



# Transcendental, Radical, Wild: American Environmental Literature

AML 2070 section 0211 Fall 2018

Instructor: Jason Crider  
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Office: TUR4341  
Hours: T/Th 10:30-11:30

Tuesday 2-3 (8:30-10:25)  
Anderson 21  
Thursday 3 (9:35-10:25)  
Anderson 19

## Course Description

“From the beginning American writing has concerned itself with the story of people and the natural world. . . ‘Environmental writing’ takes as its subject the collision between people and the rest of the world, and asks searching questions: Is it necessary? What are its effects? Might there be a better way?”

- Bill McKibben

Throughout this course we will examine the roles the environment plays within American literature and vice versa. This course is by no means an extensive overview of all things environmental in American literature, but rather an exploration into some of the ways American writers have written in, through, for, and against their physical, “natural” environments, spanning from early Native American oratories, to transcendental literature, to twenty-first-century climate change fiction, with some pit stops in poetry, film, video games, and beat lit. If we are to take seriously Kenneth Burke’s claim that literature is “equipment for living,” this course asks what might be gained from a sustained look at the strange relationship American writers have with their ecological surroundings. Over the course of this semester, students will examine a wide range of environmental ideologies as we read, discuss, and respond to works that are playful, tragic, hopeful, evil, and strange.

## General Education Objectives

- This course confers General Education credit for either Composition (C) *or* Humanities (H). This course also fulfills 6,000 of the university’s 24,000-word writing requirement (WR).
- *Composition courses* provide instruction in the methods and conventions of standard written English (grammar, punctuation, usage), as well as the techniques that produce effective texts. Composition courses are writing intensive. They require multiple drafts submitted to your instructor for feedback before final submission.
- Course content should include multiple forms of effective writing, different writing styles, approaches and formats, and methods to adapt writing to different audiences, purposes and contexts. Students should learn to organize complex arguments in writing using thesis statements, claims and evidence, and to analyze writing for errors in logic.
- The University *Writing Requirement (WR)* ensures students both maintain their fluency in writing and use writing as a tool to facilitate learning. To receive Writing Requirement

credit, a student must receive a grade of C or higher and a satisfactory completion of the writing component of the course. This means that written assignments must meet minimum word requirements totaling 6000 words.

## General Education Objectives

At the end of this course, students will be expected to have achieved the following learning outcomes in content, communication and critical thinking:

- **Content:** Students demonstrate competence in the terminology, concepts, theories and methodologies used within the academic discipline.
- **Communication:** Students communicate knowledge, ideas and reasoning clearly and effectively in written and oral forms appropriate to the discipline. Students will participate in class discussions throughout the semester to reflect on assigned readings.
- **Critical Thinking:** Students analyze information carefully and logically from multiple perspectives, using discipline-specific methods, and develop reasoned solutions to problems.

## Required Texts

The majority of our course readings will be available for free via Canvas, but you will be required to purchase or otherwise acquire the following:

*Walden; or, Life in the Woods* - Henry David Thoreau  
*Trout Fishing in America* - Richard Brautigan  
*Land of Little Rain* - Mary Hunter Austin  
*The Monkey Wrench Gang* - Edward Abbey  
*Annihilation* - Jeff VanderMeer

## Recommended Texts

*How to Talk about Books You Haven't Read* - Pierre Bayard  
*I'm With the Bears: Short Stories from a Damaged Planet* - ed. By Mark Martin  
*Style: Lessons in Clarity and Grace* - Joseph M. Williams and Joseph Bizup

\*All other assigned readings will be made available via Canvas

## Assignments

1,000 possible points

### Writing in Place - 100 points

"How vain it is to sit down to write when you have not stood up to live! Methinks that the moment my legs begin to move, my thoughts begin to flow..." - Thoreau

This creative assignment asks students to experiment with a narrative style as they explore the relationship between environment and writing. Students will choose a physical location to not only write about, but to use as a tool for rhetorical invention as they interrogate the way their selected environment creates meaning and shapes their writing. This assignment will serve as a backbone for later discussions on writing, invention, environment, and what it means to write about and through place. **750 words**

### Tweeting @ Thoreau - 200 points

Drawing from John Tinnell's article, "Tweeting @ Thoreau," this assignment asks students to put *Walden* into conversation with a contemporary technology, situation, or social problem. The goal of this assignment is to go beyond asking what Thoreau might think or say about a current issue, and instead apply the logics of *Walden* into a new transformative argument. The final draft will take the form of an online article, incorporating image, video, and linked content. **1,000 words**

### **Final Research Paper - 200 points**

The final research paper asks students to take up an issue discussed in our critical and literary texts and present an original argument that engages with a larger critical conversation. Students will select one or two primary texts from the course to examine alongside three to five scholarly texts drawn from the course and found through your own research. **1,750 words**

