

Conducting Background Research

This exercise is constructed to help develop your final project for this class. It emphasizes the strategies used by designers and scholars to obtain the information necessary to create a suitable college-level creative project supported by appropriate, accurate, and useful information.

In order to complete the project itself—to interpret a myth or mythic tradition using skills you are developing in your program—you will be required to conduct research in the following areas:

Practicing Mythography

Your project must be based on an identifiable, culturally grounded myth or mythic cycle, which you will then use to produce a translation or adaptation using your program skills. The form of your “mythograph” can consist of almost anything: an artist’s book, a collection of costume designs, a script for a short visual work, a short film, a website, an animated story, an interior design (such as a theme restaurant), a live performance, a comic book, a set of illustrations, a 3D rendering of an environment or a character—the possibilities are almost endless.

The chosen myth and its context

Depending on which myth or tradition you have chosen, you should consider the following questions. What do we know about the period(s) and/or culture(s) in which it arose? When does the story itself take place, or when does it first arise? What design conventions and artistic traditions existed in the timeframe of the story? What did the architecture look like? What did people wear? What kind of tools/weapons did they use? Has the story been adapted before? Do other translations exist? If so, be familiar with what other artists or designers have done with the myth, and read one or two existing translations to help broaden your understanding of the action and the purpose of the events.

Read at least one critical article from a scholarly source to help you understand the importance of the story. Be aware of the archetypal elements of the story: patterns, characters, events.

Developing and following through with a concept

Be able to articulate your concept in a short paragraph, and do so before consulting me. If you have already located some of your sources, add them to the Research Worksheet before we discuss your project, so I can see what you’ll need to add.

The sheet handed out along with this assignment contains examples of several kinds of resources, with instructions on how to cite them properly in MLA style. It also shows you how annotations are used. Remember *not* to use the following types of sources: **encyclopedias** (including Wikipedia) unless they specialize in a particular field (like Grove Art Online); **abstracts** of articles (use and print out only complete articles, either in full-text or .pdf form); **general dictionaries** (the *Oxford English Dictionary* is acceptable, because it provides historical contexts of words); **book reviews** (if a review makes a book look interesting and useful, try to find it) unless the review is extensive and well-illustrated. When in doubt, check with me via e-mail or during office hours.

Research Worksheet

Book: Author [Last name first; if there are multiple authors, only the name of the first one is reversed]. Title [underlined or italicized—not both, not bolded]. City of publication: Publisher, year of publication.

Flintstone, Fred. *A History of Prehistoric Sculpture*. New York: Abrams, 1997.

This book provides good historical information on prehistoric sculptures, such as the *Woman of Willendorf* and even some architecture (such as Stonehenge). However, the quality of the images isn't very impressive, and it's difficult to make out the features of some sculpted items. Flintstone includes essays from noted scholars among his own, however, providing alternative interpretations from respectable sources.

Journal article: Author [as above]. "Title of Article." Name of Journal [underlined or italicized] volume number (year): page numbers.

Rubble, Betty. "Fred Flintstone's Artistic Impact on Bedrock." *Quarry Digest* 109 (1994): 61-70.

This short article amounts to a paean to a friend; it's interesting, but not very objective. Mrs. Rubble seems to think Fred hung the moon--after having chiseled it out of stone. Rubble waxes poetic about Flintstone's stonework, and even compares it to geological formations that required millennia to form. I'm just not convinced that Bedrock's stonework is either that important or that it will last as long as monuments like the henges in Great Britain.

Essay collected in a book: Author [as above]. "Title of Essay." Title of book [underlined or italicized]. Ed. [followed by name of editor, not reversed]. City of publication: publisher, year of publication. Page numbers.

Rubble, Barney. "Between a Rock and a Hard Place." *Stories from the Quarries*. Ed. Wilma Flintstone.

Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992. 44-58.

In one of many articles on the trials and tribulations of quarry workers in an excellent volume, Rubble's piece talks about the difficulty of trying to maintain his desired level of craftsmanship in a market economy that values quantity over quality. He laments the decline of craft education and its replacement with shoddy, poorly manufactured stonework, and suggests that if things do not improve, the fall of civilization itself cannot be far behind.

Video/DVD: Name of director [Last name first], dir. Title of film [underlined or italicized]. Perf. [names of major performers]. Distributor, year of release. (Alternatively, if the film itself is more important than the director, list as follows: Film Title [underlined or italicized]. Dir. [name of director]. Perf. [as above], etc.) Two examples:

The Flintstones. Dir. Brian Levant. Perf. John Goodman, Elizabeth Perkins, Rick Moranis, Rosie O'Donnell.

Universal, 1994.

This film is funny and entertaining, but I think the writers' interpretation of the story of Fred and Wilma and their friends suffers from lack of plausibility. Everyone is engaging and amusing, but the film tells us very little about the period, and is especially lacking in any social history or context for the development of quarry work in prehistory. The fact that they have a pet dinosaur is especially annoying, since "Dino" would have been dead for 63 million years; a saber-toothed cat or a great auk would be much more convincing.

Spivey, Nigel. *How Art Made the World: How Humans Made Art and How Art Made Us Human*. Dir. Francis

Whatley, et. al. BBC Worldwide America, 2006.

This excellent series, hosted and written by the engaging Nigel Spivey from Cambridge University, focuses on creativity and imagination as hallmarks of our very humanity. It's companion book, *How Art Made the World: A Journey to the Origins of Human Creativity*, is equally compelling. The essay "More Human than Human" provides some insight into the attraction of figures like the "Woman from Willendorf."

