

## **ANTH-1974: *Worlds and Wonders: Exploring Culture Through Role-Play***

### **General Education Class + Discussion Lab**

**Maximum Enrollment: 20 Students**

#### **Class Schedule:**

- **Lecture:** MWF – 4:00 PM to 5:15 PM (or later)
  - **Discussion Lab:** TR – 11:00 AM to 11:50 AM
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#### **Grading Breakdown**

- **30%** Participation & Attendance (daily attendance + weekly participation grade)
  - **2%** Character Sheet & Introductory Essay (700 words max)
  - **8%** Post-Campaign Reflection Exams (4 exams, 2% each)
  - **10%** Midterm Reflection Essay (1500 words minimum)
  - **30%** Prompt Essays (5 essays, 6% each, 1000–1300 words)
  - **20%** Final Reflection Essay (2000 words minimum)
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#### **Course Overview**

This course takes students on a global, narrative-driven journey through history and culture, using the framework of the beloved role-playing game *Dungeons & Dragons*. Students will explore key periods in world history through the lens of original D&D characters, enhanced by academic roles that guide their narrative and reflective engagement.

Students will create standard *Dungeons & Dragons* characters, but each are randomly assigned an academic role that informs their perspective and participation.

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#### **Academic Roles**

- **Lorewalker:** Studies the land itself. Every vase, every road, every ruin holds a story—if only you stop to listen.
- **Historian:** The note-taker. Seeks meaning in everything, even in chaos. Dedicated to understanding, even when understanding fails.
- **Eternal:** The observer. These omniscient characters do not engage traditionally but drive the story forward by interpreting clues and analyzing the narrative itself.
- **Native:** The traditional player. Familiar with the world they walk. Engages in exploration, combat, and classic D&D experiences.

These roles are assigned to five students each, at random. This encourages varied engagement styles, disrupts academic comfort zones, and promotes creative equity and collaboration.

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#### **Narrative Structure**

The instructor will serve as the Dungeon Master and guide students through **four mini-campaigns**, each lasting four weeks and covering one century of cultural transformation in a specific region. The campaigns (subject to adjustment) are:

1. **Weeks 1–4:** India (1700–1800)
2. **Weeks 5–8:** United States (1800–1900)

3. **Weeks 9–12:** Japan (1900–2000)
4. **Weeks 13–16:** Modern-Day Sudan + Student-Voted Country

The final two weeks of instruction are taken over by the TA, as the Dungeon Master character—the ancient Historian—dies in the narrative. In this shift, the students assume full responsibility for the story’s resolution.

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### **Story Premise**

The story begins with students encountering a forgotten Historian—an ancient soul overflowing with tales, but no one left to listen. Moved by compassion or curiosity, the players agree to hear his story.

Each campaign explores a major moment in history, with direct gameplay during lecture and thematic, philosophical exploration reserved for the discussion lab. After the campaign in Sudan, the Historian dies. His final wish is for the students to finish his tale.

The students then vote on one modern country and, using the lessons they've learned, attempt to better the world they now inherit. The final two weeks are student-driven, TA-facilitated, and culminate in a personal and collective reflection.

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### **Prompt Essays (In-Character)**

Each essay responds to a pivotal narrative moment and must be written from the perspective of the student's character:

1. **The Bloody Crown** – You find a crown stained with blood. What might the growing divide cost this country—politically and globally?
  2. **The Ear on the Trail** – You run alongside Harriet Tubman and find the ear of a fallen runaway. What is the cost of freedom, and what would you say to those who never made it?
  3. **Peace Under the Blossoms** – Warplanes fly overhead as you sit beneath a cherry blossom tree. What does peace mean in a time of war?
  4. **The General’s Letter** – You find a letter from a politician-turned-warlord during civil war. What does it say, and what can turn a man of peace into a warmonger?
  5. **The Protest You Didn’t Expect** – You see people protesting the changes you are trying to make. What do you say to them? What does it mean to be an activist?
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### **Out-of-Character Reflections**

- **Midterm Reflection Essay** – Step out of character. What does this story mean to you personally? What have you learned through this method of learning?
  - **Final Reflection Essay** – You’ve completed the Historian’s tale. What was he trying to teach you? How can you carry his legacy onwards into your life? Will you one day teach his tale?
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### **Roles of Instructor and TA**

- **Instructor:** Acts as the Dungeon Master. Drives the narrative and emphasizes philosophical themes. Encourages student-led exploration and takes a minimal role in discussion labs, allowing students to lead.
- **Teaching Assistant (TA):** Observes for the first 14 weeks, collects data on player engagement, and develops the mini-campaign exams based on student behaviors and thematic patterns. In the final two weeks, the TA takes over instruction, facilitating student-led conclusions and reflection.