

Sierra Nevada College
English 480-Special Topics
“American Nature Writing”
Course #80014, section 1
Fall 2007
T/TH 3:30-4:45, PA 207

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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 480 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’ interpretation of untamed landscape, Puritans’ concept of wilderness, Transcendentalists’ image of divine 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

- N. Scott Momaday, *The Way to Rainy Mountain*
ISBN: 0826304362-1969, 14th paperback printing 1998, Univ of New Mexico Press
- Michael P. Branch, *Reading the Roots: American Nature Writing Before Walden*
ISBN: 0820325481-2004, 1st paperback edition, Univ of Georgia Press
- Henry David Thoreau, *Walden*
ISBN: 0807014257-2004, Reprint Edition, Beacon Press
- John Muir, *My First Summer in the Sierra*
ISBN: 0140255702-1997, Penguin Books
- Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac: And Sketches Here and There*
ISBN: 019505928X-1949, 1989 Edition, Oxford Univ Press
- Janisse Ray, *Pinhook: Finding Wholeness in a Fragmented Land*
ISBN: 1931498741-2005, 1st edition, Chelsea Green
- Jordan Fisher Smith, *Nature Noir: A Park Ranger's Patrol in the Sierra*
ISBN: 0618711953-2006, Reprint Edition, Mariner Books
- Terry Tempest Williams, *Refuge: An Unnatural History of Family and Place*
ISBN: 0679740244-1991, 1992 edition, Vintage Books
- Ann Ronald, *Earthtones: A Nevada Album*
ISBN: 0874175267, 1995, 1st paperback edition, Univ of Nevada Press
- Ellen Meloy, *The Anthropology of Turquoise: Reflections on Desert, Sea, Stone, and Sky*
ISBN: 0375708138-2002, 2003 edition, First Vintage Books
- Elizabeth Gilbert, *The Last American Man*
ISBN: 0142002836-2002, 2003 edition, Penguin Books

Other Readings

Throughout the semester, I will hand out nature writing samples 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. Start seeing nature writing everywhere because it *is* everywhere, sometimes where you least expect it. 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
- Notebook for habitat nature journal

Grading

Essays	30% (10% each essay)
Midterm Exam	20%
Final Exam	20%
Habitat Nature Journal	15%
Reading Responses	10%
Field Trip Report	5%
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	100%

Essays

Essay #1-Early American Nature Writing

Essay #2-The Transcendentalists

Essay #3-Contemporary Nature Writing

Exams

The midterm and final exams are written from class discussions. The exams consist of multiple choice, responses to excerpts, and theme-based questions.

Habitat Nature Journal

Each student will prepare a comprehensive, **creative research notebook/journal** focusing on a particular species that inhabits the Sierra Nevada (mountain range that extends about 360 miles from near Mt. Lassen at the north to the edge of Walker Pass, east of Bakersfield-all of the Sierra, except the Carson Range, lies within California). Your research involves a variety of ‘lenses’ as you look at your topic in relation to literature, science, and art. These ‘field notes’ lack precise definition; part of the project is to discover a ‘form’ for reporting. You will be placed in a group and report, occasionally, your recent findings. Look at your group as a support system, sharing ideas, solving problems, and helping at any stage. This assignment is due at the end of the semester: detailed handout to follow.

Reading Responses

Reading responses occur in a variety of forms: in class responses from writing prompts and freewrites, Moodle postings, or as homework to be turned in.

Reading Journal

A reading journal is an effective tool for dialoguing with the texts. Write your initial response, critical analysis of the texts, and/or compare to other texts. Your reading journal will also act as a reflective journal while at Sagehen and other personal outings. Your reading journal is not graded.

Examples to consider in your reading journal: Identify author's themes, worldview and means of persuasion. What new ideas are introduced to interpret nature? How are these ideas changing social practices? How is nature represented? Does this author remind you of another author? How does gender, race, economic status, etc., influence the author's perceptions?

Field Trip

Mark your calendar!

Date: Saturday Sept 8-9 (2 days/1 night)

Cost: \$45.00 (\$7.00 lodging, \$25.00 food, \$13 instructor fee)

Transportation: private vehicles

I have arranged a field trip to the UC Berkeley field station, Sage Hen Creek (20 miles north of Truckee) on Saturday Sept 8. A naturalist from the station will lead a hike 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." The field trip is mandatory; however, if a student has made prior arrangements at that time (family reunion or such), I will meet with that student and provide an alternate assignment. Handout to follow.

Late Essays and Homework

Late Essays and Assignments

Turning in assignments late is unfair to those students who have made the extra effort to turn in assignments on time, so late assignments (one class) will receive **HALF** credit. For example, an essay that is due Monday but is turned in Wednesday will receive **HALF** the grade (80%=40%). If an essay is turned in the following Monday, grade is 0%. A weekly assignment that is due Monday but is turned in on Wednesday will receive 1/2 credit. If a weekly assignment is turned in the following Monday, no 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 (and to teach at a college!). It is essential that you attend AND participate in class in order to contribute both as an individual and as a group member. If you miss class, it is YOUR responsibility to contact another student to find out what happened in class and to acquire all homework assignments. If you have a serious illness or emergency, be sure to get in touch with me as soon as possible.

If you miss more than 4 classes (2 weeks worth), you will fail the course.

Interruptions

Cell phones, ipods, planners, laptop computers, etc., Please turn them off or do not bring them to class.

Late Attendance

Late attendance disturbs class and the flow of discussion and work. Please respect your classmates and me by attending class on time. If you are late, you will miss reading responses, which will affect your grade.

