

English 260
American Environmental Literature

Mondays and Wednesdays 2:15-3:30, Hyland 3200

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Office: Heide Hall 409 (until mid-October)
Office Hours: Wednesday 3:40 - 4:40, Friday Noon - 2:00

Course Description (from the UWW Course Catalogue):

"Explore American environmental literature (creative non-fiction/fiction/poetry) from its origins, with special attention to key authors such as Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, Emily Dickinson, John Muir, Teddy Roosevelt, Aldo Leopold, Leslie Silko, Rachel Carlson, Annie Dillard and Bill McKibben."

My version of the course description:

Take English 260 and explore American writers' engagement with the environment from the nineteenth century wilderness movement through the Deep Water Horizon Gulf spill. In English 260, we will consider how writers represent, reckon with, combat, and in some cases dispute environmental issues like biodiversity loss, toxicity, climate change, and problems with food production. We will read from classic works of American nature writing like *Walden*, *A Sand County Almanac*, and *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*. We will also read books that some people may not think of as environmental literature like *Little House in the Big Woods* and *The Road*. We will look at some paintings and we will watch some films. We will consider how traditions and histories of relating to the natural world affect 21st century debates about conservation and sustainability. We will talk about whether or not language and art can have any real effect on the earth's problems. We will pay special attention to Wisconsin writers and to places around Whitewater. And we will go outside!

Textbooks

Leopold, Aldo. *A Sand County Almanac*. New York: Oxford UP, 1968.

Matson, Suzanne. *The Tree-Sitter*. New York: Norton, 2007.

Thoreau, Henry David. *Walden; Or, Life in the Woods*. Mineola, NY: Dover Thrift, 1995.

Wilder, Laura Ingalls. *Little House in the Big Woods*. New York: Harper Trophy, 1971.

Additional readings are posted on Distance to Learn (D2L). These are marked in the schedule with an asterisk (*).

Objectives

By the end of this course you should be able to:

- describe differences - but also the reasons for the sometimes fuzzy boundaries - between literature, writing, rhetoric, and polemic
- distinguish between environmental literature, nature writing, and ecocriticism
- analyze literary and rhetorical claims and arguments about the environment
- explain how language does or does not affect the physical environment.

- enter the contemporary conversation about four current environmental concerns (toxic chemicals, biodiversity loss, climate change, and food production).
- explain how the literary history of American environmental writing affects how we talk about and engage environmental problems today.
- identify, engage, analyze, and evaluate claims about the environment in a variety of genres and forms.
- clearly and effectively communicate your ideas to a broad audience in written form.

Course Requirements and Evaluation

1. Mid-Term Exam
2. Final Exam
3. Three Papers (see the pages at the end of this syllabus for full descriptions of the paper assignments)
 - Environmental Biography or Testimony (3 pages)

Experiment of Living (4-5 pages)

Analysis and Evaluation of an Environmental Argument on the Web

-or-

Analysis and Evaluation of an Environmental Argument in Place (4-5 page)

Quizzes

You will have opportunities to engage with the reading in short answer written form over the course of the semester. I give these quizzes to encourage you to keep up with the reading, to give you an opportunity to voice your responses to the course material, and to spur discussion. Given these objectives, I am not interested in quizzing you over the minutia of the reading or in tricking you. I am interested in giving you an opportunity to demonstrate your engagement with the major themes, questions, and concepts of the course and the texts. The quizzes are unscheduled and cannot be made up if they are missed.

Class Participation and Attendance

This course cannot succeed without vigorous student participation. Please come to class having carefully read the assignment and be prepared to voice your thoughts. Please also come to class on time and stay the whole time

A few words on electronics. . .

I have recently become a huge fan of reading books on my iPad, but I recognize that iBooks is not the only app that I can access on the device. You may read the course materials on a Kindle, your laptop, or an iPad, but please do not surf the internet, play games, text message, or chat during class. If I see you distracted by your electronic device, I may ask you to put it away, but I may just make a note of your disengagement from the class and reduce your participation grade. Please silence and stow your phone during class.

Grading

Your final grade will be figured according to the following percentages:

Assignment	Percent of Final Grade
Paper I – Environmental Biography or Testimony	10
Paper II - "Experiment of Living"	15
Paper III – Analysis and Evaluation of a Website -OR- – Analysis and Evaluation of a Place	20
Mid-Term Exam	15
Final Exam	20
Quizzes	10
Participation and Attendance	10

You may figure your own grade at any point in the semester by dividing the points you have earned by the points possible to that point.