### **Discussion Posts - 300 points (30 points each)**

In addition to the longer writing assignments, you will also keep a regular blog about various topics discussed in the course. These will vary from analytical reflections on topics covered in the course, to critical examinations of our readings, to formal prospectuses for the major assignments. **3,000 words total (300 words per post)**

### **Author Presentation - 100 points**

Students will give a brief presentation on one featured author from the course in order to introduce and provide some historical context on the reading. Students will also be responsible for leading class discussion on the day of their presentation, and should accompany their talk with a visual aid such as Prezi, Adobe Spark, or, if they must, PowerPoint. **10 minutes.**

### **Participation - 100 points (50 mid-semester, 50 final)**

You must be an active and engaged part of the class to not only receive participation credit, but to ensure that our course will be an academically fruitful experience. This grade will be gauged by not only your attendance, but your contribution to in-class group activities and larger discussions. **To guarantee receipt of a full grade, you must meaningfully contribute at least once per class period.**

### **Grading Scale**

A	4.0	1000-930
A-	3.67	929-900
B+	3.33	899-870
B	3.0	869-830
B-	2.67	829-800
C+	2.33	799-770
C	2.0	769-730
C-	1.67	729-700
D+	1.33	699-670
D	1.0	669-630
D-	0.67	629-600
E	0.0	599-0

## Course Policies

1. *Assignments:* You must complete all assignments to receive credit for this course.
2. *Attendance:* Attendance is mandatory. Students are allowed three unexcused absences. Missing Tuesdays counts as two absences. If you miss more than three classes during the semester, each additional absence will lower your overall grade by 100 points. **If you miss more than five classes, you will fail the course.** Exempt from this policy are only those absences involving university-sponsored events, such as athletics and band, and religious holidays, family emergencies, and health issues for which you must provide appropriate documentation in advance of the absence. In addition, if you are tardy for three class periods, you will receive an unexcused absence.
3. *Email:* As this course is focused on rhetoric and writing, students will be expected to be critical and sensitive writers in all their communication, including email. As such, I will only respond to emails that demonstrate a professional tone and style. This means that your emails must display a subject line, greeting, and writing that is edited, clear, and demonstrates that the student has already consulted all necessary documentation (such as the course syllabus) prior to writing. Furthermore, I will only reply to emails during “normal” business hours: M-F, 9:00-5:00pm. I will not discuss the following over email: grade disputes, feedback on papers, or course policies. **It’s more effective to discuss these matters during my office hours or by appointment.**
4. *Classroom behavior:* Please keep in mind that students come from diverse cultural, economic, and ethnic backgrounds. Many of the texts we will discuss and write about engage controversial topics and opinions. Diversified student backgrounds combined with provocative texts require that you demonstrate respect for ideas that may differ from your own.
5. *Class work:* All written assignments are due at the beginning of class on their assigned deadlines via Canvas. I will not accept hard copies of your work. Late work will be docked ten points for every day it is late until it loses all credit. In-class assignments will consist of group activities and larger classroom discussion. Be prepared for each class by doing the assigned reading and being ready to contribute to class in a meaningful way each day.
6. *Assignment Maintenance:* Keep duplicate copies of all work submitted in this course. Save all returned, graded work until the semester is over.
7. *Plagiarism and Academic Honesty:* Plagiarism of any kind will not be tolerated. Any plagiarized assignment will receive a zero, and may result in your automatically failing my class. Plagiarism also violates the Student Honor Code and requires reporting to the Dean of Students. All students must abide by the Student Honor Code:  
<https://www.dso.ufl.edu/sccr/process/student-conduct-honor-code/>.
8. *Students with disabilities:* If you are requesting accommodations you should first register with the Disability Resource Center (352-392-8565 and at [www.dso.ufl.edu/drc/](http://www.dso.ufl.edu/drc/)), which will provide appropriate documentation to give to your instructor.
9. *Harassment:* UF provides an educational and working environment that is free from sex discrimination and sexual harassment for its students, staff, and faculty. For more about UF policies regarding harassment, see: <http://hr.ufl.edu/manager-resources/recruitment-staffing/institutional-equity-diversity/resources/harassment/>.
10. *Grade Appeals:* In 1000- and 2000- level courses, students may appeal a final grade by filling out a form available from Carla Blount, Program Assistant, in the Department office (4008 TUR). Grade appeals may result in a higher, unchanged, or lower final grade. For more

information on UF Grading policies, see:

<https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/grades.aspx>.

