

1-2015

ENST 373A.01: Nature Works

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ENST 373 A,W
Spring 2015

NATURE WORKS: Writing about Nature & Environment

Heather McKee
T/Th 12:40-2:00pm
Davidson Honors College Room 120

Jeannette Rankin Hall M1-C Office Hours: Wednesday 1-4pm or by appointment
(Office is located up the metal stairs inside the Environmental Studies Department)
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“A universe in which everything is known would be static and dull... A universe that is unknowable is no fit place for a thinking being. The ideal universe for us is one very much like the universe we inhabit.”

– Carl Sagan, from his essay “Science and Human Concern”

Books:

A Pocket Style Manual. Diana Hacker. 2004.
Tell It Slant. Brenda Miller and Suzanne Paola. 2012.
Bird by Bird. Anne Lamott. 1994.
Teaching a Stone to Talk. Annie Dillard. 1982.
A Natural History of Now. (Edited by) Sarah Call and Li-Yen Douglass. 2012.
Granta 102: The New Nature Writing. (Edited by) Jason Cowley. 2008.
The Tarball Chronicles. David Gessner. 2011.
The Forest Unseen. David George Haskell. 2012.

Other Readings:

ENST 373 on Moodle will have the required weekly readings outside of our texts.

Assorted Camas (the literary magazine published by the Environmental Studies Graduate Program) issues may be used. These can be purchased in class for \$5 each.

Course Purposes and Outcomes: Build depth and authority in writing about the natural world, and the relationships of humans with it.

We will accomplish this by:

- Exploring methods of finding meaningful questions and subjects through direct observation and memory
- Studying examples of and practicing interweaving experience, research, and reflection in writing
- Gaining practice in all aspects of the writing process - discovering ideas, making notes, writing drafts, revising, editing, and reading aloud

- Identifying and responding to tendencies in your writing, both strengths and weaknesses
- Understanding how you and others read and respond, and integrating this into your writing
- Expanding your writing by exploring and experimenting with new or different forms of nature writing

Primary Writing: Minimum combined total of 5000 original words (+/- 300 words = ~17 pages) in 3 assignments, plus a revision, as follows (*subject to minor changes*):

- **Assignment #1:** A personal essay of between 1500-1800 words. Reflect on an experience you've had in relation with a particular place, or a particular organism. Essay should be rich with real detail, showcasing your powers of observation and inquiry, and punctuated with explorations of connected ideas. **Be sure to edit for mechanics before you provide copies for the entire class on 2/17.**
- **Assignment #2:** A larger, more in-depth work of nature writing (form of your choice) between 2200-2500 words. Refer to our readings and discussions of forms of nature writing for guidelines for your particular choice. Outside research should play a larger role in whatever form you choose. Work to blend facts organically into your prose. (Also feel free to discuss with me during office hours.) **Be sure to edit for mechanics before providing copies for the class on 3/26.**
- **Assignment #3:** One or Two Field Notes (to round out your 5,000 required word count) on a specific aspect of the environment in Montana (such as a particular animal or plant), each to be around 600 words. Field Notes are inspired by curiosity about the natural world, and typically contain a combination of keen observation, lyricism, and research about their subject. Field Notes is a natural history podcast sponsored by the Montana Natural History Center, and broadcast on Montana Public Radio. For more information, you can visit the Montana Natural History Center's website. **Four copies of a working draft due on 4/16 to discuss in small groups in class. Final draft due finals week.**
- **Revision** (significant!) of Assignment #1 or #2. Use well the comments from workshop and your own growth in the class to improve one of your previous assignments, paying special attention to clarity, voice, blending, and care with language. **Provide copies for the class on 4/23.**
- **Finals Class:** Prepare to **read aloud your Field Notes for our final class during Finals Week.**

Required Format for All Writing for MAJOR ASSIGNMENTS: (Check these points off for each essay you turn in!)

- | | |
|---------------------------------------|--|
| 1) Double spaced | 2) Double Sided (copies for class to workshop) |
| 3) 1" margins l/r/t/b & 12 point font | 4) Title |
| 5) Word count included in essay | 6) Pages Numbered (by hand ok) |

Other Required Writing:

