

ENG 123/812: Current Themes in Literature: American Writers and the Environment

The tree which moves some to tears of joy is in the Eyes of others only a Green thing that stands in the way. Some See Nature all Ridicule & Deformity, & by these I shall not regulate my proportions; & Some Scarce see Nature at all. But to the Eyes of the Man of Imagination, Nature is Imagination itself. As a man is, So he Sees.

—William Blake, letter to Dr. Trusler, 23 August 1799

In the woods, we return to reason and faith. There I feel that nothing can befall me in life—no disgrace, no calamity (leaving me my eyes), which nature cannot repair. Standing on the bare ground—my head bathed by the blithe air and uplifted into infinite space—all mean egotism vanishes. I become a transparent eyeball; I am nothing; I see all; the currents of the Universal Being circulate through me; I am part or parcel of God.

—Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Nature"

O how can it be that the ground itself does not sicken?
How can you be alive you growths of spring?
How can you furnish health you blood of herbs, roots, orchards, grain?
Are they not continually putting distemper'd corpses within you?
Is not every continent work'd over and over with sour dead?

—Walt Whitman, "This Compost"

Course code: ENG 123/812

Online days: M–TH

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Catalog Description: This course uses an ecocritical approach to representative works in American literature that contemplate nature and reflect on human relationships to the natural world. This course is suitable for both majors and non-majors. Prerequisites: ENG 023.

Course Description: Ecocriticism is one of the fastest-growing fields in literary scholarship. Among other things, it is a response to the greening of literature, which is one facet of the growing global consciousness of the complex relationship between human beings and the natural world. But what is ecocriticism? As a working definition, we may define ecocriticism as the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment. Ecocriticism investigates not only literature that deals in some way with the environment, but also the many environments (e.g., political, historical, cultural) in which literature is produced and consumed. As the above quote from the English Romantic poet William Blake indicates, the theme of the natural world extends beyond national and historical boundaries. Therefore, we will draw on a number of primary and secondary texts from various cultures and histories, while concentrating most of our readings on nineteenth- and twentieth-century American poetry and prose. Some questions we will attempt to answer: What is nature? What is natural? What is unnatural? What is nature writing? What is wilderness? How do our social, political, religious, economic, and aesthetic attitudes influence our reception and understanding of both literature and the natural world? What is the relationship between nature and culture? How does the study of literature influence our understanding and appreciation of the natural world? How does this understanding and appreciation influence how we live in the world?

Course Objectives

- Identify basic elements of literature (e.g., character, plot, situation, theme, sound, image).
- Understand and apply basic methods of literary analysis (e.g., close reading, contextual analysis).
- Understand and apply basic methods of ecocritical analysis.
- Produce critical writing on literature.

Required Texts

Snyder, Gary. *The Practice of the Wild: Essays*. Emeryville, CA: Shoemaker & Hoard, 2003.

———. *Turtle Island*. New York: New Directions, 1974.

Thoreau, Henry David. *Walden*. Ed. J. Lyndon Shanley. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004.

Texts available at Kutztown University Campus Bookstore.

Additional Requirements

—Access to a computer and the Internet.

—Access to Blackboard.

—Access to Microsoft Word.

—Adobe Acrobat Reader 5.0 or higher (go to adobe.com for free software).

—Printouts of digital materials on Blackboard.

—Email account.

—College dictionary.

COURSE INFORMATION AND POLICIES

Democracy begins in conversation.

—John Dewey

Blackboard: Blackboard is our de facto classroom environment. I will deliver lectures, reading materials, and assignments to Blackboard, and you will post responses, journals, and other assignments. It is crucial that you check Blackboard on a daily basis. It is not the purpose of Blackboard to discuss your grade, request private tutorials for missed lectures, or chat about issues that do not pertain to the course. If you are unable to access Blackboard and/or your email account, it is your responsibility to seek technical help from the KU Information Technology Department, your computer vendor, www.microsoft.com, and so on.

