

Sierra College-English 300T
Literature of American Nature Writing

Spring 2008
Course #74958
Wed 2:45-5:50, SI 201

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“Nature as a poet, an enthusiastic workingman, becomes more and more visible the farther and higher we go; the mountains are fountains-beginning places, however related to sources beyond mortal ken.”

John Muir, *My First Summer in the Sierra* 1869

Course Description

English 300T examines authors writing about the natural environment, from fifteenth-century explorers “discovering” America to twenty-first century authors tackling current environmental issues. This course will address early voyagers and Puritans’ interpretation of untamed landscape, conservationists’ viewpoint of nature, and contemporary authors’ altruistic concern of regional land degradation.

Student Outcomes

On successful completion of this course, students will be able to:

1. Identify major writers from each of the major historical and cultural periods: Early Exploration, Colonialism, Transcendentalism, Conservationism, and Present Day.
2. Identify, describe, and analyze significant works from each of the periods in a variety of genres.
3. Chart and analyze the development of specific themes such as wilderness, aesthetics and spirituality, human vs. nonhuman, nature's role in nature and culture, urban nature, politics and conservation, bioergionalism/regionalism, and ecocriticism.
4. Compare and contrast the themes throughout history.
5. Identify, interpret, and analyze the rhetorical strategies used to express the themes.

6. Compare and contrast rhetorical strategies used in nature writing in each genre and at each historical period.
7. Identify, interpret, and analyze the themes and rhetoric in context of history, politics, culture, philosophy, religion, science, and literary trends.
8. Identify, interpret, and analyze the various literary genres of nature writing-fiction, nonfiction, and poetry.
9. Assemble a 'hands on' nature journal

Textbooks

- Branch, Michael P. *Reading the Roots: American Nature Writing Before Walden*. Athens: Univ of Georgia Press, 2004. (ISBN: 0820325481)
- Gilbert, Elizabeth. *The Last American Man*. New York: Penguin Books, 2003. (ISBN: 0142002836)
- Kittredge, William. *Taking Care: Thoughts on Storytelling and Belief*. Minneapolis: Milkweed Editions, 1999. (ISBN: 1571312323)
- Leopold, Aldo, *A Sand County Almanac: And Sketches Here and There* 1949. New York: Oxford Univ Press, 1989. (ISBN: 019505928X)
- Momaday, Scott N., *The Way to Rainy Mountain*. 1969. Albuquerque: Univ of New Mexico Press, 1998. (ISBN: 0826304362)
- Muir, John Muir. *My First Summer in the Sierra*. 1911. New York: Penguin Press, 1997. (ISBN: 0140255702)
- Williams, Terry Tempest. *Refuge: An Unnatural History of Family and Place*. New York: Vintage Books, 1992. (ISBN: 0679740244)

Other Readings

Throughout the semester, I will hand out essays and other nature writings in a variety of genres and from a variety of time periods. Each student also needs to be on the 'look out' for nature writing, on the Internet, in a magazine, newspaper, journal, or book, or in some other medium such as TV, movies or art. We will share our findings in class.

Additional Required Materials

- Dictionary/ Thesaurus and A Writer's Handbook (ex: *The Little Brown Compact Handbook*)
- A 3 ring binder to house handouts and your writings
- Notebook for reading responses and nature journal

Grading

Essays	30% (10% each essay)
Midterm Exam	20%
Final Exam	20%
Homework Assignments	15%
Nature Journal	10%
<u>Field Trip Report</u>	<u>5%</u>
	100%

Essays

Essay #1-Early American Nature Writing

Essay #2-Conservation

Essay #3-Contemporary Nature Writing

Exams

The midterm and final exams will be written from class discussions. The exams consist of short answers, responses to excerpts, and theme-based questions.

Nature Journal

Each student will prepare a comprehensive, **creative notebook/journal**. These ‘field notes’ lack precise definition; part of the project is to discover a ‘form’ for reporting. This assignment is due at the end of the semester: detailed handout to follow.