Grading Scale

94-100	A	80-83	B-	60-69	D
90-93	A-	78+79	C+	0-59	F
88-89	B+	74-77	C		
84-87	B	70-73	C-		

Plagiarism and Academic Integrity

It is your responsibility to accurately present work that you turn in and to properly cite sources that you use.

Chapter fourteen of the UW system student handbook describes academic misconduct and its consequences:

Academic misconduct in an act in which a student:

- Seeks to claim credit for the work or efforts of another without authorization or citation;
- Uses unauthorized materials or fabricated data in any academic exercise;
- Forges or falsifies academic documents or records;
- Intentionally impedes or damages the academic work of others;
- Engages in conduct aimed at making false representation of a student's academic performance;
- Assists other students in any of these acts.

Examples of academic misconduct include, but are not limited to: cheating on an examination; collaborating with others in work to be presented, contrary to the stated rules of the course; submitting a paper or assignment as one's own work when a part or all of the paper or

assignment is the work of another; submitting a paper or assignment that contains ideas or research of others without appropriately identifying the sources of those ideas; stealing examinations or course materials; submitting, if contrary to the rules of a course, work previously presented in another course; tampering with the laboratory experiment or computer program of another student; knowingly and intentionally assisting another student in any of the above, including assistance in an arrangement whereby any work, classroom performance, examination or other activity is submitted or performed by a person other than the student under whose name the work is submitted or performed.
(http://www.uww.edu/handbook/student/system_1403.html)

Please feel free to consult me with any questions you have about citing sources and feel free to make use of resources on campus to help you avoid plagiarism. The time to have this conversation is before you turn in your final draft for a grade. If you have significant concerns, you might also consider participating in one of the Academic Support Center's plagiarism workshops (see http://www.uww.edu/acadsupport/tutorial/plagiarism_workshop_registration.html for more information).

The best way to avoid getting caught up in a messy and unpleasant academic misconduct imbroglio is to do your own work and to save all of the notes and drafts that you used to create your paper. If you compose on a computer, its always a good idea to save multiple versions of your paper when you make substantial revisions.

Deadlines

Unless you arrange for an extension in advance of the deadline, I will not accept late papers. Plan ahead and turn in your assignments on time. Pop quizzes cannot be made up. Papers must be turned in on paper; I cannot accept emailed papers. You may print your papers double sided or you may print on the backs of previously printed pages if you would like to save paper.

Special Needs

The university in general and I in particular are committed to providing, on a flexible and individual basis, reasonable accommodation to students who have documented disability conditions (e.g. physical, learning, psychiatric, vision, hearing, or systemic) that may affect their ability to participate in course activities or to meet course requirements. If you have a disability that requires accommodation, please contact both the Center for Students with Disabilities and me to discuss your individual needs. The Center for Students with Disabilities is located on the first floor of Andersen Library in room 2002. You can also call them at 262-472-4711(Main Phone/Relay) or 262-472-1109 (TTY), and you can find the Center on the web at <http://www.uww.edu/csd/>.

Schedule

(an * indicates that a PDF of the reading can be found on D2L)

W 9/5 Welcome and Introductions
 What is "The Environment"?
 Nature and Wilderness from Genesis to Plymouth Rock
In class reading:
 *Genesis, chapter 1
 *Odyssey, from Book 5: Nymph and Shipwreck

I. What is American Environmental Literature?

- M9/10 What is “The Environment,” continued: Romanticism and the Wilderness Movement
Read:
Wordsworth, "Nutting"
Shelley, “Mont Blanc: Lines Written in the Vale of Chamouni”
- W 9/12 What is Environmental Literature and how is it different from other types of writing?
Nature Writing as Environmental Literature
Read: *Muir, from *The Mountains of California*, "The Sierra Nevada"
*Muir, from *The Story of My Boyhood and Life*, "A New World"
*Austin, from *The Land of Little Rain*
Environmental Writing, Environmental Rhetoric, Environmental Polemic
From Wilderness Preservation to Sustainability: a brief history of American
Environmentalism and Legislation
- M 9/17 What is Ecocriticism?
Read: Wilder, *Little House in the Big Woods*
- W 9/19 Why American Environmental Literature?
Read: Thoreau, *Walden*, "Economy"
Due Today: Paper 1 - Environmental Autobiography or Testimony
- M 9/24 Read: Thoreau, *Walden*, "Where I Lived, and What I Lived For", "Reading", and
"Sounds"
- W 9/26 Read: Thoreau, *Walden*, "Solitude", "Visitors" "The Bean Field" "The Village" "The
Ponds" "Baker Farm"
- M 10/1 Film: *Gasland*
(Optional) Presentation by Josh Fox, Writer/Director/Producer of *Gasland*, 7:00 pm,
Young Auditorium, Free!
- W 10/3 Read: Thoreau, *Walden*, "Higher Laws" "Brute Neighbors" "House Warming" "Former
Inhabitants; and Winter Visitors" , "Winter Animals" "The Pond in Winter" "Spring" and
"Conclusion"
- M 10/8 How has *Walden* affected the way that Americans write about and think about the
environment?
Read: Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac*, "Wisconsin" and "The Land Ethic"
- W 10/10 Is rootedness in particular places a help or a hindrance to environmental
protection?
Read:
*Berry, *The Long-Legged House*
*Sanders, from *Staying Put*
*Heise, "Introduction," *Sense of Place, Sense of Planet*
- M 10/15 Read: *Hildebrand, essays from *A Northern Front*
Optional event: John Hildebrand reading.

