From sacred myth to urban legend and everything in between, the folklore of Japan is rich and varied. There are epics of war; folktales about monsters and ghosts and shapeshifting creatures; local festivals and foodways that have persisted for hundreds of years; and brand new traditions created in the context of globalization and cultural change. This course introduces students to Japanese folklore and its study (minzokugaku). Primary emphasis is on the narrative genres of myth, legend, and folktale, but we will also discuss folk beliefs, ritual, festival, art and supernatural creatures. We will examine issues of identity and authenticity and what it means to call something “Japanese”; questions of tradition, the “invention of tradition,” and modernity within a historical context; and the intersection of folklore with literature and popular culture (including film, anime, and video games).

GE: ARTS & HUMANITIES AND WORLD CULTURES.