

English 389R: Special Topic: Nature Writing
Spring 2004
Dr. Christine Loflin

Course Description: What is our relationship to the natural world? Is our relationship biological only, or also spiritual, emotional, social and psychological? What do we *see* when we look at nature? In this course, we will read a selection of (primarily American) essays on nature and the environment. We will be reading works from the early colonial period, from the American Romantics, and from 20th and 21st century writers who explore issues of ecology, development, cultural practices, religion, pollution, “greenscapes” and other contemporary issues in relation to the environment. While reading these authors, we will be analyzing their worldview as represented in the texts, their rhetoric, and their appeals to the reader: how do these authors attempt to persuade the reader to share their perspectives? You will also be asked to do some writing about the natural world in your own voice.

Course requirements:

1. Short responses to readings.
2. Two essays analyzing the rhetoric of selected authors.
3. A research paper analyzing a variety of responses to a particular landscape
4. A journal of your own work, both notes in response to readings and your own writing about a natural space. You will be required to choose a natural area and visit it several times over the course of the semester, recording your observations and responses to the landscape. You will also be asked to write short pieces using the style of writers we will read.

Texts:

The Norton Anthology of Nature Writing
Ecology of a Cracker Childhood

In addition to these texts, you will be expected to learn how to identify the local flora and fauna near Oxford College and to understand the underlying geology of the Piedmont region.

Tentative Syllabus

Introduction to the course

The Local Environment 1: What do we know? What don't we know? We will meet with Ms. Theodosia Wade at the Ox House to learn about the basic environment in the Oxford area. Assignments: before and after quizzes on the environment; journal entries identifying species.

The History of Nature Writing in America:

Selections from Bartram, Emerson, Thoreau, Jewett and other early voices.

Assignments: journal entries identifying author's themes, worldview and means of persuasion; one essay in the voice of one of these writers.

The Local Environment 2: Get Out There. Each student will take a trip to the Appalachian trail, Hazelbrand Farm, or Arabia mountain. The geology and ecology of the area will be identified, and students will discuss the social interpretations of and interactions with landscapes: what gets preserved? What are our reasons for preservation? How has the management of natural areas changed in recent times?

Assignments: An analysis of the landscape and an analysis of how current ideas about "wilderness" are different from Emerson or Thoreau's views.

History continued:

20th century writers.

Assignment: A response to the reading: what new ideas are being used to interpret the environment? How are these ideas changing social practices? OR: What specific strategies are writers using to stave off despair and disaffection in their readers?

Georgia

Ecology of a Cracker Childhood and selections from other writers. How has this environment been written about? How has Georgia's environment changed over time?

Oxford College and Newton County

We will do some research in Emory's special collections to find descriptions of the College and the surrounding environment from Emory's past. We will also study current Oxford and Emory statements about the use of the local environment, ecological and environmental concerns. We will coordinate with environmental science classes' projects to read what students conclude about the college environment: what is the "load" we place on local resources? What kinds of pollution do we produce? How do our buildings, parking lots and public spaces impact the environment? What environmental issues are concerns in the local community? Also, we will read the proposals of the "Smart Growth" committee in Newton County, as well as reports on the rapid development of metro Atlanta.