**Quiz #3**

**What lead to Joseph Campbell’s interest in comparative mythology?**

The genesis of Joseph Campbell’s interest in comparative mythology began during his younger days when his father took him to the Natural History Museum where he became fascinated with Native American culture. This event led to a lifelong interest in telling stories. Even in graduate school, he wanted to pursue Sanskrit and Medieval literature.

**How did Joseph Campbell become the world’s foremost scholar on mythology? How did the Great Depression benefit his education?**

Joseph Campbell’s pure interest in the pursuit of knowledge led him to an intense and rigorous study of the stories of all cultures through time. This included studying the mythology in all cultures around the world. During the Great Depression, he spent nine hours a day, reading about all the cultures around the world; he did this for five years. He did all this even while living in a shack in Woodstock, New York. He emerged as a leading scholar in comparative mythology.

**What is considered to be Joseph Campbell’s most important teaching?**

Campbell’s most famous teaching was the belief in “following your bliss”. It entails pursuing whatever one’s happiness, delight, pleasure and contentment is. He believed that if one follows their bliss, they will put themselves on a track that has always been there for them; it’ll open them to the life that they ought to be living and is the one they are living. When one realizes this pursuit, they will meet other people who are in the field of their bliss. By following this philosophy, many opportunities open up that wouldn’t have normally opened up. Many students in the late 1960s and early 1970s, from USC and UCLA flocked together and worked together because they followed their bliss. They revolutionized Hollywood. They helped break the older studio system and made dare-devil movies such as Easy Rider. They brought their youth and their ideas to the forefront. These included great men like Francis Ford Coppola, George Lucas, Walter Murch and John Milius. They gave us The Godfather, Conan the Barbarian, the modern 5-channel audio mixing in Apocalypse Now and Star Wars. Can we imagine the American psyche without Star Wars?

**What is the primary factor that decides what type of stories a storyteller will decide to tell? What are storytellers “a product” of?**

The storyteller is a product of the culture and the time that he/she is born in to. The storyteller brings with him/her, the class structure, the time period, gender, caste, tribe and race. The struggles and celebrations that the writer has gone through in their life, will be reflected in their respective storytelling. Steven Spielberg’s movies always have a divorce in them because his parents were divorced; he always felt that his father was gone. The protagonists in his movies are usually missing a father, but invariably, find a father-figure. Some examples include: Close Encounters of the Third Kind (the boy does not have a father but finds a father figure), Jurassic Park (the hero does not like children but ends up becoming a father-figure), War of the Worlds (the protagonist is divorced and loses his kids, but ends up finding them in the climax). Note that Close Encounters of the Third King was written by Spielberg. The other two movies, although originally written by other authors, were interpreted and shown by Spielberg to have protagonists who were doubtful fathers/father-figures.

**Describe why myths are important. What are “stories”, as defined in the context of this chapter?**

Myths are important for many reasons: they have connected to people for thousands of years, over several generations and races and guide humans through their most beloved rituals; they form as metaphors for how to live life to the fullest realization. They are stories that are so deeply ingrained in to all our cultures that it is impossible to ignore them. An adult atheist with Catholic roots will at some point in his/her life be drawn to the mythological figures in Catholicism, no matter how much he rejects it. In fact, his/her rejection will take a specific form that will revolve solely around Catholicism. Take Superman, for instance: an American icon. But if one were to step back and look deeply at Superman’s character, he is a misfit immigrant! The creators of Superman were sons of Jewish immigrants. They not only brought their immigrant sensibilities to their hero, but also weren’t able to escape it! Imagine that: one of the greatest American icons is a misfit immigrant, who wants to protect Americans and has a huge crush on an American girl. As per Campbell, “myths are public dreams and dreams are private myths”. Stories are therefore, in this context, the collected dreams of the millions of generations of mythmakers who have lived throughout history and who chose to share their visions with humanity. That’s the power of true storytellers. The dreams that Siegel and Shuster (Superman’s creators) occupied were their own private myths. Superman beautifully blossomed in to a great American public dream.

**Explain how you will discover your own myths.**

I will be able to discover my own myths, first by rediscovering my own history: what were my biggest fears and struggles and how did I overcome them? What are my biggest insecurities? Based on the struggles, fears and insecurities, I’ll be able to build heroes that will be able to overcome these pitfalls in their stories. The story comes from my experiences, sensibilities and subconscious. I’ll be able to explore my subconscious through writing and being able to rediscover myself through writing. Usually, writing in to the night helps me achieve new character traits and can find new avenue for my story and characters to explore. This way, I’ll be truthful to the story and the characters.