Course Design: Active Learning: Most collegiate classrooms are based on either a passive learning model (i.e., traditional lecture), an active learning model, or some combination of the two. According to the philosophy of active learning, meaningful education requires that students participate in their educational experience beyond simply listening to lectures and taking notes. While listening and taking notes may constitute forms of active learning, the active learning model encourages a wide variety of student-based activities, including listening, speaking, discussing, reading, writing, participating in small-group work, presentations, and so on. In other words, the active learning model of education is based on a collaboration between the students and the professor. The philosophy behind active learning is grounded in the belief that students learn better when they take a more active role in their education. Although there will be occasional lectures, this is not a lecture-based course. Instead, the majority of classtime will be devoted to active learning activities. For more information on active learning, see for example: www.kutztown.edu/CET/index.html

Conduct: In a distance-learning course, your computer is the classroom environment. Therefore, the same Code of Civility that applies to classroom interaction also applies to online communication. Basically, follow the Golden Rule: Treat others as you would have others treat you. For more information on conduct, please refer to the Kutztown University Code of Civility. Tips for online interaction: It is very easy to misconstrue intent via online communication. In order to avoid such mishaps, please carefully consider your words and tone before addressing others online. Use basic social niceties (e.g., salutations, closings). If you are unfamiliar with online communication, I recommend that you visit any number of online manuals that address digital communication etiquette (e.g., www.netmanners.com). Violation of any of the conduct policies will negatively impact your grade, including your participation grade, and may be cause for being dropped from the course.

Preparation: Regular online attendance and active participation are crucial components of the course. You cannot pass the course without regular online attendance and active participation. Textbook work is an integral part of the course, and you are responsible for making sure that you have all required materials.

Attendance: Regular online presence is critical to the learning process, and a significant portion of your final grade (10%) is based on participation. Obviously, you cannot participate if you are not present to the online environment. If you cannot log in daily and keep up with the lectures, readings, discussions, and assignments, I strongly recommend that you drop the course and retake it at a time that is more convenient for you. I do not conduct private lectures, nor will I go over missed information via phone, email, or Blackboard. Prior to contacting me for missed information, please consult Blackboard and your syllabus.

Excused Absences: I reserve the right to allow make-up work due to extreme circumstances such as a medical emergency. Only absences that are accompanied by signed documents (e.g., doctor's note; coach's letter) will be considered for an excused absence. Copies of these documents must be submitted to me within one (1) week of the absence.

Code of Academic Integrity: You are expected to abide by the Academic Honesty Policy, which is available online at www.kutztown.edu/admin/conduct and in the student handbook, *The Key*. Kutztown University considers violations of scholastic ethics, including plagiarism, as serious offenses which may result in failure of an assignment, the course, or possible expulsion from the university. The university subscribes to anti-plagiarism services for checking student papers against material posted on the Internet, including websites that require payment to download papers. All work done for this class must be your own. For assignments, you may use work from books and other materials if properly cited. Copying from any source without proper reference is considered plagiarism. Do not plagiarize. If you have questions about plagiarism, please feel free to ask me.

Kutztown University ADA Compliance Statement: Any student who has a need for accommodation based on the impact of a disability should contact me privately to discuss the specific situation as soon as possible. Contact Disability Resources and Services to coordinate reasonable accommodations for students with documented disabilities. Disability Services: Office of Human Diversity, 215 Stratton Administration Building. See also: www.kutztown.edu/admin/humandiversity/disabilityservices/index.shtml

GRADING PROCEDURES AND ASSIGNMENTS

Major Assignment	Percent of Final Grade
Discussion Board	40
Journals	10
Short Paper	10
Long Paper	30
Participation	10

Percentile	Grade	
90–100	A	Sophisticated: Overall, the coursework is excellent.
80–89	B	Advanced: Overall, the coursework is above average.
70–79	C	Average: Overall, the coursework is average.
60–69	D	Below Average: Overall, the coursework is below average.
Below 60	F	Unacceptable: Overall, the coursework is unacceptable.

Grades: Although a grade is often determined by the amount of effort you put into your work, you are not graded on effort. Some students are able to write an A paper with little effort, while others put twice the effort into their paper and do not receive a passing grade. Thus, your grade is determined by the quality of the product, not the quantity of the process. To complete this course with an average grade (C) or

higher, you must attend to online lectures and assignments, complete all assignments on time and in the proper format, prepare for class, and participate in online discussions. You cannot receive a passing grade unless you have submitted all major assignments on time. To receive full credit, all written assignments must be submitted on time, in the proper format (to be explained in separate format sheets), and with the required supporting material. If you have a question about my comments or the grades you have received, be sure to talk to me about it immediately. Only work assigned and graded by the instructor of record will be used to determine your final grade.

