

The Environmental Imagination in 19th-Century America

EngL 3090 General Topics, sec. 2 (#88575)
 EngL 5150 Readings in 19C Lit & Culture, sec. 1 (#87419)
 Tu, 6:20 - 8:50 pm
 Lind Hall 207A
 3 credits
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Course Description

This course will explore how what we now call “the environment” was represented and constructed in nineteenth-century American literature and culture. Our primary question throughout will be pragmatic: why and how do these formulations matter today? And our answers will be robust, given that many of the subjects and features of contemporary environmental discourse find their roots in the nineteenth century, including such subjects as population growth, urbanization, and industrialization and such features as romantic aesthetics, scientific realism, and regional variation. We will begin with a brief survey of early American nature writing before turning to an examination of some of the major landmarks in nineteenth-century American environmental writing, including James Fenimore Cooper’s *The Pioneers* (1823), Emerson’s *Nature* (1836), Susan Fenimore Cooper’s *Rural Hours* (1850), Henry David Thoreau’s *Walden* (1854), John Muir’s *The Mountains of California* (1894), and Mary Austin’s *The Land of Little Rain* (1903). We will also read the poetry of Walt Whitman and Emily Dickinson, explore the Hudson River and Rocky Mountain schools of landscape painting, and discuss the relationship between these written and visual representations and the material changes occurring to the environment throughout what Thoreau called “this restless, nervous, bustling, trivial Nineteenth Century.”

Course web site: <https://moodle.umn.edu/>

Class time: 40% lecture, 60% discussion

Work load: 100 pages of reading per week, 20 pages of writing per semester, 2 papers, 2 journal entries, 1 presentation, regular reading responses

Grade: 60% written reports or papers, 15% journal, 10% class participation, 10% reflection papers, 5% in-class presentation

Objectives

What questions will the course help you to answer? How will you grow in knowledge and understanding? What intellectual abilities will the course help you to develop?

By the end of this course, you should be able to:

- recognize, understand, and connect basic facts and concepts involved in the study of nineteenth-century American environmental literature and culture
- collaborate with others to increase your knowledge and understanding of these facts and concepts
- analyze and appreciate how the environmental imagination is shaped by different environments, technologies, and ideologies, as well as by different authors, audiences, and rhetorical choices
- communicate your ideas effectively in writing and in speaking

Texts

What reading materials will help you to pursue the goals of this course?

There are six required textbooks for this course:

1. Michael P. Branch, ed. *Reading the Roots: American Nature Writing before Walden*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2004. ISBN-13: 978-0820325484. \$26.10.
2. James Fenimore Cooper. *The Pioneers*. Intro. Donald A. Ringe. New York: Penguin, 1988. ISBN-13: 978-0140390070. \$14.00. (any edition is fine)
3. Susan Fenimore Cooper. *Rural Hours*. Ed. Rochelle Johnson and Daniel Patterson. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1998. ISBN-13: 978-0820320007. \$24.15. (this edition required)
4. Henry David Thoreau. *Walden, Civil Disobedience, and Other Writings* (Norton Critical Edition). Ed. William Rossi. 3rd ed. New York: Norton, 2008. ISBN-13: 978-0393930900. \$14.20. (this edition required)

5. John Muir. The Mountains of California. Intro. Edward Hoagland. New York: Penguin, 2008. ISBN-13: 978-0143105251. \$13.00. (any edition is fine)
6. Mary Austin. The Land of Little Rain. Intro. Terry Tempest Williams. New York: Penguin, 1997. ISBN-13: 978-0140249194. \$13.00. (any edition is fine)

We will also be reading several other texts, which will be available on our course web site, listed above.

Grades

How will I evaluate the nature, quality, and progress of your learning?

I will award grades in this course according to the University of Minnesota's Uniform Grading Policy:

- A: achievement that is outstanding relative to the level necessary to meet course requirements
- B: achievement that is significantly above the level necessary to meet course requirements
- C: achievement that meets the course requirements in every respect
- D: achievement that is worthy of credit even though it fails to meet fully the course requirements
- F: represents failure and signifies that the work was either:
 - completed but at a level of achievement that is not worthy of credit, or
 - not completed and there was no agreement between the instructor and the student that the student would be awarded an "I" (Incomplete)

I will also award pluses and minuses, with the highest possible grade being an "A."

An "I" (Incomplete) is assigned at the discretion of the instructor when, due to extraordinary circumstances, such as hospitalization, a student is prevented from completing the work of the course on time. An Incomplete requires a written agreement between instructor and student.

