

Environmental Studies 215
Nature's Meanings: The American Experience—Spring 2012

Prof. Kathryn Morse, x2436
Franklin Environmental Center at Hillcrest, Room 119
Starr-Axinn Center, Room 240

kmorse@middlebury.edu

<http://community.middlebury.edu/~kmorse>

Office Hours, Spring 2012

Tues 3:30-4, Axinn 240/Wed 1-1:30, Hillcrest 119/Thurs 3-4 Axinn 240

and by appointment (please email)

Course Meeting Times:

Lecture: Mon/Fri 11:15-12:05 The Orchard, Hillcrest 103

Wed. Disc. X: 1:45-2:35, ATD 102 (Atwater Sem Rm)

Wed. Disc. Y: 2:50-3:40, ATD 102 (Atwater Sem Rm)

Thurs Disc Z: 1:55-2:45, LIB 140 (Davis Library Lower Level)

Description & Goals:

Nature's Meanings is a core course in the Environmental Studies major. It is designed to introduce Environmental Studies majors and minors to the study of the human relationship to nature in American culture through the humanities. In doing so, it complements the three other core courses required of E.S. majors, which introduce students to that study through the social sciences (E.S. 211) and the natural sciences (E.S. 112), as well as spatial analysis (GEOG 320). Nature's Meanings is centered on close analysis of primary sources and scholarly works which presents diverse ideas about nature in American culture over time. It is an interdisciplinary course, which attempts to integrate history, religion, philosophy, and literature. Students are expected to engage and develop their critical reading, thinking, listening, discussion, oral presentation, and writing skills through class readings, lectures, discussions, examinations, and papers.

Required work in ENVS 215:

Students must complete all required written work (2 papers and 2 exams) in order to pass the course. All required work is detailed below:

1) Assigned readings, as detailed in this syllabus. **These are subject to change. Listen for announcements in class.** Readings are listed for both "lecture" classes (Mondays and Fridays) AND "discussion sections" (Wednesdays and Thursdays). In Wed/Thurs discussion sections, with smaller groups of 15-20, we will have in-depth discussions of the readings assigned for those days, and I will expect participation from everyone. Mondays and Fridays will be different. We cannot have the same sort of discussion in a lecture hall with 45 students. Not everyone will be able to comment on the readings assigned for Mondays and Fridays. However,

I will ask for your thoughts and reactions on Mondays and Fridays, and may call on various students each class to contribute thoughts.

- 2) Active and engaged participation in discussion sections on Wednesdays/Thursdays.
- 3) Two short (5 pp.) essays on assigned topics, with details to be handed out ahead of time. Due March 2 and April 27, by 5 pm both days, by email to kmorse@middlebury.edu.
- 4) One in-class, 50-minute written exam (closed book) on March 16; and one three-hour final exam (closed book) scheduled for May 18.
- 5) One optional film, Into the Wild, with a group screening the last week of classes, Tues. May 8, 7:30 pm, MBH 220. You may also watch the film on your own; it will be on reserve at Davis Library.

Books and Other Readings: I have ordered 8 books (though each student reads only 6). They are all available at the College Bookstore (and through on-line booksellers). Four of the books will be divided up: half of each discussion section will read Epitaph for a Peach and half will read Under the Feet of Jesus. Similarly, half will read Into the Wild and half will read Mississippi Solo. You are welcome to read both books in each pair, but of course are not required to do so. We'll decide early in the semester who will read each one. All 8 books will also be on 2-hour reserve at the Davis Library. **Additional readings will be found either on the web or in the Share Folder in our course classes folder.**

Bill McKibben, ed., American Earth: Environmental Writing Since Thoreau (2008)
Susan Schrepfer, Nature's Altars: Mountains, Gender, and American Environmentalism (2005)
David Mas Masumoto, Epitaph for a Peach: Four Seasons on my Family Farm (1996)
Helena Maria Villamontes, Under the Feet of Jesus (1996)
Joni Adamson, American Indian Literature, Environmental Justice, and Ecocriticism: The Middle Place (2001)
Elizabeth Blum, Love Canal Revisited: Race, Class, and Gender in Environmental Activism (2008)
Jon Krakauer, Into the Wild (1996)
Eddy Harris, Mississippi Solo (1998)

Class Policies:

- 1) **Honor Code:** The honor code is in effect for all work in this class, and should be stated and signed on all formal written work (papers and exams).
- 2) **Grades:** As the semester progresses, I will provide handouts and further information on specific criteria for grading on specific assignments. Final grades will be determined by the

following percentages, though there is always room for adjustment based on extenuating circumstances: Attendance and active engagement in discussion: 15%; first paper: 20%; first exam: 15%; second paper: 25%; final exam: 25%.

