

Literature & the Environment

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Course Description

Is nature something to be found out there, on the other side of culture? Is it something of which human beings no longer partake? Are we, humans, outside of nature? This course examines how literature depicts our natural environment. It focuses on the ways in which an awareness of environment in literature informs and expresses cultural assumptions, individuals and their locality, conceptions of the human, nonhuman and inanimate, the unprecedented destruction of our planet, gender, economic, and racial issues, and the ways our thinking about the environment shapes how we know ourselves and the world. We will consider a range of work—poetry, nature writing, and fictional prose—from a variety of writers, mostly from the Americas.

“Nature” is what We see –
The Hill – the Afternoon –
Squirrel – Eclipse – the Bumble bee –
Nay – Nature is Heaven –
Emily Dickinson

Learning Goals

1. Familiarity with ecocritical reading of major texts and issues in American nature writing and in other genres.
2. Recognition of key cultural, historical, and ideological perspectives on those issues in those major texts.
3. Recognition of different methods – literary and historical, artistic and social, aesthetic and ethical, textual and contextual – for interpreting texts.
4. Engagement with themes of the course as they apply to 21st-century lives.

Required Readings

- Finch, Robert and John Elder (eds.), *The Norton Book of Nature Writing*. New York: W.W. Norton, 2002.
- Matthiessen, Peter. *Far Tortuga: A Novel*. Penguin, 1988.
- All poems are available on Moodle.
- Any essays not in the Norton Anthology are available on Moodle.

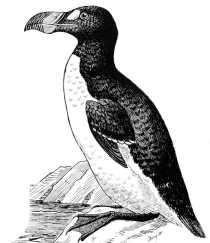
PLEASE NOTE: You must bring copies of the reading to class. This includes books as well as printed copies of the additional material uploaded to Moodle.

Course Requirements

10%	Attendance and participation
10%	Exploratory essay on walking
60%	Three essays
10%	Revision
10%	Syllabus rewriting

Attendance & Participation

I take attendance promptly at the beginning of class. Each student will begin the semester with 115% credit for attendance. This means that if you attend



every session of the semester, the extra 15% will boost your overall attendance grade. Each absence after that will continue to reduce your raw attendance score in 15% increments. Lateness will also reduce your attendance score. If you arrive less than 10 minutes late, I will deduct 5%; if you arrive more than 15 minutes late, I will mark you absent. Six absences will result in immediate failure.

0 absences:	115%
1 absence:	100%
2 absences:	85%
3 absences:	70%
4 absences:	55%
5 absences:	40%
6 absences:	Immediate failure

It is essential that you read the assignments before class so that you are able to participate in our discussions. Participation demonstrate that you are an attentive and interested reader of the assignments; that you have read and taken notes; and are actively developing your oral skills.

Exploratory Essay on Walking 10%

Length: 3 pages (700 words)

Format: multimodal

You will go on a walk around Butte. The trajectory is entirely up to you, but you must take this walk alone. You will write a multimodal essay describing your walk. Be sure to take a notebook with you in case you need to jot down thoughts or make drawings. You may also choose to record yourself as you walk—think of Agent Cooper in *Twin Peaks*! Be precise in your descriptions. Take photos of plants, trees, and animals so as to refer to them later, but also in order to look up their precise names, or include them in your essay. Comprehensive guidelines will be distributed in class.

First Essay

Length: 5 pages (1250 words)

Format: Times New Roman 12-point font, one-inch margins, double-spaced

Second Essay

Length: 5 pages (1250 words)

Format: Times New Roman 12-point font, one-inch margins, double-spaced

Third Essay

Length: 5 pages (1250 words)

Format: Times New Roman 12-point font, one-inch margins, double-spaced

Revision

Length: 5 pages

Format: Times New Roman 12-point font, one-inch margins, double-spaced

Choose one of the essays you wrote and revise it a third time. You will meet with me to discuss how to approach your revisions. The aim is to rewrite with an eye for publication (regardless of whether you will publish this essay or not). This will be the gem of your intellectual labor!