- 1) **Weekly Writings (TYPED)** – A single, double-spaced page of in-progress writing. Topics for these informal writings are provided in the syllabus, or when not described, your choice from revisions of in-class writings, journaling, or a piece of one of your major assignments. **Due nearly every day, check syllabus.**
- 2) **Writing Journal** – A catch-all for the class. Here you can compose in class writings (ICWs), notes and questions on outside readings, notes and work for your assignments, any other resources. **This will be collected and reviewed on 3/5 and 5/7.**
- 3) **Field Journal** – Find a place. A spot along the river, an old maple tree, a sitting rock along a hiking trail. **At least once weekly, visit this place for at least 15 minutes**, and using **all** senses, jot observations, questions and/or sketches with notes. Record weather, date, and time. You will develop your own natural history and phenology associated with this unique natural place over the semester. **This will be collected and reviewed on 3/5 and 5/7.**
- 4) **Responses to other students' essays:** You are expected to read each other's work attentively and critically. Use the copies you are given to underline strong and weak points, and make notes. In addition, a response of at least two paragraphs is required to ALL student essays read for class. You can type this up or write directly on the essay. Although short, these should be thoughtful, constructive, and SPECIFIC responses. Respect the work that your fellow students have put into these writings, with an eye to help refine their work. Refer to Chapter 14 of *Tell It Slant* if you need ideas for how to approach reviewing a piece. **These are due on the days we are workshoping essays – 36 total responses over the semester.**
- 5) **Responses to Wild Mercy/outside readings:** (TYPED) – You are required to attend, but I hope you will also enjoy, at least THREE Wild Mercy Readings, or outside readings at bookstores, etc. Wild Mercy Readings are from 7:00-8:30 on Thursday evenings at the UM Flat on 633 S. Fifth Street E., adjacent to the University. Type a minimum of a one paragraph response to each reading you attend. (If you have a conflict, let me know ASAP so we can make other arrangements.) **These are due within one week of attending a reading.**

Attendance: You are expected in class. You are also appreciated in class – you each have a valuable and unique perspective. Ultimately, this is a workshop, and it only works with your participation. **If you are unable to make a class, you must turn in the required materials in hard copy to my mailbox in Rankin Hall before that class to receive credit**, unless you have made prior arrangements with me. Repeated tardiness and unexcused absences will strongly affect your participation grade.

Writing Grades: I will return each of your major assignments with a comprehensive response, although not a letter grade. My responses will be based on my overlapping appraisals of clarity, originality, mechanics (grammar, punctuation, spelling,) flow and organization, research, detail, intention, tone, and style in your writing. You must of course, also meet the basic assignment objectives, including word count and due date. Grades will be influenced by your individual effort and personal development in writing over the semester. Ask me anytime for a tentative, current course grade.

Course Grade Determination:

Total of Main 3 Assignments + One Revision = 2/3

(Approximately 1/6 each, but your progress and improvement will be considered)

Attendance and Participation=1/6

Weekly Writing, Journals, & Outside Events=1/6

Outside Help: I am available during my office hours, by appointment, and over e-mail for questions you may have about your work. In addition, the University offers The Writing Center as a free service to all students. I encourage you to use it. <http://www.umt.edu/writingcenter/>.

	NATURE WORKS 2015	<i>Syllabus subject to change</i>	
Date	Discussion Topics	Readings DUE this day	Assignments DUE this day
1/27	Introductions, Overview, Why We Read & Write	"Why We Write" - Terry Tempest Williams (in class)	
1/29	What is Nature Writing? Finding Questions: Observing and Field Journaling	Bird by Bird: "Looking Around" p.97 (in class) Granta 102: "Daydreaming" - R. Deakin "A City Person Encountering Nature" - Maxine Hong Kingston "Writing the Nature Essay" - Dinty Moore "Why I Keep A Field Notebook" - E. Greene	WW: Hopes for the class, why you write about nature
2/3	Finding Questions: Uncovering Memories	Tell It Slant: Chapters 1 & 3 Bird by Bird: "Getting Started & Short Assignments" p.3-20 Granta 102: "Butterflies on a Wheel" - A. Doerr "Water Contours" - D. Fisher "Growing Up Game" - B. Patterson	WW: Elaboration on one field journal entry or class observation exercise
2/5	Writing a First Draft: Outrunning The Inner Critic Basics of Good Writing: What is an Essay?	Bird by Bird: "Shitty First Drafts" p.21 Bird by Bird: "Perfectionism" p.28 "The Personal (Not Private) Essay" - D. Moore "Locating an Essay's DNA" - J. Bonomo "In Progress (S.F.D.)": H. McKee	WW: Elaboration on one memory
2/10	Basics of Good Writing: Writing About What Matters - To You Zooming In and Zooming Out S.F.D. Discussion in Small Groups	Bird by Bird: "Moral POV" p.103 "Essays" - Kidder & Todd "Cloudy is the Stuff of Stones" - A. Doerr Note on "Structure" p.40 (from Good Prose, in class)	WW: 4 copies S.F.D.
2/12	Basics of Good Writing: Developing a Personal Essay	Tell It Slant: Chapter 13 Tell It Slant: Chapter 9 (only pgs. 89-94) TBA	No WW
2/17	How to Workshop: Constructive Critiquing & Responsive Revising Brief Discussion of Grammatical Issues	Tell It Slant: Chapter 14 & 15 Camas Summer 2013: "The Cakewalk" - Jenner Harsha TBA Pocket Style Manual (in class, bring text)	Essay #1: Copies for entire class
2/19	Workshop Essay #1	Read and Respond to 3 Essays, Authors: Bring Questions Granta 102: "Introduction" (in class, bring text)	No WW AND: 2 paragraph response to each author's piece

