1. Who/what is the trickster and what is the nature of its trickery?
2. Are there any human/animal, or shape-shifting, qualities associated with the trickster in the story?
3. What is the "take home message" that the trickster says about humanity? Is it positive or negative? Why?

(Don’t include these in your paper- it’s placed here as a gentle reminder)

Trickster- Short Write

The trickster character that I am choosing to write about is Jack Sparrow from “The Pirates of the Caribbean” (PoC) film franchise. In “Myth and Knowing” the character of the Trickster is described as possessing “a funny, absurd, iconoclastic sort of playfulness, yet the Trickster’s playfulness can carry with it serious, even tragic or transcendent overtones” (Leonard and McClure, 250). I couldn’t think of a better way to capture all of the facets of Jack Sparrow’s character. Being a pirate, Jack embodies a man who lives outside the normal rules of society. The PoC films are set in the days when Britain controlled the seas and the rules of behavior were rigidly controlled- particularly for those in the military. However, the pirate Jack- walking around in his androgynous clothing and behaving in a self-serving, amoral, manner is the complete opposite of the normal society presented at the start of the film.

Jack is able to manipulate people through his charms, or flat out deceit- whatever it takes to trick people into being part of his overall plan. It is widely known that Johnny Depp based Jack Sparrow’s look on legendary Rolling Stones’ guitarist Keith Richards. Depp’s speech and clothing he used in bringing the character of Jack Sparrow to life were practically cloned from Richards’ own attempt to be a modern-day pirate for almost 50 years. As “Myth and Knowing” describes, “Tricksters are frequently greedy and lazy, dishonest and gluttonous, vain and impulsive (Leonard and McClure, 250). I can’t think of a better description for the Rock ‘n’ Roll lifestyle Richards is the poster child for- a life comprised of drugs, androgyny, avoidance of being part of the 9 to 5 world, etc. It is a lifestyle that is the perfect real-life complement to illustrate how charming and dangerous Jack Sparrow is as a Trickster compared with the other characters in the film.

Aside from the gender bending qualities of earrings, scarves and eye makeup that creates a male/female hybrid, Jack has another shape-shifting quality based on the fact that he is named for a sparrow. However, I think the character is surprisingly flamboyant to be named Sparrow when I consider how common-place sparrows actually are. Depp plays Jack like a peacock, a bird more famous for its desire for attention more than its
ability for flight. But Jack, like a sparrow, can take flight— and often does at even the slightest whiff of conflict. But Jack is not a coward.

One important and memorable scene within the film illustrates that Jack is able to transcend death. As mentioned above, the Trickster contains “tragic overtones” which can be seen within the curse that is the reason the first PoC is subtitled “The Curse of the Black Pearl”. The curse is said to be from the Aztecs who placed it on whoever possesses their gold. As a result, none of the pirates who served on Sparrow’s ship, The Black Pearl, can ever be killed. Instead, they are forced to walk the earth as restless souls. Only moonlight can reveal that they are not actually flesh and blood, but rather a band of zombies. While holding a piece of cursed gold in his hand, Jack is able to battle his sworn enemy, Hector Barbossa, straddling the line between life and death, as well as the world of the cursed and the blessed. In true comedic fashion, the world of light is able to defeat the world of darkness and the evil pirates are defeated with the help of Jack Sparrow.

Essentially, Jack’s code is an honorable one. Though he transcends the rules of normal behavior as it presented in the film, I believe that his own code has an element of honorability, faithfulness and trust within it that we identify with in our own lives. Though one might be able to count on Jack trying to screw over a friend, you know that he will try to make up for it later when he actually gets what he wants. Or at least partly make up for it— after all, that’s what he thinks friends are for. His sense of vitality and humor, particularly in the face of death is also a model that I believe the filmmakers are trying to present as a model for our own behavior. Jack may be quick to run from a fight, especially when he could be drinking instead, he will stand his ground when faced with a true challenge to his honor. The tricks that Jack plays on his new friends reveal to them that they should live by their own code rather than blindly following the prescribed rules of society. The film suggests that we should, as they do, fulfill our own dreams, rather than walk unhappily through this life (like a zombie) trying to act like something that we know we’re not.