

# Mapping Home

## Literature of the Pacific Northwest

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There are those to whom place is unimportant,  
But this place, where sea and fresh water meet,  
Is important—  
Where the hawks sway out into the wind,  
Without a single wingbeat,  
And the eagles sail low over the fir trees,  
And the gulls cry against the crows  
In the curved harbors,  
And the tide rises up against the grass  
--Theodore Roethke



### Introduction

This course introduces you to a wealth of literature about the Pacific Northwest, placing it in the context of Pacific Northwest history, geography, politics, religion, and culture. The primary readings for the course reflect the ethnic as well as geographic diversity of the region and include works by half-Cherokee story-teller Vickie Sears and African American author Charlotte Watson Sherman from Seattle, Washington, and Japanese American poet Joy Nozomi Kogawa from Vancouver, British Columbia. The Pacific Northwest is a region rich in resources, history and conflict. In fact, the region could be described as a contact zone between Western Christian ideals and native religions, a place where cultures with very different orientations toward the natural world and very different economic and political aspirations have come together, sometimes in peace but more often in conflict. The conflict is reflected in the literature of the region. As we read, we will explore a variety of concerns: What does it mean to possess a “sense of place,” and how do you get one if you don’t have it? How is the PNW portrayed in literature? Who are the major PNW authors? Does the literature of a

region create an identity for it? How have different groups experienced the PNW's landscape? Will reading about the PNW change the way you experience the area? How is the PNW's literary history tied to its economic and political history? How have the tensions between various cultural communities within the region affected people's lives, their psyches, their mental health, their ability to feel at home in the world and in their own skins? Films, secondary criticism/theory, and possible field trips complement the readings and provide historical and social context.

### **Objectives**

- To welcome students into the academic community and intellectual life of the Puget Sound Region and the Pacific Northwest
- To broaden knowledge and appreciation of the Pacific Northwest through literature
- To gain an appreciation for literary texts as expressions emerging from complex social, cultural, and historical circumstances
- To encourage examination of how social identities are shaped by cultural forces and attitudes
- To encourage examination of how identities and communities are shaped by environments, even as environments are shaped by social communities
- To extend the learning experience outside the classroom through co-curricular activities that are integrated into the academic content of the course
- To encourage a greater sense of belonging to a place and a community
- To sharpen critical reading, writing, and thinking skills
- To develop tools for analyzing and interpreting literature
- To stretch boundaries and critique traditional assumptions
- To do purposeful research and “wallow in the complexity” of an issue by using the resources of the library, licensed databases, and the Web

### **Primary Texts and Films**

- Ken Kesey: *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* (Oregon, 1962; Film adaptation 1975)
- Charlotte Watson Sherman: *One Dark Body* (Seattle, Washington, 1963)
- Vickie Sears: *Simple Songs* (Seattle, Washington, 1990)
- Marilynne Robinson: *Housekeeping* (Idaho, 1980; Film adaptation 1987)
- Joy Nozomi Kogawa: *Obasan* (Vancouver, British Columbia, 1981)
- Norman Maclean: *A River Runs Through It* (Montana, 1976; Film Adaptation 1992)

**Grading**

- Position Paper 10%
- Response Papers to Readings 25%
- Mid-Term Paper 25%
- Final Paper and Presentation 30%
- Participation 10%

**BlackBoard**

Course materials, including assignments, will be posted to BlackBoard.

**Participation and Conferences**

Since this class is discussion-based, your participation is essential for the class to function effectively. You are responsible for coming to class prepared to share your thoughts on the readings. We will explore multiple perspectives on various issues in this class. Your presence and active participation in this exploration process is essential if we are to consider as many perspectives as possible. What you think counts. How you look at the world or interpret a piece of writing matters. If you need to miss a class, please try to contact me ahead of time. You will have the opportunity to meet with me for individual conferences twice during the term, once prior to your mid-term paper and again prior to the final paper.

**Position Paper**

For this paper, you are to position yourself within the greater Puget Sound region or the Pacific Northwest. Where do you feel most at home? In the city proper: Seattle, Portland, Olympia? In a mall, a city park, a nearby national park or wilderness area? Climbing a mountain or on the water, perhaps in a rowboat with fishing rod in hand? In your room, in front of your computer, transported into virtual reality? Once you have positioned yourself and determined where you feel most at home, consider how this positioning affects who you are, how you think, your capacity to read and write (what kinds of reading and writing you like to do); your ability to feel at home in the “natural world,” in the city, in your body, in your own skin, your ability to feel at home with living, non-human creatures and with other human beings. (2-3 pages, due May 21, Friday).

**Response Papers**

Brief 2-3 page papers in response to a prompt, to be written prior to class discussions of each work. You will be asked to examine the historical context and social climate of the texts; how characters and communities within the texts position themselves to their environments; and how the tensions between various communities—their position to the environment and their economic and/or political aspirations--affect the lives of the characters.

**Mid-term Paper**

This paper will require more in-depth critical analysis and historical contextualizing. You will choose one of the works we have covered in the first half of the term, research a cultural or historical event that influenced the text, and write an analysis that considers the tensions within the contact zones of human and non-human communities. A more in-depth description of this assignment will be posted on BlackBoard. (5-7 pages).

**Final Paper and Presentation**

As with your mid-term paper, this paper will require in-depth critical analysis and historical contextualizing. You will choose a work from the bibliography provided (other works upon approval), research a cultural or historical event that influenced the text, and write an analysis that considers the tensions within the contact zones of human and non-human communities. You will present your paper in class. A more in-depth description of this assignment will be posted on BlackBoard. (7-10 pages, 15 min presentation).

**Resources and Links**

- Center for the Study of the Pacific Northwest, University of Washington: History and Literature of the Pacific Northwest:  
<http://www.washington.edu/uwired/outreach/cspn/Website/Hist%20n%20Lit/lit%20main.html>
- The Association for the Study of Literature and Environment, Pacific Northwest Literature Bibliography:  
<http://www.asle.org/site/resources/ecocritical-library/bibliography/pacificnw/>
- Introduction to Native American Literature, Reed College, Department of English:  
<http://academic.reed.edu/english/courses/English201NAL/Introduction.html>