Syllabus Rewriting

Now that you have read all the materials in the syllabus, how would you reorganize the readings of this syllabus if you were to teach such a course? You may choose one organizational principle, such as literary genres, or combine two or more organizational principles. You might also pick a theme and arrange the readings to reflect this focus. You might also consider adding or removing readings.

Course Policies

CLASSROOM CONDUCT

- No electronic devices, please. This includes tablets, laptops, e-readers, cell phones, or music players. Use an old-fashioned pen and pad for taking notes.
- No eating in class, please. You may bring non-alcoholic drinks to class.
- Be thoughtful and courteous to your colleagues during class discussions.

LATE WORK

I do not accept late assignments of any kind, nor will I accept papers over email.

EXCUSED ABSENCES & ATHLETES

In order for an absence to be excused for participating in an athletic event, I must hear from your coach and you must write a 300-word response paper on the readings assigned for the missed session. You must give me a printed copy at the beginning of the following class session.

ACADEMIC DISHONESTY

Montana Tech regards acts of academic dishonesty (e.g. plagiarism, cheating on examinations, obtaining unfair advantage, and falsification of records and official documents) as serious offenses against the values of intellectual honesty. Moreover, I am committed to enforcing academic integrity and will pursue cases of academic dishonesty according to Montana Tech Integrity Procedures. If you are unsure about what constitutes plagiarism, come speak with me.

DISABILITY

All persons with disabilities have the right to participate fully and equally in the programs and services of Montana Tech. Montana Tech is committed to ensuring full and equal participation

by eliminating barriers and making the appropriate accommodations that allow persons with disabilities to have equal opportunity in all aspects of campus life.

Student Life Counselors are the Montana Tech Disability Service Coordinators. For further information about Disability Services, please refer to the Disability Services Website—http://www.mtech.edu/student_life/disability/

Course Plan

Norton = *The Norton Book of Nature Writing*.

Poem pdf = Moodle

Essay pdf = Moodle

Far Tortuga: A Novel

WEEK 1

Introduction to the Course

What is Environmental Literature?

Climate Change

Watch the documentary *Merchants of Doubt*. A link to the film is available on Moodle.

Jorie Graham, "Sea Change" (poem pdf)

WEEK 2

Wilderness

Luther Standing Bear, "Nature" (Norton, 326-330)

Henry David Thoreau, "Walking" (Norton, 180-205)

WEEK 3

Wilderness

Exploratory Essay due

Evelyn White, "Black Women and the Wilderness" (Norton, 1062-1067)

Sharman Apt Russell, "Gila Wilderness" (Norton, 1052-1062)

American Places – Indigenous Conceptions

Leslie Marmon Silko, "Landscape, History and the Pueblo Imagination" (Norton 1003-1014)

N. Scott Momaday, "The Way to Rainy Mountain" (Norton, 737-742)

WEEK 4

American Places – The West

Barry Lopez, "The American Geographies" (Norton 914-923)

Gary Snyder, "Ancient Forests of the Far West" (Norton 662-683)

American Places – The West

First essay draft due.

William Kittredge, "Owning it All" (Norton, 706-717)

Doug Peacock, "The Big Snow" (Norton, 832-840)

WEEK 5

American Places – The Desert

Edward Abbey, "The Great American Desert" (Norton, 620-628)

Mary Austin, from *The Land of Little Rain* (Norton, 320-325)

Joseph Wood Krutch, "Love in the Desert," (Norton, 397-410)

American Places – The Arctic

Quiz #7

John Haines, "Moments and Journeys," (Norton 566-572)

Barry Lopez, from *Arctic Dreams* (Norton 900-913)

Alison Hawthorne Deming, "Wolf, Eagle, Bear: An Alaska Notebook" (Norton, 937-943)

WEEK 6

Water

Quiz #8

Rachel Carson, "The Marginal World," (Norton, 480-485)

Thomas Merton, "Rain and the Rhinoceros" (Norton, 546-553)

Lorine Niedecker from *Paen to Place* (poem pdf)

Destruction of Ecosystems

First essay final draft due.

