The term "mythology" carries a number of meanings, including ancient stories associated with rituals, potent symbols, and images with an uncanny power to stick in our minds and shape our worldviews. In many usages, "mythology" also carries the connotation of the temporally, spatially, and/or geographically distant. In this course, we will look at examples of such "distant" mythologies, including stories, rituals, and symbols embraced by the ancient Greeks, Pacific Islanders, and Native Americans (who, though spatially proximate, are regarded by many Americans as culturally distant). Some scholars, however, think that it is too confining, if not prejudicial, to limit the concept of "myth" to such distant societies and cultures. In the second part of the course, we will consider the idea that mythology is to be found in many forms of modern mass-culture, such as film, television, advertising, and popular iconography. Throughout, we will consider the ways in which mythology intersects with culture more broadly and the ways it functions within society.

Anthropologists Bronislaw Malinowski's "Myth in Primitive Psychology" will be the focal work for the first half of the course; literary and culture critic Roland Barthes' "Mythologies" for the second. Readings will be supplemented with visual materials. The workload for this class will be average. Grades will be based on participation, an in-class presentation, two short essays, and a concluding essay to be written during the final exam period.