2/24	Workshop Essay #1 What Is "The New" Nature Writing?	Read and Respond to 3 Essays, Authors: Bring Questions "Beyond Nature Writing" - Sharon Blackie	WW: Your relationships with nature/env AND: 2 paragraph response to each author's piece
2/26	Workshop Essay #1 Forms of Nature Writing: Literary Journalism	Read and Respond to 3 Essays, Authors: Bring Questions The Tarball Chronicles: "Prelude & I" pp 3-42	WW: Elaborate on one relationship AND: 2 paragraph response to each author's piece
3/3	Workshop Essay #1 Forms of Nature Writing: Literary Journalism	Read and Respond to 3 Essays; Authors: Bring Questions The Tarball Chronicles: "II" pp 45-115	WW: Environmental issues imp. to you AND: 2 paragraph response to each author's piece
3/5	Workshop Essay #1 Forms of Nature Writing: Literary Journalism & The Advocacy Essay	Read and Respond to 3 Essays, Authors: Bring Questions The Tarball Chronicles: "Migrations" pp 185-202, "Two Stories" pp 221-235, "Testimony from Captain Ryan Lambert" pp 281-285 "Thinking Green: Writing the Advocacy Essay" - E. Bader TBA	No WW AND: 2 paragraph response to each author's piece AND: Turn In Field Journals and Writing Journals
3/10	Workshop Essay #1 Forms of Nature Writing: The Lyric Essay - Braided	Read and Respond to 3 Essays, Authors: Bring Questions Tell It Slant: "What is the Lyric Essay?" p. 108 (in class) Tell It Slant: "A Braided Heart - Shaping the Lyric..." p.283 NHN: "Migrations" - Beth Baker "Gulo gulo" - Thomas Deuring TBA	WW: Approach for investigation of issue AND: 2 paragraph response to each author's piece
3/12	Forms of Nature Writing: The Lyric Essay - Various	NHN: "One Hour Photo" - Chavawn Kelley NHN: "I Guess It Is Spring Again..." - Kurt Caswell "Writing the Lyric Essay" - Dinty Moore TBA	WW: Lyric braid possibilities
3/17	Forms of Nature Writing: The Prose Poem & Collage Discussion of Lyric Essay in Small Groups	Tell It Slant: "The Prose Poem & The Collage" p.109-112 "On Miniatures" - L. Purpurea "An Interview with Emily Dickinson" - S. St. Germaine Browse Brevity Journal online TBA	WW: Elaboration of one possible braid or extended lyrical freewrite or work in progress - 4 copies
3/19	Forms of Nature Writing: Science Interpretation Journals at Mansfield Library?	Tell It Slant: Chapter 7 'Writing the Larger World' "Hay Moon" - S. Steingraber	WW: Working Prose Poem or Collage

		TBA	
3/24	Forms of Nature Writing: The Natural History Essay	Tell It Slant: Review Chapter Forest Unseen: Intro & Chapters TBA "Improving the Olympics" - Kim Todd Camas Summer 2009: "A Finger of Owls" - Julia Corbett	WW: Science Interpretation (Journal)
3/26	Learning from Radio: Field Notes Podcasts & Outdoor Journaling (Weather Permitting)	No readings due	Essay #2: Copies for entire class
3/31	**SPRING BREAK**	Work on Field Notes? Read Essays?	
4/2	**SPRING BREAK**	Work on Field Notes? Read Essays?	
4/7	Workshop Essay #2	Read and Respond to 4 Essays, Authors: Bring Questions	No WW AND 2 paragraph response to each author's piece
4/9	Workshop Essay #2	Read and Respond to 4 Essays, Authors: Bring Questions	WW: Work in progress AND 2 paragraph response to each author's piece
4/14	Workshop Essay #2	Read and Respond to 4 Essays, Authors: Bring Questions	No WW AND 2 paragraph response to each author's piece
4/16	Workshop Essay #2 Discussion of Field Notes Drafts in Small Groups	Read and Respond to 4 Essays, Authors: Bring Questions	Field Notes Draft - 4 copies AND 2 paragraph response to each author's piece
4/21	Outdoor Journaling (Weather Permitting) or film viewing/podcast	Readings TBA	No WW
4/23	Outdoor Journaling (Weather Permitting) or film viewing/podcast	Readings TBA	Revision of E#1 or E#2: Copies for entire class
4/28	Workshop Revision	Read and Respond to 4 Essays, Bring Questions, Thoughts Authors:	No WW AND 2 paragraph response to each author's piece
4/30		Read and Respond to 4 Essays, Authors:	No WW

	Workshop Revision	Bring Questions, Thoughts	AND 2 paragraph response to each author's piece
5/5	Workshop Revision	Read and Respond to 4 Essays, Bring Questions, Thoughts	Authors: No WW AND 2 paragraph response to each author's piece
5/7	Workshop Revision	Read and Respond to 4 Essays, Bring Questions, Thoughts	Authors: No WW AND 2 paragraph response to each author's piece
			Turn in Writing and Field Journals - these will be returned to you at final
FINAL	***Readings of Field Notes by Class***		Field Notes - 2 copies