

SYLLABUS: Engl/Amst 470  
Literature and Culture of the American West  
Avery 12 2:10-3 MWF

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Course Description:

The issues that used to haunt settlers and Native Americans, including survival and the importance of land, are in many ways the same issues that are at the heart of contemporary literature; nevertheless, the West looks and is different than it was during the nineteenth century. While land seems abundant in many nineteenth century writings, the contemporary writings of Don Waters show land as only blank space until the arrival of the next developer. While Lewis and Clark write about the abundance of buffalo, Rick Bass talks about the difficulty of reintroducing wolves into a wilderness broken up by cattle ranches, and Ellen Meloy writes about what it's like to try to save the last herd of native bighorn sheep.

During the theme of exploration, we'll look at how explorers and pioneers encountered the West. Then we'll read the Native American perspective of white men coming to the West in the novel *Fools Crow*. In the work unit, we'll discuss how westerners make a living through reading Mark Sprague's account of growing up on the oldest dude ranch in the West, Ed Abbey's account of working in Arches National Park, and Don Water's story of how illegal immigrants scratch out a living in Las Vegas. We'll examine how work in the West often means destruction of natural resources and how insiders and outsiders have different stakes in the environment and animals of the West. Terry Tempest Williams' account of losing her mother to cancer as a result of nuclear testing in Utah will naturally lead to a discussion of ecofeminism and how the West has been seen as a dumping ground for nuclear waste, which we'll explore more fully in John D'Agata's *About a Mountain*. Finally, we'll read Mary Blew's novel *Jackalope Dreams* and examine what it means to live in the contemporary West where methamphetamine dealers coexist with old-time ranchers. We'll finish the course by reading the current issue of *High Desert Journal*, a literary magazine that focuses on western writers and issues of the American West.

Course Goals:

Students will come to conclusions about why and how the population of the West has exploded and the ways in which the issues of the West have grown to include tourism, development, light pollution, endangered species, illegal immigrants, and drug use. We'll look at characters in memoirs, short stories, essays, and novels and discuss how authors depict both stereotypes and truths about the American West. By the end of the course, students should be able to talk about contradictions, themes, and connections in the literature of the West. They will be able to synthesize and analyze ways authors view the land, the landscape, the people and animals that inhabit it. Students will engage with the readings through class discussion, journal entries, in-class writings, take-home exams, and a creative project.

Required Texts:

*The Norton Anthology of Nature Writing*, ed. Robert Finch and John Elder

*Fools Crow* by James Welch

*The Solace of Open Spaces* by Gretel Erlich

*Refuge* by Terry Tempest Williams

*Jackalope Dreams* by Mary Clearman Blew

Course Packet, available at Cougar Copies

Assignments:

Test #1: 25%

Test #2: 25%

Final: 25%

Reading Journal: 15%

In-class journals: 10%

Assignment Description:

Tests will be take-home, open book. You will have one week to complete them. They will be essay format, so you will turn in something that will be closer to a paper than an in-class essay. There will be constraints on what books to use, and you should obviously keep your sources to the books we've read for class. For the final, you'll have the option of writing an essay or short story that somehow engages with an issue in the West instead of taking the final. I will post some of my essays about the West on Angel as models.

Reading Journal is simply to help you stay current with the reading. I'll have it set up so you can post on Angel. You should post five times for each unit, and I will give it a letter grade. Your posts should be several paragraphs and engage in a specific or general way with the reading. What interested you? Confused you? What did you want to know more about? You can also engage with a particular passage. Make sure to copy the passage.

In-class journal is what I'll use instead of attendance. I'll randomly say that we'll do a journal entry in class. This will often help create material for discussion. You'll simply be counted for the percentage you are present for. If you haven't done the reading, you can simply write "present" and earn half credit. You can also earn half credit by making up the writing at another time. You can also use these writings as fodder for your reading journal or copy them exactly if they come out that way.