**Why is it important to understand the history of your art?**

It is important to know the history of our art, the genre, and the semantics of film-making to make sure that we find our proper place in story-telling, direction and film-making. If we do not understand the history of our art, we will not understand the struggles an artist goes through and the future struggles that will come up. We’ll be like a fish tossed ashore and lost. If we are lost, we cannot build the skills to become an auteur. We won’t be able to lead, set direction and motivate those around us to make a great product in story-telling.

**Describe the difference between an antihero and an antivillain.**

An antihero is a character that blurs the difference between hero and villain. We root for them despite their flaws and their lack of heroic features and characteristics. Travis Bickle in Taxi Driver is a great example. He is thrown in to conflict by their surrounding forces and don’t want to necessarily be involved. Travis gets pulled in to rescuing the teenage prostitute; he was never looking for it. Michael Corleone is another great antihero; he never wanted to get mixed in the family business (mafia); he wanted to lead the life of a typical American: accolades in military, government service, senator. And yet, the actions around him pull him in to the family business. He had no choice but to join the forces with his family to protect his father. The situation demands that such antiheros act and dive in to conflict. And antivillain, on the other hand, is a force with hero-like qualities, but who opposes the hero. A regular villain has no heroic qualities. David Dunn is a hero; Elijah Price is a villain, in Unbreakable. The two characters are unmistakably different at the climax of the film; they are two polar opposites of the spectrum. However, throughout the journey of the film, Elijah Price appears to be David Dunn’s friend. In the climax, we know that he the means to achieve his ends were immoral. In his own mind, he was doing the right thing to find his place in this world. But, his means ended up costing a lot of lives. Yet, the audience sympathizes with him throughout the narration. He is clearly the antivillain.

**As a storyteller, following countless other storytellers before you, how do you plan on keeping your stories FRESH and UNIQUE? How do you achieve freedom from the “monomyth”?**

To stay FRESH and UNIQUE, we should first completely eliminate the need for form, when looking for truthful story and characters. Only after finding a great story to tell and after creating beautiful, conflicting characters and after we have a blueprint for our story, we should find the mythic form and use that form to narrate our story. That will be captivating for the audience. At a certain point during the writing process, the form will manifest itself in to a genre. At that point, we can use the genre conventions/form that makes sense to our story and characters. We can discard any genre form or mythic structure that won’t fit in to our story. Bottom line: make sure to bend/break form conventions to tell your story beautifully instead of squeezing the story in to a preset form.

**Explain what you think is the best way to utilize the “hero’s journey” without it becoming stale and predictable**

As artists, we strive for the light and the darkness with equal passion because it is the understanding of both these extreme polarities that will help us understand humanity. Without understanding humanity, how can artists write who we are, where we come from, and beautifully narrate our journeys? For this big reason, the best way to keep the stories and hero’s journey from becoming stale is by telling the truth about humanity. It doesn’t mean we are striving to be documentarians. It means, that even in feature films, the characters need to be truthful to their characterizations, their choices, their fears, their doubts, their love, their happiness, their children, their parents. We should be able to squeeze out every last little detail about their childhood, their lovers, their disappointments, what they eat for breakfast, lunch and dinner, how they make love, and what drives them crazy. Bottom line: research, read, write, repeat and do it truthfully: this is how we stay away from becoming stale and predictable.

**What separates real storytellers from those who just want to play storyteller? What is the most important trait you must possess to achieve your goals?**

Creative discipline is of utmost importance to the real storyteller. While those who want to play storytellers slack off and don’t put any effort in to their idea, the real storyteller will struggle for hours on end every day and night to tell the correct story in the correct way. He will strive to make the best stories and characters for his audience and want to make their jaw drop. The fake storyteller will find such a task daunting while the real storyteller will put him(her)self through misery to get the most beautiful story out to his/her audience. He/She will stay up all night to discover the deep intentions of his/her characters and make every scene turn. He/She will not create blatant, short-sighted material. He/She will have the discipline to deliver unique revelations in his/her story; he will know where and when to make the proper sacrifices to deliver.

