- film?
- December 5 Conclusion

Survey / Interview

Read Stopping by Woods and Goose Girl

1. What do you think " the woods" mean?
2. Think of an example of a time when you have gone into the "woods" and returned
3. What is poetic justice?
4. Cite an example of one time when you think poetic justice was achieved.
5. Cite an example of one time when you think poetic justice was not achieved.
6. What does it mean to have an epiphany?
7. Explain one epiphany that you have had.