Discussion Board: I will post questions on the Discussion Board on Blackboard. You must contribute to the Discussion Board in two ways: 1) respond to my question posted to the Discussion Board, and 2) respond to someone else's response posted to the Discussion Board. Responses like "I agree" do not count. Make sure to sign all of your responses. Responses are due by 8:00 p.m. each day. I will not accept responses that are submitted late, submitted as email or email attachments, dropped off in my office, and so on.

Journals: You are responsible for posting journals to the Digital Dropbox on Blackboard. Journals MUST be formatted in Word. I will explain journal formatting in detail in a separate format sheet. Journal questions will be posted to Blackboard in advance of each due date, so it is important that you check Blackboard on a daily basis. In order to receive credit, journals must be complete, in the proper format, and submitted to the Digital Dropbox on time. I will not accept journals that are submitted late, submitted as email or email attachments, dropped off in my office, and so on. Incomplete and/or improperly-formatted journals will receive zero credit. Late journals will not be accepted. Journals sent as email or email attachments will not be accepted.

Short Paper: There will be one short paper assignment due during the first weeks of the semester. The short paper MUST be formatted in Word. I will explain the short paper in a separate assignment sheet.

Long Paper: There will be one long paper assignment due during the last week of the semester. The long paper MUST be formatted in Word. I will explain the long paper in a separate assignment sheet.

Participation: As this is an active learning course based on class discussion, online participation is absolutely crucial to your success. Participation is worth 10% (1 letter grade) of your final grade. Participation is defined as quality intellectual engagement in online class discussions throughout the entire semester.

Communication of Grades: In accordance with administrative policies, no grades will be given by telephone or digital communication.

Withdrawal Grades: See www.kutztown.edu for information regarding withdrawal deadlines.

Incomplete Grades: Due to the nature of this course, incomplete grades will not be given.

ESL (English as a Second Language): If you are an ESL student, please inform me at the beginning of the semester so that I may discuss with you additional assistance and campus resources.

Email: Make sure to identify yourself and your course number and section in the subject line of your email (e.g. Dante Stallworth ENG 123/812). Email sent without proper identification will not be acknowledged. Please refer to Blackboard prior to emailing me for information. Questions about policies and procedures already addressed on Blackboard (e.g., syllabus, journal assignments) will receive no response. I try to answer email as quickly as possible, but keep in mind that I am not always online.

An Allegory of Reading and Writing

A post-graduate student equipped with honors and diplomas went to Agassiz* to receive the final and finishing touches. The great man offered him a small fish and told him to describe it.

Post-Graduate Student: "That's only a sunfish."

Agassiz: "I know that. Write a description of it."

After a few minutes the student returned with the description of the *Ichthus Heliodiplodokus*, or whatever term is used to conceal the common sunfish from vulgar knowledge, family *Heliichtherinkus*, etc., as found in textbooks of the subject.

Agassiz again told the student to describe the fish.

The student produced a four-page essay.

Agassiz then told him to look at the fish.

At the end of three weeks the fish was in an advanced state of decomposition, but the student knew something about it.

* Louis Agassiz (1807-1873): Swiss-born US paleontologist and geologist.

—Ezra Pound, *ABC of Reading*

EL HOMBRE

It's a strange courage
you give me ancient star:

Shine alone in the sunrise
toward which you lend no part!

—William Carlos Williams, *Al Que Quiere!* (1917)

Acknowledgment of Receipt of Syllabus

A syllabus is a contract. By signing this form you acknowledge that you understand the terms and obligations of the syllabus.

Please sign and return to the professor the following for ENG 123/812.

Student name: _____

Date: _____

Directions: Initial each of the following to which you agree.

____ I have received my syllabus, which includes course objectives, policies, and requirements.

____ I have read, understand, and agree to all of the syllabus policies and requirements.

____ I understand that it is my responsibility to inform the instructor immediately of any special conditions that may influence my performance in the class (ESL status, learning disabilities, etc.).

Student information:

Signature: _____

Name: _____
(please print)

Email address: _____