Students taking this course using the S/N option must complete all requirements, which will be graded using the A-F system. Students must earn a "C-" or better to receive an "S" (Satisfactory). Students earning a "D+" or worse will receive an "N" (No Credit).

Grades will be assigned in terms of a percentage of possible points according to the following standards:

	B+ >= 87%	C+ >= 77%	D+ >= 67%		
A >= 93%	B >= 83%	C >= 73%	D >= 63%	F < 63%	
A- >= 90%	B- >= 80%	C- >= 70%			

I may choose to grade more generously, but I will not raise my standards above these. If at any time you have concerns about your grade, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Overall, I would say I am a "tough but fair" grader. I expect your work to be outstanding, and the way to get an "A" is to meet those expectations in every respect.

How to Calculate Your Grade

You can calculate your grade at any time by adding up all the points you received on your assignments to date and dividing that number by all the points you could have received on those assignments. (Grades for attendance and participation will not be calculated until the end of the semester.)

Credits and Workload Expectations

This three-credit course will require, for the average University of Minnesota undergraduate student, nine hours of academic work per week, averaged over the term, in order to complete the work of the course. Since the course meets for three hours a week, you should expect to spend an additional six hours a week on coursework outside the classroom. All grades are based on the quality of the work submitted, not on hours of effort.

Student Academic Success Services

University Counseling & Consulting Services (UCCS) offers learning support services, including classes, workshops, individual consultation and counseling, and study skills resources to help you be successful at the University. They have two Twin Cities campus locations: Minneapolis (340 Appleby Hall) and St. Paul (199 Coffey Hall). Phone: 612-624-3323. Web: <http://www.uccs.umn.edu/>

University Policies

What University policies apply to this course so that you will have a safe, productive, and fair environment for learning?

Sexual Harassment

Sexual harassment by or toward a member of the University community is prohibited by Board of Regents policy. Complaints about sexual harassment should be reported to the University's Office of Equal Opportunity and Affirmative Action, 419 Morrill Hall.

Classroom Conduct

All students at the University have the right to a civil, productive, and stimulating learning environment. In turn, instructors have a responsibility to nurture and maintain such an environment. Lively, even heated, discussion is not disruptive behavior. Both instructors and students have a fundamental obligation to respect the rights of each other and an equally fundamental obligation to respect the instructional setting as a place for civil, courteous behavior. Students who disrupt the educational process because of discourteous, threatening, harassing, or other aggressive behavior will be removed from class.

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities

It is University policy to provide, on a flexible and individualized basis, reasonable accommodations to students who have disabilities that may affect their ability to participate in course activities or to meet course requirements. If you have a disability, please contact me and/or Disability Services (180 McNamara Alumni Center, 612-626-1333 TTY/voice) to schedule an appointment with a Specialist. All requests will remain confidential. This syllabus is available in alternative formats upon request.

Student Academic Integrity and Scholastic Dishonesty

Academic integrity is essential to a positive teaching and learning environment. All students enrolled in University courses are expected to complete coursework responsibilities with fairness and honesty. Failure to do so by seeking unfair advantage over others or misrepresenting someone else's work as your own can result in disciplinary action. Any student found guilty of scholastic dishonesty in this course can be assigned a penalty up to and including an "F" or "N" for the course and be reported to the University's Office for Student Academic Integrity. If you have any questions regarding the expectations for a specific assignment or exam, please ask.

Requirements

What will you be doing to pursue the goals of this course?

To succeed in this course, you must complete the following requirements, which are worth a total of 1,000 possible points. For more information on this point system, see the section on grades.

1. Attendance and Participation (100 points)

Learning is social; it occurs in community. As a result, you will need to participate actively in this course on several levels, so that all of us can learn as much as possible from one another.

Because we meet only once a week, more than one unexcused absence will seriously affect your grade in this portion of the course, and a pattern of unexcused absences is cause for a grade of "F" or "N" in the entire course. If you know in advance that you are going to be absent on a particular day, please let me know. You are also responsible for documenting the legitimacy of any absence.

Legitimate reasons for absence include:

- illnesses certified by Boynton Health Service or your family physician
- emergencies caused by a death or serious illness in your immediate family
- participation in intercollegiate athletic events or other group activities sponsored by the University
- subpoenas, jury duty, military service, and religious observances

Our time in class is limited and therefore valuable. For this reason you should:

- arrive on time and stay the entire class period. Students who arrive late or leave early disrupt the flow of class and may miss important information. You should not expect to pass this course if you arrive late or leave early on a regular basis.
- stow your cell phone, iPod, and other electronic devices. In order to learn as much as we can from one another, we must pay attention to one another, and that means no texting, emailing,

or web surfing during class. Your cell phone must be off, away, and out of sight. Because I will post my lecture notes online, you should also not need to take notes on a laptop.