W 10/17 Mid-Term Exam

II. Toxicity: What can literature and writing do about poisons in the air and water??

- M 10/22 How did *Silent Spring* have so great an effect on American culture, politics, and the environment?
Read: *Carson, *Silent Spring* "A Fable for Tomorrow" and "Indiscriminately from the Skies"
- W 10/24 What is environmental justice and how is injustice related to exposure to toxic chemicals?
 Film, *Living Downstream*
- M 10/29 Is it possible to take environmental issues too seriously? What role do humor, spontaneity, and ragged wildness play in environmental protection?
Read: *Gessner, from *The Tarball Chronicles*, and *Sick of Nature*
Due Today: Paper 2 - "Experiment of Living"

III. Plants and Animals: What can literature do to prevent the biodiversity loss and problems with the production of food?

- W 10/31 How do depictions and narratives of violence and love (agape, philo, eros) affect the loss of biodiversity?
 Film: *If a Tree Falls*
- M 11/5 Read: Matson, *The Tree-Sitter* Chapters 1-6 (pp.1-80)
- W 11/7 Read: Matson, *The Tree-Sitter* Chapters 7-12 (pp. 81-156)
- M 11/12 Read: Matson, *The Tree-Sitter* Chapters 13-21 (pp. 157-246)
- W 11/14 Is Philosophical writing an effective way to argue for protection for animals?
Read:
 *Coetzee, *The Lives of Animals*, "The Philosophers and the Animals" pp. 59-90
- M11/19 Why did so many people read *The Omnivore's Dilemma*?
Read:
 *Pollan, from *The Omnivore's Dilemma*
- W 11/21 Film, *Food Inc.*

IV. Climate Change

- M 11/26 How does journalism affect the climate change debate and the Earth's temperature?
Read:

*Kolbert, *Field Notes from a Catastrophe*, Ch 1: Shishmaref, Alaska and Ch 3: Under the Glacier

- W 11/28 How do the writings of climate skeptics affect political responses to climate change?
Read:
 *Pooly, *The Climate War* "The Deniers' Convention 33-51"
- M 12/3 Read:
 *Evangelical Climate Initiative (ECI), "Climate Change: An Evangelical Call To Action"
 *The Cornwall Alliance, "A Call to Truth, Prudence, and Protection of the Poor"
 * Southern Baptist Convention, "A Southern Baptist Declaration on the Environment and Climate Change"
Peruse: National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) "Creation Care" [webpage](#)
- W 12/5 Read: McKibbin, from *The End of Nature*
Due Today: Paper Three - Analysis and Evaluation of a Website or Analysis and Evaluation of an Argument in Place.
- M 12/10 Reading and topic to be discussed and decided. . .

Paper Assignment Descriptions

Paper 1 (3 pages) – Environmental Biography or Testimony

For your first paper, I would like you to narrate an episode in your life that has formed your view of the environment. You should feel free to describe any event, interaction, encounter, or conversation, but please limit your narrative to one particular episode. The strongest and most interesting essays will likely be ones that are narrowly focused and that provide specific details. This essay should emphasize your experience and it need not be thesis-driven; thus you do not have to shoehorn your experience into neat conclusion (“ . . .and that’s why we need to protect. . .” “ . . .and that’s why I took this course. . .”).

Mode: Narrative (chronological, episodic, or spatial organization)

Tone: Formal, personal

Research and Citation Requirement: None

Example: *Wisconsin Natural Resources Magazine*

Objectives: (You) get the pen or keyboard moving, (Me) get to know you and your writing

Evaluation: This is a low stakes writing assignment, but I will look for evidence of affection for your topic, precise description, and clean, lively prose.

Publication or Broadcast Suggestions: No publication required, but if its really a good essay, you should send it off to *Wisconsin Natural Resources Magazine*.