11. *Course Evaluations*: Toward the end of the semester, you will receive email messages asking you to go online and evaluate this course: <https://evaluations.ufl.edu/evals/Default.aspx>.
12. *Mental Health and Wellness*: Students who face difficulties completing the course or who are in need of counseling or urgent help may call the on-campus Counseling and Wellness Center (352) 392-1575, or contact them online: <http://www.counseling.ufl.edu/cwc/Default.aspx>.
13. *UF's Policy on Harassment*: UF provides an educational and working environment that is free from sex discrimination and sexual harassment for its students, staff, and faculty: <http://hr.ufl.edu/manager-resources/recruitment-staffing/institutional-equity-diversity/resources/harassment/>.
14. *Environmental Sustainability*: Whenever possible, I will use paper-sparing electronic media to distribute our course materials. Consider purchasing electronic editions of assigned texts when they are available, or used copies of print texts. If you do not elect to keep your print books, consider sharing them with others after the semester ends (for example, you could donate them to the Alachua County Friends of the Library annual book sale).

## Tentative Course Schedule

### Week 1

8/23 Course Introductions

### Week 2

8/28 "Owl's Lesson"

Bayard, "Encounters with Professors" and "Imposing Your Ideas"

Glotfelty, "Literary Studies in an Age of Environmental Crisis"

8/30 Excerpts from Bartram's *Travels*: <https://docsouth.unc.edu/nc/bartram/bartram.html>

pp. xiii - xxvii

pp. 79-95

pp. 165-189

Author presentation signups

**Discussion post 1 due - On Literature**

### Week 3

9/4 Visit to Special Collections, location TBD

Sivils, "William Bartram's *Travels* and the Rhetoric of Ecological Communities"

9/6 Guest lecturer: Madison Jones

Coleridge, "[Kubla Khan](#)"

**Discussion post 2 due - Bartram**

#### Week 4

9/11 Ralph Waldo Emerson, "[The Transcendentalist](#)" and "[Letter to Martin van Buren](#)"  
Cronon, "[The Trouble with Wilderness](#)"

9/13 Emerson, "[Nature](#)" (excerpts)  
Le Guin, "The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction"  
**Writing in Place assignment due 9/15**

#### Week 5

9/18 Thoreau, *Walden* excerpts: "Economy," and "Where I lived, and What I lived For," "Reading," and "Sounds"

9/20 In class: *Walden, a game*  
"Former Inhabitants; and Winter Visitors," "Winter Animals," "The Pond in Winter,"  
"Spring," and "Conclusion"

**Discussion post 3 due - Walden**

#### Week 6

9/25 Schulz, "[Pond Scum](#)"  
Mark, "[In Defense of Henry David Thoreau](#)" (response to Schulz)  
Purdy, "[In Defense of Thoreau](#)" (response to Schulz)

9/27 Tinnell, "[Tweeting @ Thoreau](#)"  
Critical Reading TBD  
**Discussion post 4 due - Tweeting @ Thoreau Prospectus**

#### Week 7

10/2 Dickinson poems TBD  
In class: Tweeting @ Thoreau workshop

10/4 Parks, "The Swamps of Emily Dickinson"  
Dillard, "Living Like Weasels"  
Dickey, "[The Heaven of Animals](#)"  
Critical reading TBD

#### Week 8

10/9 Whitman, *Leaves of Grass*

10/11 Hughes, "[The South](#)"

Hughes, TBD

Stevens, "[Fabliau of Florida](#)," "[O Florida, Venereal Soil](#)," "[The Idea of Order at Key West](#)," and "[Farewell to Florida](#)"

**Discussion post 5 due - On Poetry**

## Week 9

10/16 Austin, *The Land of Little Rain*

10/18 O'Connor, "A View of the Woods"

Williams and Bizzup reading, TBD

**Tweeting @ Thoreau due**

## Week 10

10/23 Brautigan, *Trout Fishing in America*

10/25 Bruce, "Green(ing) English: Voices Howling in the Wilderness?"

**Discussion post 6 due - Trout Fishing**

## Week 11

10/30 Dillard, "Seeing"

Slovic, "Nature Writing and American Psychology: The Interiority of Outdoor Experience"

11/1 (No class - Homecoming)

**Discussion post 7 due - Flash Ecocriticism**

## Week 12

11/6 Abbey, *The Monkey Wrench Gang*

11/8 Abbey, *The Monkey Wrench Gang*

## Week 13

11/13 Finish *The Monkey Wrench Gang*

Buell, "[Toxic Discourse](#)"

11/15 "Industrial Society and Its Future" excerpts via Canvas

**Discussion post 8 due - Final Paper Prospectus**

## Week 14

11/20 VanderMeer, *Annihilation*

Morton, "Sublime Objects"

11/22 (No class - Thanksgiving)

**Week 15**

11/27 In class: Garland, *Annihilation* (film)

11/29 Finish *Annihilation*

**Discussion post 9 due - Annihilation**

**Week 16**

12/4 (Last day of Class)

**Discussion post 10 due - Course Reflection**

**Final Projects due 12/10 by 11:59pm**

**Final Grades posted 12/17**

“...when it comes to a war between the races, I’m with the bears.”  
- John Muir