

ENGL230: Introduction to Environmental Literature  
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Office Hours: Tuesdays and Thursdays, 1-2 p.m.

The American environmental movement has been underway, in one way or another, for at least 150 years. There have been many great achievements in both conservation and science: vast national parks and wilderness areas; a reduction in industrial pollutants in our water and air; a better understanding of ecological principals. Yet despite a century and a half of hearty debate over man's place in the world; we (and the natural world) still suffer enormous insults to our very ecological foundations: climate change receives the greatest attention these days, but other troubles are legion: mass species extinctions; vast chemical pollution of our food and bodies; habitat destruction through suburban sprawl; the destruction of our mountains for coal power. There is also a great human cost: the growing field of environmental justice has begun to enumerate the ways environmental damage is often accompanied by profound insults to the world's poorest and most vulnerable people.

Although much work has been done in the science and policy fields, perhaps what is needed is an entirely new way of thinking about our place in the world. Thankfully, there is much to draw on. Ancient wisdom traditions, poetry, and animal research have much to offer on this subject, and this is where our journey will begin. We will explore them all to search for clues to living more holistic and sustainable lives that are more in keeping with the natural rhythms of life on earth.

Since our class is large, meets only twice a week, and is made up of students from a wide variety of disciplines, we will have a number of challenges and opportunities. I expect our conversations to be wide-ranging, cross-pollinating, and rich. With this in mind, preparation for and participation in classroom discussion is essential, and expected. This is not a lecture course. I will start things off, and guide our discussions, but at its core this class will be a discussion.

Reading assignments will not be heavy, but they must be done. In an effort to reassure myself that folks are doing their reading, I will offer periodic (and very easy) pop quizzes – this will offer diligent readers an excellent opportunity to improve their grade.

Writing requirements will be as follows: each week, students will compose a two-page journal – due by email to me on Tuesday mornings -- based on impressions from your reading, our class discussions, and – critically – your experiences in the woods. Journals should be loose and fun and inspired. They can engage any subject you choose, but they must have one important focal point: a weekly visit to a place in the outdoors of your choosing, preferably one where water and land meet: a streamside, lakeshore, or beach. White Clay Creek is an excellent place to explore for this. The PLACE will be central to your experience this semester, so choose wisely. What you will do at this place each week, rain or snow or shine, is look as closely as possible at your surroundings. Notice the changes over time in the trees, in the grasses, in the animals, in the insects, in the sounds.

Like many of the books we will be reading, these journals can be impressionistic, or they can be deeply researched; better yet, they can be both. These journals are intended to be public, and we will read from them in class every week. I hope to post some of the best work on a blog.

Grading will be conducted as follows: the average of the weekly journals will count 80 percent. Class participation will count 10 percent. When grading student writing, I look at the quality of three things – reporting or research; writing; and structure. "A" pieces must show exceptional imagination and execution, with fresh ideas, eloquent, even flawless writing, and abiding intelligence. "B" pieces must be interesting, even inspiring, and be written with clarity throughout, with few errors in spelling, grammar, or punctuation. "C" papers must be acceptably reported and plainly written, with a minimum of lapses in the rudiments of basic journalistic technique. "D" papers fail to meet these basic standards, and "F"s require active delinquency.

A note on cell phones and laptops: Cell phones are to be muted, and laptops are to be closed, when you are in class. If you make or receive calls or text-messages during class, you will be asked to leave and will be counted as absent for the day.

Reading List (all books available in the university bookstore)

McKay Jenkins, *What's Gotten Into Us*  
Chris Hedges and Joe Sacco, *Days of Destruction, Days of Revolt*  
Kathleen Dean Moore, ed., *Moral Ground*  
Alexandra Morton, *Listening to Whales*  
David George Haskell, *The Forest Unseen*  
Mary Oliver *New and Selected Poems* (splashed)  
Jonathan Starr, ed. *Tao Te Ching*

Semester Schedule:

Part One: Problems

Week One: Introductions, Toxics

Reading: *What's Gotten Into Us*: Prologue, Chapters One and Two; Mary Oliver, "Winter;" "Lonely, White Fields;" "Some Questions You Might Ask;" "First Snow"

Week Two: Consumption, Water, Lawns

Reading: *What's Gotten Into Us*: Chapters Three, Four, Five; Mary Oliver, "5 a.m. in the Pinewoods;" "Nature;"

Note: Environmental Film Festival, 2/21-23

Week Three: Environmental Racism

Reading: *Days of Destruction*, Chapters One and Two; Mary Oliver, "The Ponds;" "The Summer Day;" "Roses, Late Summer;"

Week Four: Environmental Justice and Photography

Reading: *Days of Destruction*, Chapters Three and Four; Mary Oliver, "Hummingbird Pauses at the Trumpet Vine;" "October;"

Guest Speaker, March 6: Photographer Tristan Spinski

Part Two: Solutions

Week Five: Moral Choices,

Reading: *Moral Ground*, Parts One, Two and Ten; Mary Oliver, "A Certain Sharpness in the Morning Air;" "The Snowshoes Hare;"

- Week Six: Reading the Forested Landscape  
 Reading: *The Forest Unseen*, pp 1-81; Mary Oliver, "Spring Azures;" "When Death Comes;" "Picking Blueberries;" "Goldrenrod"
- Week Seven: Observing and Drawing  
 Reading: *The Forest Unseen*, pp. 81-169; Maary Oliver, "Marengo;" " Field Near Linden, Alamaba;" "Whelks;"  
 Guest Speaker, March 27: Jules Bruck
- Week Eight: Reading the Land  
 Reading: *The Forest Unseen*, pp 169-247; Mary Oliver, "Spring;" "Some Herons;" "Crossing the Swamp;"
- Week Nine: Animal Consciousness  
 Reading: Listening to Whales, pp. 1-96; Mary Oliver, "Her Grave;" "Peonies;" "This Morning Again It Was in the Dusty Pines."
- Week Ten: Animal Communication  
 Reading: Listening to Whales pp. 96-207; Mary Oliver, "Humpbacks;" "Gannets;" "Skunk Cabbage;" "Blossom"  
 Film: "Blackfish"
- Week Eleven: The Perils of Fish Farming  
 Reading: Listening to Whales pp. 207-309; Mary Oliver, "Morning Poem;" "Wild Geese;" "The Sea"
- Week Twelve: Ancient Wisdom and Natural Systems  
 Reading: *The Tao Te Ching*, Verses 1-40; *Moral Ground*, Parts 7 and 13; Mary Oliver, "The Waterfall;" "The Sun;" "One or Two Things"  
 Field Trip: A Journey down the Susquehanna River
- Week Thirteen: Moral Choices, Part Two  
 Reading: *The Tao Te Ching*, Verses 41-81; *Moral Ground*, Parts 12 and 14; May Oliver, "Egrets;"