

Björklunden Seminars

"Vacation with a purpose"

AUGUST 11-17, 2024 AT BJÖRKLUNDEN



Where do we come from? Where do we go? And Everything in Between: Mythology Across Time and Across the Universe

Course Description

Since the beginning of time, humans have tried to figure out the world around them. They wondered about how it had begun, why things happened as they did, and how eventually it would end. Across the planet, people came up with stories to help them explain earthly phenomena, including, and perhaps, most importantly death.

This corpus of stories has come to be known as mythology. Myths have been seen through many lenses, including being fundamentally fictions. This seminar will be an opportunity to explore mythology as it has existed in many places and amongst many individuals.

We will start by examining what mythology is and theories people have had as to why it exists and its function. Next, the stories will be told. We will not go society-by-society, but rather we will look a series of topics to facilitate cross-cultural comparison.

Finally, we ask what the myths say about the cultures that produced them and decide whether it matters if they are factual.

This summer, we will see ravens, dragons, and all kinds of fanciful beasts; we will meet gods and goddesses; we will explain the season and the tides; and we will face creation and death. It will truly be the hero's journey.

Instructor



Nikolas Hoel ('99)

Hoel is an instructor of history at Northeastern Illinois University in Chicago.

He is a graduate of Lawrence University and went on to earn an M.A. at the University of Colorado-Boulder and a Ph.D. at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

He is trained in both medieval and Byzantine history. At NEIU he teaches classes concerning both ancient and medieval Europe, for which he has been honored with several Instructor Excellent Awards.

Hoel's primary research interests concern the religious, cultural, and intellectual history of the Middle Ages, and he became a medieval historian because of the passion for the barbarians he developed while at Lawrence.

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