- refrain from eating meals during class. You are welcome to bring a drink or light snack with you to class, but please be considerate of those around you.

In return, I will always begin and end class on time, will place any lecture notes online as soon as possible after the end of class, and will make myself available to answer your questions and discuss your concerns before and after class, whenever possible, in addition to during my office hours.

I will evaluate your class participation using the following scale:

- A: frequent and courteous participation, with mature and thoughtful insights
- B: above average participation and insight
- C: moderate participation and reasonable insight
- D: below average participation with little understanding of the issues
- F: little or no participation

Halfway through the semester, I will ask you to evaluate your own class participation using this scale, as well as identify what can you do to improve. At the end of the semester, I will ask you to evaluate yourself again, as well as indicate what have you done to improve since mid-semester. I will then take this final evaluation into account when assigning grades in this portion of the course.

To receive the full 100 points for attendance and participation, therefore, you should read the assigned texts carefully, attend the class meetings conscientiously, and participate actively in class discussions, small-group work, and other in-class assignments.

2. Critical Essays (600 points)

To encourage you to think deeply and communicate effectively about the subject of this course, at two points during the semester I will ask you to submit a critical essay discussing one or more of our main course texts. Your first paper should be 4-5 pages long (graduate students: 6-8 pages) and will be worth 200 points; your second paper should be 8-10 pages long (graduate students: 16-20 pages) and will be worth 400 points. Specific assignments will be given out in class.

Due dates and late papers: Papers are due at the beginning of class on the dates indicated on the schedule. Late papers will have their grades reduced by ten percent for every week they are late. Note that I cannot accept "computer problems" as an excuse for late papers. Please back-up your files and avoid waiting until the last minute to print your papers.

Submissions: Papers may not be submitted by email. You must bring a hard copy of your paper to class with you. I do, however, encourage you to print your papers on the reverse sides of previously used, recycled paper. Please keep a copy of each paper you write in case your original is somehow lost or destroyed.

Format: All papers must be typed, proofread, and spellchecked. The text should be double-spaced with one-inch margins and formatted in a standard-size font. Your pages should be numbered in the upper right-hand corner and stapled in the upper left-hand corner. Your name, the course number, my name, and the date should appear at the top left of the first page, and your title should be centered on the next line. (Try to use a title that explains your argument instead of simply stating or alluding to your subject.) Do not include a separate title page.

Documenting sources: If you quote from or refer to one or more of our course texts, lectures, or other outside readings in a paper, please cite them appropriately:

Within the body of your paper: Please indicate (a) the name of the author you are citing, (b) the title of the article or book the citation appears in, and (c) the page number on which it can be found. If you quote from or refer to a lecture from this course, simply place the word "lecture" in parentheses, followed by the date of the lecture, like so: (lecture, 1/26/10). Also, please do not drop quotations into your papers without providing context for them through the use of signal phrases. Here is an example of a quotation introduced by a signal phrase and cited with a parenthetical page reference (notice that the period goes after the parentheses):

According to Roderick Nash in *Wilderness and the American Mind*, "the first immigrants approached North America with a cluster of preconceived ideas about wilderness" (8).

In a bibliography: You do not need to include a bibliography unless you are citing a source other than the texts used in this course. If you cite outside sources, use the citation style with which you are most familiar (MLA, APA, or Chicago). Please do not mix styles or create your own citation method. To cite a web page in your bibliography, simply give enough information that I can (a) locate it, and (b) evaluate its quality. If you are citing a single web page, give its author and/or title (if available), the web address, and the date you accessed it. If you are citing an article that is part of a database, and the address is quite long, you need only provide the short form of the address (for example, <<http://www.cnn.com/>>).

Grading criteria: I will grade your papers according to the following criteria:

1. Content: Did you follow the assignment instructions? Have you read and understood the course material? Is your analysis insightful?
2. Coherence and clarity: Is your paper focused and well organized? Do you clearly state your purpose, explain how you will fulfill that purpose, and devote your paper to doing so? Do you support your claims with evidence and address opposing arguments?
3. Format, proof-reading, and documentation: Did you follow the formatting guidelines? Is your paper free of errors in grammar, punctuation, and spelling? Do you credit the source of borrowed ideas and statements appropriately?