Work of Art: Name of artist [Last name first, if known]. Title of Work [underlined or italicized]. Location [e.g., Name of Museum], City. Source Title [underlined or italicized]. By [Author's name]. City of Publication: Publisher, year of publication. Page number.

Woman from Willendorf. Naturhistorisches Museum, Vienna. *Art History* (2nd Ed.) by Marilyn Stokstad. New York:

Prentice Hall/Abrams, 2002. 46.

This single image has caused more controversy than any other prehistoric art work, with the possible exception of the *Shaft of the Dead Man* in Lascaux Cave. Stokstad's comments are straightforward and factual, and place the image in its wider context.

An online article that focuses on a single work can be treated as any other website:

Witcombe, Christopher L. C. E. "Earth Mysteries: Stonehenge." 7 February 2008. Sweet Briar College. 3 February 2009.

Dr. Witcombe created his art history websites in 1996, and has been adding to them ever since. This article, part of a series on so-called "mysterious" works, has been updated several times to take advantage of recent archaeological information. The page provides photographs and diagrams, and an easily-accessible, well-documented history of the site.

Article in an online database: There are many types of databases, but the basic pattern includes Author [reversed for alphabetizing]. "Title of Article." Name of original periodical. Volume: Month (year). Name of Electronic Source [underlined or italicized]. Ed. [Name of Editor]. Month of Access, Year of Access. Location of database access [The Art Institute of Dallas]. <URL>. [note: Provide only the main URL, because the individual articles cannot be accessed without a password.]

Headstone, Rock. "The Boundary Between Art and Labor." *Quarry Art Reporter* 23 July 1993: *Wilson Web*.

Sept. 2008. The Art Institute of Dallas. <http://www.wilsonweb.com>.

Headstone is a renowned Leftist art historian, and in this article he summarizes his belief that many quarry workers are in fact artists and craftsmen. He also believes strongly that these workers are being exploited by being paid wages much lower than those of recognized artisans, simply because their work is confined to the quarry.

CD ROM: Author [reversed for alphabetizing]. Title [Underlined or italicized]. City of Publication/Distribution: Publisher/Distributor, year of publication.

Flintstone, Fred and Barney Rubble. *The World of Paleolithic Art*. New York: Britannica World Multimedia, 1999.

This CD-ROM presentation covers Paleolithic works from around the world, and includes analysis from such important researchers as Alexander Marshack. The images are high-resolution and can be magnified up to 150%. Updated information is available through a companion website.

Website: Title of page or article [If you're using a specific page from a larger website, list the page first, in quotation marks. Then list the larger website, italicized or underlined, after the editor/author and last update.] Ed. [Name of Editor or Webmaster listed]. Month and year of last update. Name of general website. Name of sponsoring institution or company. Date of access [e.g. 20 April 2002]. <URL>. **Or** [if the page contains an article you're using as a source, begin with the author]: Last name, first name. Title of page, etc.

Uhlmeier, Candace. "Understanding Paleolithic Art and Design." April 2005. *Owldroppings* (course page). The Art Institute of Dallas. 05 October 2005. <http://www.owlfarmer.com/PaleoArt1.htm>.

In this cogent and tightly-argued essay, Uhlmeier presents an overview of the history of cave-art interpretation and points out that modern human beings cannot effectively interpret Paleolithic art because of a kind of technological blindness—a consequence of our lack of contact with the natural world. She thoroughly debunks claims that the figures on the cave walls at Lascaux represent illustrations of stories told by Paleolithic peoples.

Watkins, Jody Taylor. *Resources on Prehistoric Art*. St. Joseph's College. 18 April 2006.

<http://www.saintjoe.edu/%7Ejwatkins/prehistoric.htm>

Watkins is an assistant professor, Director of the Intercultural Core program, and Research Librarian at St. Joseph's College in Indiana. This page, for her lecture on prehistoric creativity for the Core course, "Humanity in the Universe," includes an outline of the lecture, plus a helpful list of sources for further reading: books, websites, and articles.

Research Checklist

To complete this assignment, make sure the following elements are present on your bibliography:

1. At least five sources from a variety of media.

This means that you must consult two or more different kinds of sources—not all books or all websites. A well-rounded bibliography will include books, websites, journal articles, and other media as evidence of research.

2. At least one article from an online database or print journal that pertains directly to the content of your chosen text. Print or copy this article and include it in your final packet.

3. A high-quality bibliography requires high-quality sources; so while you may include “Eyewitness Books” or the like, which are more generally associated with elementary or secondary school projects, you must add college-level sources to these. Remember that five is a minimum number of sources—not a maximum!

4. An appropriate bibliography will also include the following kinds of sources: background readings on the myth itself, research into the technologies or media you will be using to complete your project (although not textbooks), other versions of the story/myth, other adaptations (including those from other historical periods), etc.

5. Books and articles on the periods, characters (such as gods and goddesses, mythical critters), design conventions, weaponry, architecture, and other cultural elements of the myth.

Two final admonitions:

6. I would prefer it if all images you include in your work be your own, original creations. If they are not, however, be sure to acknowledge your sources carefully. You *should* be looking for images from our databases, Wikimedia Commons, or other Creative Commons license-holders who allow use with acknowledgment. Royalty-free images are frequently available in the Library, so be sure to check for Dover publications and other sources for embellishments if you don’t have the hand skills to create them yourself.

7. Do not forget to **annotate** your citations by writing a short paragraph to evaluate their use to your research. Use complete sentences, at least two or three, and include information other than “I used this book because it had pretty pictures.” If you thought the source was terrible and/or didn’t use it, don’t list it!