Course Schedule:

Week 1: Exploring the West/Jan. 10-14

M: Introductions, Syllabus

W: Turner, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History" (handout)

George Catlin, "Letters and Notes on the Manners, Customs, and Conditions of the North American Indians" in Norton/ Lewis and Clark "Original Journals"

F: John Wesley Powell “Exploration of the Colorado River of the West and its Tributaries” in Norton/ “Wind Storm in the Forests” by John Muir in Norton/“Nature” by Luther Standing Bear in Norton

Week 2: Exploring the West/Jan. 17-21

M: MLK day. No class!

W Mary Austin “Land of Little Rain” in Norton/Isabella Bird “A Lady’s Life in the Rocky Mountains” all in CP

F: “Myth Making” in CP/ Watch clip of “Deadwood”

Week 3: Exploring the West/Jan 24-28

M: *Fools Crow* and critical reading in CP

W: *Fools Crow*

F: *Fools Crow*

Week 4: Exploring the West/Jan 31-Feb 4

M: *Fools Crow*

W: *Fools Crow*

F: *Fools Crow*

Week 5: Land in the West/Feb 7-Feb 11

M: *Fools Crow*

Reading Journal #1 due!

Test #1 – take home handed out.

W: “Glen Canyon Submursus” and “Wilderness Letter” by Wallace Stegner in Norton

F: Kitteridge, “*Owning it All*” in Norton/ Mark Sprague, excerpt from *Where Rivers Change Direction* in CP

Week 6: Working in the West/Feb 14-18

M Black Women in the Wilderness” and “Landscape, History, and the Pueblo Imagination” and “Gila Wilderness” in Norton

W Jolie Kaytes, WSU landscape architect professor, visits class as guest speaker and Debbie Lee, WSU English professor visits class as guest speaker/ Test #1 due!

F “Looking for a Female Tenet” by Catherine Brady/”Blood Management” by Don Waters

Week 7: Working in the West/Feb 21-25

M: Presidents’ Day. No Class!

W: Edward Abbey in Norton/Sean Prentiss as guest speaker via phone

F: Pam Houston from CP/Excerpt from *In the Wilderness* in CP

Week 8: Work Feb 28-March 4

M: *The Solace of Open Spaces*

W: *The Solace of Open Spaces*/Watch “Sweetgrass”

F: Professor out of town. No Class!

Week 9: Nuclear in the West/March 7-11  
M: *The Solace of Open Spaces*/Watch "Sweetgrass"  
W: *Refuge*  
F: *Refuge*

March 14-18: No Class! Spring Break!

Week 10: March 21-25 Animals/Survival in the West  
M:*Refuge*  
W: *Refuge*  
F: *Refuge*

Week 11: March 28-April 1: Survival in the West/The New West  
M: Rick Bass, excerpt from *Nine Mile Wolves* in Norton/ Ellen Meloy, "The Blue Door Band"/excerpt from *Eating Stone* in CP/ Ray Gonzalez in Norton  
Reading Journal #2 due/ Test #2 given out/take home  
W Terri Jentz, excerpt from *Strange Piece of Paradise* in CP/Pete Fromm "Snow Cave" in CP  
F "Blue Desert" in CP/ "The Bulls at San Luis" by Don Waters in CP

Week 12: April 4 – April 8: The New West  
M Cisneros/Bowden in CP!  
W: "In Praise of Darkness" by John Daniel/possibly another reading TBA  
F: *About a Mountain* excerpt in CP

Week 13: April 11-15: The New West  
M: "The Only Traffic Signal on the Reservation Doesn't Flash Red Anymore" by Sherman Alexie in CP/Watch film clips from "Smoke Signals"  
W: *Jackalope Dreams*  
F: *Jackalope Dreams*

Week 14: The New West/April 18-22  
M: *Jackalope Dreams*  
W: *Jackalope Dreams* Mary Clearman Blew visits class  
F: Finish *Jackalope Dreams*

Week 15: The New West/April 25-29  
M: "Brokeback Mountain" by Annie Proulx/ Watch film clips from "Brokeback Mountain"  
W: *High Desert Journal*/ Elizabeth Quinn visits classroom via phone conference  
F: Review for Exam (take home)/ Peer Review creative pieces (post on angel by 5 p.m. Thursday)/Evaluations!  
Reading Journals #3 Due!  
Final Exam due by: Wed, May 4, 8-10 a.m.