The Center for Writing: The Center for Writing offers free writing instruction for all University of Minnesota students—graduate and undergraduate—at all stages of the writing process. Consulting is available by appointment online and in Nicholson Hall, and on a walk-in basis in Appleby Hall. For more information, go to <<http://writing.umn.edu/sws>> or call 612-625-1893.

3. Place Journals (150 points): Because the richest understanding of literature comes not only through critical analysis but also through creative writing (recognizing, of course, that criticism is also a creative activity), I would also like you to write two entries in a place journal: one in winter and one in spring. Writing these will help you better appreciate the craft of writing and help you learn to read like a writer.

Each journal entry should be 2-3 pages long (graduate students: 3-5 pages) and will be worth 75 points. Each entry should have the same descriptive title—such as “Place: Mississippi River Flats”—so I can quickly identify the location about which you are writing. Your entries may also be accompanied by drawings, photos, and/or videos if you wish. Journal entries are due at the beginning of class on the dates indicated on the schedule. Late entries will have their grades reduced by ten percent for every week they are late.

Each journal entry should record your thoughts and observations about a particular piece of land. The place may be located anywhere you wish, but it must be safe enough and accessible enough so that you can visit it twice during the semester for 15-30 minutes each time. This place should also consist primarily of the natural environment, not the built environment, since the goal of this assignment is to get you to sharpen your perception of the nonhuman world. (We will talk at length about the nature-culture relationship.)

Here are some prompts to help you craft your journal entries:

- Describe: Describe your place, using all five of your senses. What do you see, hear, smell, touch, and taste? Consider such aspects as location (where are you?), time (time of day, time of year), geology (rocks, soil, slope, erosion), water (its presence or absence), weather (temperature, humidity, wind, precipitation), vegetation (kind of plants, their stages of growth), other creatures (humans and nonhumans) and their impacts. How do the ideas we have been discussing in class affect your perception of this place?
- Imagine: Imagine your place from the perspective of a nineteenth-century visitor or inhabitant (native or non-native). How might his or her perception of this place differ from your own? How do such factors as your race, ethnicity, class, gender, and age affect your perception of this place? What role does your historical moment play? What role do other factors—such as your environmental ethic, aesthetic preference, access to technology, economic system, political persuasion, and religious orientation—play? Ground your response to these questions in the observation of particular aspects of your place.
- Focus: Focus your attention on one specific plant or animal in your place. Describe its behavior and/or appearance in detail and discuss your reactions to it. Compare your observations to those of a printed or online field guide, such as those available at enature.com (be sure to include the web address or title of the field guide you use). What does a scientific description capture that your more subjective description does not, and vice-versa? If you noticed this plant or animal

before, has it changed since you last saw it? If so, how and why? How do you think some of the writers we are reading would respond to this plant or animal?

- **Reflect:** Reflect on how you and your place have changed since you saw it last. What have you learned about the interaction of people and the land through time in this place? Consider the limits of human observation: what have you been unable to learn about this place simply by observing it? What would you have to do to learn more about it? What may you never know? Why? What relationship does this place have to the Twin Cities and beyond?

The best place journals obviously don't try to answer all of the above questions in order, since doing so could lead to very fragmented entries. Instead, they use these questions as prompts to create a thoughtful record of observations of a particular place, and they cite or quote from the readings where appropriate.

I will grade your journal entries according to the following scale:

- A: original, purposeful, clear, coherent, skillful, error-free (or almost)
- B: thoughtful, inspired, and complete, but with some stylistic weaknesses
- C: sufficient but somewhat unimaginative, with notable stylistic and mechanical errors
- D-F: unoriginal, incomplete, unclear, incoherent, poorly written, with numerous errors

4. Reading Responses (100 points): Another important part of this course is the series of reading responses you will write over the course of the term. These responses will allow you share your written thoughts about our course texts with other students in the class, and they could also help you to develop your own writing projects.

Each response should be approximately 300 words long (the equivalent of a printed page) and should be a thoughtful, considered reaction to one or more of the texts we are reading for that week. Your reading responses should be based primarily on your own attention to and engagement with the texts, but I also encourage you to engage the responses of other students by posting follow-up responses.