Field Trip

2 days/1 night

Cost: \$25.00 (\$15.00 lodging, \$10.00 food)

Transportation: private vehicles

Once we meet, I will arrange a field trip to the UC Berkeley field station, Sage Hen Creek (20 miles north of Truckee). A naturalist from the station will lead a hike/ski on Saturday and discuss a variety of ecosystems and connections between nature, culture, science, and literature. The focus of Saturday night’s program addresses Aldo Leopold (one of our authors) and the “land ethic,” and science “then and now.” Sunday will be devoted to “reading and writing nature.” If a student has made prior arrangements at that time (family reunion or such), he or she will write a report on another outdoor education program. Handout to follow.

Late Essays and Homework

Turning in assignments late is unfair to those students who have made the extra effort to turn them in on time. Since we meet only once/week, it is imperative that you turn in your work on time. If you turn in late homework, you will receive only partial credit (for essays, ½ credit). **Being absent is NOT an excuse for missed homework.** You may email your homework or give it to another student to bring to class. If you email your homework, I will respond to let you know I received it. If you don’t receive a response, assume I didn’t get your email. At that point, please feel free to call me.

Attendance/Participation

I believe it is a privilege to attend college; therefore, I expect everyone in our community to attend, participate (as an individual and group member), and work hard. If you miss class, it is YOUR responsibility to contact another student (or me) to find out what happened in class and to acquire all homework assignments.

“A student will be allowed six hours of class absence (excluding excused absences) for a three-unit, three-hour-per-week, full-term course...Professors will communicate any exception to this attendance regulation.” *Sierra College Catalog*

In other words, if you miss more than 2 classes or more you will receive a W by the last day of withdrawal. If you miss more than 2 classes *after* the withdrawal date, you will receive an F. I will notify you when you've missed 2 classes and we will then discuss if you should continue the course.

If you have a serious illness or emergency, be sure to get in touch with me as soon as possible. If you are unable to contact me (due to illness or emergency situation), have a friend or family member call the school.

Interruptions

Cell phones, ipods, planners, and laptop computers. Either turn them off or don't bring them to class.

Worldview

Each student will come to this classroom with a particular worldview stemming from his or her background, education, and experiences. Each student (and instructor) will also bring to our class certain opinions and values. With that in mind, I expect everyone to have the utmost respect for one another. Look at this class as an opportunity to learn from one another, not as an outlet to judge others.

Communication

If you have questions or concerns about your work or the class, please contact me via email, phone, or in person.

Communication is imperative to your success as a student and mine as an instructor.

Plagiarism (representing someone else's work, words, or ideas as one's own)

If a student is found plagiarizing someone else's work, whether from a fellow student, or text, or from an Internet source, there will be consequences, as stated in the Sierra College policy. As for this class, **I will automatically fail you, not for the assignment but an F for the course.**

Equal Opportunity

Sierra College is committed to equal opportunity in education for all students, including those with physical disabilities or learning disabilities. If you are a student with a documented disability, please contact me so that we can discuss appropriate accommodations.

Health Services

As a Sierra College student, you are entitled to services offered at the Student Health Center in Rocklin. These services include: physicals, immunizations, blood work, prescriptions, referrals, birth control, etc. All services are available either free or very low cost. Mental health care is also offered, free of charge. Phone: 916/781-0517
 Web page: <http://www.sierracollege.edu/StudentServices/healthServCtr/index.html>

Financial Aid

Financial aid is available to many students. Don't hesitate to contact Sierra College if you're interested in obtaining educational aid.

Recycling

Let's all do our part! For writing assignments, I encourage students to use "used" paper (the backside of papers). As for recycling on campus, please recycle paper, bottles, and cans by placing them in the appropriate recycling bins around campus-black boxes house bottles and cans, blue sacks hold paper. PLEASE keep *other* trash separate from the bins; once recyclables are contaminated they are unable to be recycled. Thanks!

Snow Day Policy

Follow the snow day procedure according to the Tahoe Truckee Unified School District. If TTUSD announces a snow day, we won't have class. You can find this information by watching channel 6 on TV or by looking at the TTUSD or Truckee High School website, truckeehigh.com. Do not call Sierra College; they simply follow the district's decision (for day classes).

Emergency Procedures

In the event of an emergency, it is vital to be able to account for the whereabouts of all students, faculty, and staff. Please gather at the **main parking lot of the school** before leaving the campus.

Teaching Style

I will lecture regularly, but most of our class time will be devoted to discussion. I consider the classroom a place of discovery where every student (and teacher) contributes his or her ideas, arguments, and inquisitive thoughts, and learns from one another.