Paper 2 (4 pages) – Experiment of Living

The idea for this assignment comes from *Walden*. In his first chapter, Thoreau expresses skepticism about classroom learning and suggests that students would benefit from some physical labor to complement their intellectual work. A friend expresses skepticism, saying, "'But,' says one, 'you do not mean that the students should go to work with their hands instead of their heads?'" Thoreau responds,

I do not mean that exactly, but I mean something which he might think a good deal like that; I mean that they should not play life, or study it merely, while the community supports them at this expensive game, but earnestly live it from beginning to end. How could youths better learn to live than by at once trying the experiment of living? Methinks this would exercise their minds as much as mathematics.

I tend to agree with Thoreau that students might learn more in an "experiment of living" than by reading about the work that others are doing. So, for this assignment, I would like you to undertake a week-long experiment that relates to the broad theme of improving the environment. You might try to go a week without burning any gasoline; you might give up non-local food for a week; you might walk in the woods at dawn each morning for a week; or you might carry all of the trash you produce with you all week. Get creative and do something unique that will be fun to write about (and interesting for me to read), but please don't do anything illegal or that violates provisions of the UWS handbook. If you are concerned about your experiment's validity or legality, it is probably a good idea to check with me first.

Mode: Narrative and Evaluation

Tone: Formal academic

Research and Citation Requirement: No research is required, but you should keep a log or journal while you are undertaking your experiment.

Examples: *Supersize Me, Omnivore's Dilemma*

Objectives: (You)

(Me) Discover if Thoreau's hypothesis about experimental living is correct.

Evaluation: I will weigh the significance of your Main Idea, the quality of your Organization and Analysis, the fullness of the Evidence you use to support your claims, and the clarity and artistry of your Writing.

Publication or Broadcast Suggestions: Send it off to a local newspaper.

Paper 3, Option A (900-1200 words) – Analysis and Evaluation of an Environmental Argument on the Web

If you choose this option, you will write your third paper about a web site that makes an environmental argument. For this assignment, please:

- a. Identify and describe a site related to the main concerns of this course
- b. Evaluate it's worth according to the set of criteria found D2L.
- c. Assess its importance to or effect on public discourse about the environment.

This paper should be 900-1200 words long and it should be written as one essay. You may of course separate the sections with headings, but you should use transitions to maintain the essay's continuity.

Paper 3, Option B (900-1200 words) – Analysis and Evaluation of an Environmental Argument in Place (4-5 pages exclusive of images)

If you choose this option, you will, write your third paper about a physical site that makes an environmental argument. For this assignment, please:

- a. Identify and describe a place and the arguments (explicit and implicit) that it makes about an environmental issue or series of issues.
 - look for mission statements, founding history narratives, and self descriptions in promotional materials or on signs around the site to identify purpose or mission statements.
- b. Analyze the place's effectiveness in communicating its message or in encouraging behaviors by observing and interviewing visitors to the place. If the place has a message board (either online or at the store) you might read through some of the comments and reviews.
- c. Evaluate the place's overall impact on the environment. This will obviously be highly unscientific and subjective. I'm not asking you to add up BTUs or kilowatt hours, I am just asking you to consider whether it is doing good or ill and why you think so.

This paper should be 900-1200 words long and should be written as one essay. You may of course separate the sections with headings, but you should use transitions to maintain the essay's continuity. I would imagine that places like the UWW arboretum or campus landscape, Whole Foods, Walmart, REI, Metcalf's Market, a Co-op, a Land Rover or Jeep dealership, or a LEED-Certified building. Feel free to choose whatever site you wish (among this list or one that you have thought up), but please run your choice by me before you invest a lot of time in the project.

Mode: Description and thesis-driven analysis and evaluation

Tone: Formal Academic

Research and Citation Requirement: No research required other than the primary research at the site. As with the other assignments, if you reference other books, cite them by author and title in the line of the review. Please feel free to include images and web links if you think it will help your readers understand your claims.

Example: Guterson, "[Enclosed. Encyclopedic. Endured.](#)" *Harpers* Aug. 1993.

Objectives: (You) demonstrate your facility with the tools and knowledge you gained in the course as you observe, analyze and evaluate multimedia, multigenre communication about the environment. (Me) Watch with satisfaction as you succeed at doing this.

Evaluation: I will weigh the significance of your main idea or thesis, the quality of your Organization and Analysis, the fullness of the Evidence you use to support your claims, and the clarity and artistry of your Writing.

Publication or Broadcasts Suggestions: Post your essay in the submission forum on D2L.