Reading responses should be submitted to the "Discussion Forum" section of our Moodle site by 9 a.m. on the days indicated. Late and missing responses will receive no credit, so plan your reading accordingly. At the end of the semester, I will grade your responses according to the following scale:

- A: frequent and courteous participation, with mature and thoughtful insights
- B: above average participation and insight
- C: moderate participation and reasonable insight

5. Leading Discussion (50 points): For one class meeting, I would like you to work with another student to lead class discussion of the text(s) assigned for that day. You may approach this assignment in any way you wish, but you will be expected to provide a 10-15-minute introduction and to direct our conversation in the ways you find most appropriate. This assignment will help you get to know another student in the class, learn how to collaborate effectively, and practice your public speaking skills. You may approach this assignment in any way you wish (be creative!), but you must prepare a written document for use on the day of your presentation. This will take the place of your normal reading response. Your document may be a handout or short PowerPoint presentation, and it may consist of a discussion guide, a series of questions, or additional information about the day's reading. (If you prepare a handout, make sure you leave enough time to visit one of the Copy Centers on campus before class.) You and your partner should consult with me ahead of time for suggestions about how to prepare your presentation. Your presentation will count for 50 points, which will be awarded on a pass-fail basis.

Contact Me

How can you contact me to help you learn?

The best way to contact me is immediately after class; I would be happy to meet with you briefly to answer a question or elaborate on a point made in class. To contact me at other times, feel free to call me at my office, send me email, or stop by during my office hours. If my office hours are inconvenient for you, please let me know, and we can arrange to meet at another time. Even if you do not have a specific question, I encourage you to stop by my office at some point during the semester, so that I can get to know you better as a person and so that we can talk in more detail about the subjects that interest you. The main reason I am here is to help you learn and grow, so please take advantage of this opportunity and come see me. **My contact information appears at the top of this syllabus.**

Course Schedule

How is this course structured to develop your knowledge, understanding, and abilities throughout the semester?

This schedule is subject to change, so if you miss a class you should check with a classmate for the most current information. Lecture notes, handouts, and additional readings will be available on our web site.

1. Imagining Early Encounters: Ecocriticism and Early American Nature Writing

- 1/19 **Welcome; Introduction to Ecocriticism; How to Read**
Optional readings: Anne Milne, "Ecocriticism"; David Orr, "What is Education For?" (online)
- 1/26 **Reading the Roots, Introduction, Parts I and II**
I: Columbus, Cabeza de Vaca, Smith, Wood, Bradstreet, Josselyn, Hennepin
II: Knight, Edwards, Catesby, Pinckney, Kalm, Crèvecoeur, Jefferson, Bartram, Peale
Reading Response Due
Discussion Leaders:

2. Narrating Nature's Nation: James Fenimore Cooper

- 2/2 **The Pioneers, Introduction, chapters 1-20**
Reading Response Due
Discussion Leaders:
- 2/9 **The Pioneers, chapters 21-41**
Reading Response Due
Discussion Leaders:

3. Transcending the Material: Ralph Waldo Emerson and the Hudson River School

- 2/16 **Emerson, Nature (online); plus Reading the Roots, Part III**
III: Emerson, Cole, Hooper, Hawthorne, Bryant, Fuller
PLACE JOURNAL #1 DUE (WINTER)

4. Facing Facts: Susan Fenimore Cooper

- 2/23 **Rural Hours, Introduction, plus Spring and Summer**
Reading Response Due
Discussion Leaders:
- 3/2 **Rural Hours, Autumn and Winter**
Reading Response Due
Discussion Leaders:
In class: Mid-semester evaluations

5. Exploring, Touring, and Representing the West

- 3/9 **Reading the Roots, Part III**
III: Lewis and Clark, Wilson, Bayley, Royall, Audubon, Irving, Schoolcrafts, Catlin, Copway
PAPER #1 DUE
- 3/16 **SPRING BREAK (no class)**

6. Promoting the Pastoral: Henry David Thoreau

- 3/23 **Walden, "Economy" to "The Bean-Field"**
Reading Response Due
Discussion Leaders:

3/30 **Walden, "The Village" to "Conclusion"**

Reading Response Due

Discussion Leaders:

4/6 **"Walking," "Wild Apples," and the Journal, plus selected criticism**

Reading Response Due

Discussion Leaders:

7. Loving Nature, Facing Death: Whitman, Dickinson, and the Civil War

4/13 **Walt Whitman and Emily Dickinson, selected poetry and prose (online)**

PLACE JOURNAL #2 DUE (SPRING)

8. Preserving the West: John Muir and Mary Austin

4/20 **John Muir, The Mountains of California**

Reading Response Due

Discussion Leaders:

4/27 **Mary Austin, The Land of Little Rain**

Reading Response Due

Discussion Leaders:

5/4 **Last class**

In class: Course evaluations

PAPER #2 DUE (no late papers)