"Instead of noble men, let us have noble villages of men."

Walden, 1854-Henry David Thoreau

Welcome to Our Class!

CALENDAR-Spring 2008
Sierra College-English 300T-Literature of American Nature Writing

Assignments will be given in class. All assignments are due on the day they are listed and must be typed and completed before class. This schedule may change, particularly toward the end of the semester, so be sure to keep updated on daily and future coursework.

Misc readings by authors not included on calendar: Abbey, Carson, Dickinson, Dillard, Emerson, Kingsolver, Lopez, Marsh, Meloy, Oliver, Ray, Snyder, Stegner, and Whitman

Week 1-Jan 16

Class List, Syllabus, Calendar, Introduction to course and to each other

What is nature writing? What is nature? What are nature writing's goals? Why do we read it? Why or why isn't it important?

Read handouts: Gessner and Gilbert

Watch part of the DVD *The Greatest Good*

Week 2-Jan 23

Our experiences in nature, nature writing, and reading nature texts

Respond in journal to the 6 pieces of writings, Gessner and Gilbert, Steingraber,

Williams, Burroughs, and Garcia

Purchase textbooks immediately!

Read Introduction to *Roots*

Watch part of DVD *GG*

Week 3-Jan 30

Early American Nature Writing

Reading the Roots: American Nature Writing before Walden

Read *Roots* Part I: Exploration Narratives, 15-17th Centuries

Read Columbus, Cabeza de Vaca, Smith, and Wood

Part II: Exploring Colonial Settlement, 18th Century

Read St. John de Crevecoeur, Jefferson, Bartram

Write Letter of Introduction (aka LOI)

Week 4-Feb 6

Read *Roots* Part III: Western Exploration Narratives, Science Writing, and Nationalism and Romanticism, 19th Century

Read Lewis and Clark, Audubon, Cole, Catlin, and Cooper

Bring journal to class

Week 5-Feb 13

Essay #1 due-Early American Nature Writing

Read *The Way to Rainy Mountain*

Week 6-Feb 20**Walden and Transcendentalism**

Read *Walden*-TBA individual readings

Week 7-Feb 27**John Muir and Regional Writing**

Read *My First Summer in the Sierra*

Read Through the Foothills with a Flock of Sheep through The Yosemite

Watch DVD on John Muir

Week 8-Mar 5

Read *My First Summer in the Sierra*

Read Mount Hoffman and Lake Tenaya to end

Midterm Exam Study Guide

**Thurs Mar 6, The Hetch Hetchy Story (Dennis Pottenger)

Week 9-Mar 12**Sense of Place**

Midterm Exam

Read *Taking Care: Thoughts on Storytelling and Belief*

Bring journal to class

SPRING BREAK MARCH 17-22**Week 10-Mar 26****Conservation**

Read *A Sand County Almanac: And Sketches Here and There*, Introduction, January, February, Thinking Like a Mountain, and all of Part III: The Upshot (will focus on certain essays individually)

Week 11-Apr 2**Aesthetics and Spirituality**

Read *Refuge: An Unnatural History of Family and Place*, Burrowing Owls through Roadrunner

Essay #2 due-Conservation

Week 12-Apr 9

Read *Refuge* Magpies through The Clan of One-Breasted Women

Watch DVD clip on TTW

Week 13-Apr 16**Current Beliefs and Practices (Science in nature writing)**

Read *The Last American Man*, chps 1-4

**Thurs, Apr 17, The Life and Legacy of John Muir (Jim Canaday)
Sierra College at Rocklin Room IRC 107 6:00-9:00 pm free

**Fri, April 18, John Muir Play (actor Lee Stetson)
Sierra College at Rocklin, Dietrich Theatre, 7:30 pm, \$5.00

**Sat, April 19-20, Sagehen Field Trip
Sagehen Creek Field Station, Saturday to Sunday morning,
\$22.00

Week 14-Apr 23 (Bioregionalism and Urban Nature Writing)

Read *The Last American Man*, chps 5-7

Bring journal to class

Week 15-Apr 30

Read *The Last American Man*, chps 8-epilogue

Essay #3 due-Contemporary Nature Writing

Final Exam Study Guide

Week 16-May 7

Final Exam