Quiz #9

Wallace Stegner, "Glen Canyon Submersus" and "Coda" (Norton 504-519)

Muriel Rukeyser, "The Dam" (poem pdf)

WEEK 7

Destruction of Ecosystems

Quiz #10

The Nubians, "They Built a Dam to Take Away Our River" (essay pdf)

Aldo Leopold, "Marshland Elegy" (Norton 376-380)

Ira Sadoff, "I've Always Despised the Wetlands" (poem pdf)

Evolution

Quiz #11

Charles Darwin, (Norton 151-162)

WEEK 8

Animals, Labor, and Livelihood

Draft Second essay due.

Peter Matthiessen, *Far Tortuga*

Animals, Labor, and Livelihood

Peter Matthiessen, *Far Tortuga*

WEEK 9

Animals, Labor, and Livelihood

Peter Matthiessen, *Far Tortuga*

Animals, Labor, and Livelihood

Peter Matthiessen, *Far Tortuga*

WEEK 10

Animals: Epiphanies

Final Draft Second essay due.

Edward Abbey, "The Serpents of Paradise" (Norton, 614-620)

Vladimir Nabokov, "Butterflies" (Norton, 423-431)

Alberto Ríos, "Uncovered Ants" (pdf poem)

Becoming Animal

Quiz #17

J. A. Baker, from *The Peregrine*, (essay pdf)

WEEK 11

Extinction

Quiz #18

Aldo Leopold, "Thinking Like a Mountain" (Norton 381-82)

Bill McKibben "The End of Nature" (Norton 1120-1129)

Extinction

Quiz #19

W.S. Merwin, "For a Coming Extinction," "Vixen" (poem pdf)

Nathan Wate, "The Saltwater People" (essay pdf)

Freeman House, "In Salmon's Water," (Norton 766-772)

WEEK 12

Ecocentric Ethics

Quiz #20

Aldo Leopold "The Land Ethic" (Norton 382-397)

Land Ethics and The Legacy of Colonialism

Quiz #21

King Moshoeshoe II, "Return to Self-Reliance: Balancing the African Condition and the Environment" (essay pdf)

Kamoriongo Ole Aimerru Nkongoni, "The Circle Closes in on the Nomads" (essay pdf)

WEEK 13

Environmental Justice

Draft Third essay due.

Quiz #22

Sarath Kotagama, "Practice What You Preach: A Lesson for Sustainable Living" (essay pdf)

Joseph Bruchac, "The Circle is the Way to See" (Norton, 811-818)

Plants

Quiz #23

Michael Pollan, "Weeds are us" (Norton 1078-1090)

H.D., "Sea Iris" (poem pdf)

Alison Hawthorne Deming, "Specimens at the Clear Cut" (poem pdf)

Dambutja Datarak, "Iharang, The Healing Plant" (pdf)

WEEK 14

Agriculture

Quiz #24

Michael Pollan, "Marijuana" from *The Botany of Desire* (essay pdf)

Tess Taylor, selection from *Works and Days* (poem pdf on Moodle)

WEEK 15

Ecological Communication

Quiz #25

David Abram "The Ecology of Magic," (Norton 1101-1113)

Marcos Terena, "Sing the Song of the Voice of the Forest" (essay pdf)

Pollution & Illness

Final Third essay due.

Quiz #26

Terry Tempest Williams, "The Clan of the One-Breasted Women" (Norton 1091-1097)

Pekka Aikio, "Beyond the Last Line of Forest Trees," (essay pdf)

A.R. Ammons, from *Garbage* (poem pdf)

WEEK 16

Course overview

Syllabus rewriting due.

Revision due.