

NELC 5568/CompStd 5668

STUDIES IN ORALITY AND LITERACY Seminar

AU23

Wed 3:55 - 6:30 pm

Professor Michael Swartz

Before people wrote texts, they told stories, said prayers, learned lore from their parents and teachers, and carried out their culture and religion—all without writing. But even with the invention of writing and the production of books, the oral dimension of language has been predominant in most societies. What does it mean for a culture to rely on oral transmission? How does a civilization change when writing becomes part of the culture? What is the meaning of authorship?

In this seminar, we will explore the nature of oral traditions, what it means for a culture to have a primarily oral literature, and the complex relationships between orality and literacy. We will look at theories of orality and literacy from the disciplines of folklore, anthropology, the history of religion, and comparative literature.

