

# Today

- How do we recognize ritualizing activities?
- How might we use theories of ritual to analyze a Sweat Lodge using theories of ritual?

A thick black L-shaped frame is positioned on the left and right sides of the slide. The left part of the frame consists of a vertical line extending from the bottom and a horizontal line extending from the top. The right part consists of a vertical line extending from the top and a horizontal line extending from the bottom.

# ABORIGINAL TRADITIONS: RITUAL

Sept 20

# Sample Quiz Short Answer Questions

- What does it mean when we say that the category “World Religions” is a recent, Western category? Does this mean there were no religions before modern Europe?
- According to Bruce Lincoln, myths are stories that make truth claims, are credible, and have authority in the present. What does this mean? Give an example from class or the readings
- How might we recognize a Sweat Lodge as a ritualizing activity? Using one theory of ritual (Society, Memory, or Power) briefly analyze the Sweat Lodge.

# Place and Sacred Ecology in Myth

- Living in harmony with space important
- Over exploitation has consequences
- Sacred ecology underpins moral and spiritual orientations
- Humans often inferior to other beings in the world, the opposite of a Judeo-Christian world where humans were given domain over the beasts of the earth

# Rituals refresher

- Ritualizing, rituals are actions not things
- What are some of the things that we might expect ritualizing actions to convey or accomplish?
- Social bonds
- Teaching through repetition
- Relations of power, both expressions and challenges

# Myth and Ritual: Prayer and the Pipe

- Prayer with a calumet, a pipe with a red or black bowl and long stem
- Minimally ceremonial
- Pipe stored in bag: pipe bowl, and stem always stored separately



# Origin Myths: Lakota Sioux

- Two hunters came across a beautiful woman
- One had lustful thoughts
- When he moved toward the woman a whirlwind kicked up and reduced the man to a pile of bones
- The woman asked the other man to take her to his camping band



# Origin Myths: Lakota Sioux

- She came into the village and gave a pipe to the people
- She urged them to be respectful and pray daily
- She left, and in the distance turned into a white buffalo calf
- The pipe is called White Buffalo Calf Pipe

# Pipe and Prayer

- Involves smoking the pipe
- Pointing it in 6 directions
  - *The cardinal four*
  - *The up to the creator and down to mother earth*
- If others are present, the pipe is passed around
- Touching or holding the pipe in an honour, so whomever smokes is prayer is admonished to be moral and truthful in all actions

# Sweat Lodge

- They are prepared and performed as needed, sometimes as a purifying ritual before more strictly “religious” activities

# Ritual: Sweat Lodge

■ As I describe the ritual, think of one example of each of the following:

1. How do we know that this is a ritualizing activity
2. How does the ritual bring people together or divide people? (Ritual and Society)
3. How/are ideas communicated through repetition or dramatic actions? (Ritual and Memory)
4. What relations of power are apparent? Is there an example of an expression of power? Resistance to power? (Ritual and Power)

- Lodge built from young willows and set up near a natural source of water
- The entrance faces either east or south
- Space is circular and divided into four quarters for each cardinal direction
- A deep, wide hole is dug in the middle
- The hot rocks are placed here as the ritual goes on
- The rocks symbolize grandmother earth and the indestructible nature of *Wakan-Tanka*

- The round fire pit at the centre of the lodge represents the centre of the universe, symbolic dwelling places of *wakan tanka*, its power is the fire
- A fire is built apr. 50 ft from the door, and 40 rocks are heated in it
- The fire is started an hour or so before the rest of the ceremony, people arriving often watch the fire burning down
- Many other preparations

- Once everything is prepared, people are invited to enter the lodge
- Before they enter
- The leader of the ceremony prays, and passes a pipe so that every participant has a chance to pray and smoke the pipe
- Everyone then enters the lodge, leaving a pathway between the door and the pit
- One person is designated “doorman” and tasked with bringing in the hot stones

- There are four rounds of bringing the stones in, each round bringing in  $\frac{1}{4}$  of the total rocks
- All rocks, even broken ones, must be used
- The doorman closes the door and the round begins
- Rounds feature prayers and songs, water is periodically splashed on the rocks
- A stick is sometimes used to beat the water container like a drum
- Participants can join the singing and make prayers of their own



# Sweat Lodge as Ritualizing Activity?

- How might we recognize a sweat lodge as a ritualizing activity?
- What is one thing we might say about Ritual and Society?
- What is one thing we might say about Ritual and Memory?
- What is one thing we might say about Ritual and Power?

# Ritual: Sundance

- Among Indigenous peoples of the Great Plains and Canadian Prairies, one of the most sacred ceremonies
- Must be requested and sponsored

- Request for sundance must be accepted
- Sometimes one, sometimes multiple sponsors
- Dancers prepare by fasting and meditating, assembling all they need to participate
- Each dancer and the sponsor vows to sacrifice in exchange for what is being sought
- Many types of sacrifice
- Participants must be selfless, throw themselves at the mercy of the spirits, make themselves pitiable before them

- Dancers must contemplate the import of their actions to sacrifice by dancing, fasting food and water, and in exceptional cases being pierced
- These actions are part of a community of people engaging in the seeking of the fulfillment of vows
- The dancers build the structures themselves, cutting poles, digging post holes
- The dancers that vowed to be pierced are painted and prepared
- The piercing demonstrates their commitment and endurance

- Dancers are attempting to make themselves pitiful and pitiable to the creator and the spirits, so that the prayers they are making and the reason they are dancing can be witnessed as the extent of their sincerity and belief
- On the last day, healing is offered to those who need it
- Four men are chosen to eat four symbolic foods
- Then the fast is broken with water
- Sundance is a public display of community wide commitment and renewal

# Myth revisited: Truth, Context, Meaning

- No reason to think that indigenous groups believe myths to be “true”
- Or that the literal meaning of the story is the important aspect
- More going on here
- We rarely encounter myths in their natural forms

“it’s off to Leonard, defended by Simmons,  
is this the dagger?”







# Transmission of Knowledge

- Embodied traditions
- Young people in seclusion crying out for a vision
- Visions of historical or prehistorical entities
- Visions interpreted with elders
- Knowledge gendered