Plagiarism

Plagiarism is "passing off a source's information, ideas, or words as one's own by omitting to acknowledge the sources." This refers to all sources of information, including the Internet.

The following policy regarding cheating and plagiarism has been established at Sierra Nevada College:

First offense: Student receives a failing grade for that assignment; the instructor notifies the advisor and the Vice President of Academic Affairs. Students identified as committing an act of plagiarism will be referred to Student Services.

Second offense in the same class or any other class that semester or subsequent semesters: Student receives a failing grade for the class where the second offense takes place; the instructor notifies the advisor and the Vice President of Academic Affairs.

Third offense: The student is expelled from Sierra Nevada College. The instructor notifies the advisor and the Vice President of Academic Affairs.

Special Accommodations (ADA)

In accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, students with a documented disability are eligible for support services and accommodations. If a student wishes to request an accommodation, contact the Director of Student Services (Prim Library room 323) at (775) 831-7799 x7534 within the first week of the semester.

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-Fall 2007

Sierra Nevada College-English 480, "American Nature Writing"

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

Week 1-Aug 21 and 23

Tues-Class list, Syllabus, Calendar, Introduction to course and to each other
What is nature writing?

Thurs-Review syllabus and **purchase textbooks immediately!**
Read handouts: Stewart, Steingraber, Gessner, and Murland, choose 1 (other than Stewart) and write a 2 page informal response, summarizing his/her ideas and adding your comments

Questions about syllabus? Introduction to course and one another-continued, discuss handouts

*Sunday August 26-Last day to drop with 100% refund

Week 2-Aug 28 and 30

Tues-LOI-Letter of Introduction, purchase textbooks, and begin reading *Roots*
Roots Part I: Exploration Narratives, 15-17th Centuries
 Read Columbus, Cabeza de Vaca, Smith, and Wood
 Part II: Exploring Colonial Settlement, 18th Century
 Read Edwards, St. John de Crevecoeur, Jefferson, Bartram

Respond on Moodle

Thurs-*Roots* Part III: Western Exploration Narratives, Science Writing, and Nationalism and Romanticism, 19th Century
Read Lewis and Clark, Audubon, Emerson, Martineau, Schoolcroft (Jane and Henry), Fuller, Thoreau, Cooper

*Sunday Sept 2-Last day to withdraw with 50% refund

Week 3-Sept 4 and 6

Tues-*Sand County Almanac*
Read Part I and II: A Sand County Almanac and Sketches Here and There

Thurs-*Sand County Almanac*
Read Part III: The Upshot

**Sat Sept 8 and 9-Field trip to Sagehen Creek Field Station

**Sunday Sept 9-Last day to withdraw with 25% refund

Week 4-Sept 11 and 13

Tues-Final wrap up of *Roots*, *Sand County Almanac* and field trip reflection
Habitat topic due

Thurs-Read *The Way to Rainy Mountain*
Name habitat groups

Week 5-Sept 18 and 20

Tues-*Walden*
Read Economy
Essay #1 due-Early American Nature Writing
Handout of habitat groups and topics

Thurs-*Walden*
Read Where I Lived and What I Lived For through Solitude

Week 6-Sept 25 and 27

Tues-*Walden*
Read Visitors through House-Warming

Thurs-*Walden*
Read Former Inhabitants: and Winter Visitors through Conclusion

Week 7-Oct 2 and 4

Tues-*My First Summer*
Read Through the Foothills with a Flock of Sheep through A Bread Famine

Thurs-*My First Summer*
Read To the High Mountains through The Yosemite

Week 8-Oct 9 and 11

Tues-*My First Summer*
Read Mount Hoffman and Lake Tenaya through The Mono Trail

Thurs-*My First Summer*
Read Bloody Canon and Mono Lake through Back to the Lowlands
Midterm Exam Study Guide

Week 9-Oct 16 and 18

Tues-Midterm Exam

Thurs-Read *Pinhook*

**Fri Oct 19-Midterm grades filed

Week 10-Oct 23 and 25

Tues-*Refuge*

Read Burrowing Owls through Peregrine Falcon
Midterm Works Cited due for Habitat Nature Journal
Essay #2 due-Transcendentalism

Thurs-*Refuge*

Read Wilson's Phalarope through Peregrine Falcon through Roadrunner

Week 11-Oct 30 and Nov 1

Tues-*Refuge*

Read Magpies through The Clan of One-Breasted Women

Thurs-Read *Earthtones*

Week 12-Nov 6 and 8

Tues-*Nature Noir*

Read Prologue through A Natural Death

Thurs-*Nature Noir*

Read Finch Finds His Roots through Epilogue

Week 13-Nov 13 and 15

Tues-*Anthropology of Turquoise*

Read A Wilderness of Monkeys and Tilano's Jeans

Thurs-*Anthropology of Turquoise*

Read The Silk That Hurls Us Down Its Spine and A Field Guide to Brazen Harlotry

Nov 20 and 22-NO CLASS

Thanksgiving Holiday

Week 14-Nov 27 and 29

Tues-*The Last American Man*

Read Chapter 1 through 6

Thurs-*The Last American Man*

Read Chapter 7 through Epilogue

Week 15-Dec 4 and 6

Tues-Habitat Presentations

Essay #3 due-Contemporary Nature Writing

Thurs-Habitat Presentations

Week 16-Dec 11 and 13

Tues-Habitat Presentations

Final Exam Study Guide

Thurs-Final Exam

** Wed Dec 19-Final grades filed