**Choose one film from the 12 films that you watched that you enjoyed the most, were inspired by, want to steal from, etc, and break down the archetypes in the film. The film you choose should also be what you see as most similar in tone to the film you hope to eventually make.**

Out of the twelve films I have watched, I choose “American Beauty” as the one I have enjoyed the most. It is beautiful because it plays out like a comedy throughout the narration and yet, the protagonist dies in the climax. Despite his death, the film is never remembered as a tragedy! It is a beautiful coming-of-age story for a man who is going through his mid-life crisis. The archetypes in the film are: the homophobic military man, the pot-headed teenager, who is too smart for his parents, the confused teenager, the conceited teenager and finally, the protagonists: the sexually frustrated suburban American couple. My film will be similar in tone: it’ll have certain comedic elements and certain tragic elements. But my film’s overall tone will be a little more serious than American Beauty because it has a lot to do with dealing with loss of a loved one. We won’t know it until the climax, by which point, the protagonist will have learned to grieve and properly get over his past. It’ll also involve an “alternative” reality that my protagonist lives in, which is very similar to the protagonist’s alternative reality in American Beauty: his confused love for his teenage daughter’s best friend. And just like that (snap fingers): he gets over it in the climax. He realizes that he has to protect this child instead of having sex with her. My protagonist too, snaps back in to reality: he gets over his past and comes to his sense, to do the right thing for his child.

**Watch the films “Burden of Dreams” and the DVD supplement “Werner Herzog Eats his Shoe”**

I watched the film and the supplement.

**Write a one-page paper on what you believe Herzog’s “philosophy of film” to be. How does it relate to guerilla filmmaking? How does his method of filmmaking differ from other filmmakers?**

Werner Herzog’s “philosophy of film” is that you have to go to any length of effort, time and sacrifice to make your film and show it to an audience. There was a time once, when Herzog had to choose between Shampoo and food. He had two shampoos at the time, but had no food. So, he exchanged one of the shampoos for some rice that he lived on for four weeks. There was another time when he publicly cooked and ate his shoe. He promised to do so, if Errol Morris completed a film project on pet cemeteries. Herzog believed that Morris didn’t have it in him to get through a project completely. But once Morris did, Herzog delivered his end of the bargain.

That is the commitment Herzog has to film-making: it isn’t just for himself, but also for his contemporaries. He famously declared that he prefers people who have worked as bouncers in a sex club, or have been wardens in a lunatic asylum, because those people would have lived life in its very elementary forms. He prefers the raw, stark-naked quality of life as opposed to the academic way of film-making. This is clearly reflected in Burden of Dreams, which has documented Herzog’s almost maniac way of filming in the harsh conditions in South America. The madness of the central character, Fitzarraldo (a native version of Fitzgerald) manifests in to Herzog in real life. He had gone through immense pain, isolation from home, and put everyone else around him in literal hell, to get the film made.

This style and sensibility of filmmaking is in direct correlation to his belief in guerilla film-making. He does not depend on the studio system for finance, distribution or for filming. He will find financers on his own. He will find distributers on his own. And most importantly, he can be his own crew. He will do the light, the sound, the camera if he has to. More importantly, he has a knack for doing things ad hoc, even if the conditions aren’t right for filming using the crew and actors/actresses if required, to get the proper shot, angle, natural light, scenery. In one word, the guerilla film-making is about self-reliance. That one compounded word. And in an effort to be self-reliant, everyone will leave their egos at the door and do whatever is required to film. It is similar to the Dogme style of Dutch film-making (started in mid-90s), but on steroids. This isn’t simply independent style of film-making; it involves solitude, sacrifice and the knack to brush off rejection and continue as though nothing negative had ever happened. It involves faking permits to shooting locations that have not given you permission. It involves hiking with equipment on your shoulders for miles together. It’ll be as important as taking care of your baby. It will not roughen you up around the edges. It’ll throw you in the rough and make you understand how to captivate a four-year old with a captivating story.

Herzog’s style of film-making also differs from other filmmakers in that he takes his time to develop the story and also takes as long as required to get the perfect scene and shot. He is not driven by money. He has never cared about the bottom line. He has always wanted it to be about the journey and the experience of going to the depths of hell to get a film made and shown to audience. Herzog does not like to story-board his films before-hand. He also does not like to come up with a production schedule. Most of the scenes and dialogs are improvised. He is also very different from other filmmakers, in that he believes he is a product of his failures. It would be inconceivable in a studio system to make that happen. The biggest part of Herzog’s guerilla style of filmmaking is the way he writes: he writes his screenplays in five days. If it takes more than two weeks, something is wrong with it. He throws out the Three-Act structure; he does not like structure in his narration. He does not like the protagonist to say something on page 7 or do something by page 10. He does not believe in such formulas. He believes in good stories that captivate the mind. He believes that the images should flow like a poem.

It’s a pity that we don’t have two Werner Herzogs on this planet.

**Schedule an appointment to have a phone or Skype meeting with your Hollywood Screenwriter.**

I have completed this task.