3) Late Papers and Extensions:

Each student may take two (2) “extension days” during this semester in this class to use or spend to extend paper deadlines without penalty. As a result a student may turn in one paper two days late without penalty, or both papers 1 day late each, to make a total of two “late days.” However, the student is responsible for NOTIFYING the professor when turning the paper in that their free “extension days” are in effect. A day is considered 24 hours, and Friday-Monday will count as one (1) 24-hour period. The half-day addition: Students may consider a 12-hour extension a one-half (1/2) day extension.

Earning more extension days: Students may earn and bank additional extension days by attending approved events related in some way to the environment. These include Thursday ES Colloquia (every Thurs, 12:30, Hillcrest 103), and other events specified in the syllabus. In order to earn an additional extension day, a student must attend the event and email me a one-paragraph (7-10 sentence) reaction, linking the event to some broader theme of human/environment interactions (i.e. don’t just summarize the event).

Semester-long opportunity to earn an extension day (through Apr. 22). Middlebury College Museum of Art Exhibition, **“Environment and Object - Recent African Art,”** January 27-Sunday, April 22.

Organized by Skidmore art historian Lisa Aronson and John Weber, Director of the Tang Museum at Skidmore, the exhibition features a number of dramatically edgy, provocative works by contemporary African artists living abroad as well as in Nigeria, South Africa, Egypt, Cameroon, Congo, and other African nations. The degradation of the environment and the exploitation of natural resources are underlying themes of all of the works on view. Many of them exploit the use of found objects -- oil cans, plastic bags, bottle caps, even rifles. The curators will be speaking publicly about the exhibition on Thursday, FEB 16, at 4:30 p.m. in Room 221 of the MCA.

Beyond those allowed “extension days” any paper turned in after the deadline will be penalized two points (i.e. grade of 80 to grade of 78) for every 24 hours late. Friday at 5 to Monday at 5 will count as one (1) 24-hour period. A paper due Wed. at 5 turned in by Monday at 5 will be three days late and penalized 6 points.

4) Technology in the classroom. Please turn off all cellphones and other personal electronic devices during ALL CLASSES. Although it is now common practice for students to bring and use laptops in class, I ask that you limit laptop use to lecture classes (Mondays and Fridays). If our readings for any given week are in electronic form, and you simply cannot print them out,

then laptop use makes sense. However, when we are discussing books or other printed readings, please do not use laptops in discussion sections on Wednesdays and Thursdays.

5) **Classroom behavior.** I expect students to treat each other (and me) with courtesy and respect. Although the classroom is open to vigorous and thoughtful debate, and to disagreement on topics under discussion, we all must work to critique each other's ideas, and not each other as fellow students and scholars. If at any time you feel limited by me or others in your ability to express your ideas openly, please let me know in person or by email.

6) **Disruptive classroom exits:** Finally, unless you are experiencing a physical or emotional emergency, please do not leave the classroom during our 50 minute classes once we have begun class. If you need to leave a specific class early, please let me know at the beginning of class, and sit near the door so as to minimize the disruption caused by your departure.

7) **Accessibility, Accommodations, Abilities:**

We all have varying abilities; we all carry various strengths and weaknesses. Some of these might even be "documented" with a place like the ADA Office. If so, please just let me know. With or without documentation, it is my intent to make our learning experience as accessible as possible. With documentation, I am especially interested in providing any student accommodations that have probably been best determined by the student and the ADA Coordinator (Jodi Litchfield) in advance. Please let me know NOW what we can do to maximize *your* learning potential, participation, and general access in this course. I am available to meet with you in person or to discuss such things on email.

The ADA Office is located at Meeker House 003. [46 Porter Field Road]

Jodi Litchfield, coordinator: 802.443.5936; litchfie@middlebury.edu

<http://www.middlebury.edu/studentlife/doc/ada/about>

8) **Intercollegiate Athletics and Other Activities:** If you are a member of a team or engaged in other campus activities, you may, at various times during the semester, have athletic or other events scheduled during our class times. Although **no activity can require** that you miss class or other academic events, you may need to choose which activity (class or non-class) you would prefer to attend. Those choices are entirely your own, and I will respect them as valid choices. However, be aware that according to college policy such absences are explained rather than excused. It is **your responsibility** to inform me of your schedule, what work you will miss, and how and when you intend to make up that work. I do not regularly check sports schedules or know team departure times, so it is your job to present me with that information, well in advance of the absence itself.

Week 1:

Mon Feb 13: Introductions

Wed/Thurs Feb 15: Discussion:

From The Believer magazine (weblink below): Jenny Price, "Thirteen Ways of Seeing Nature in L.A." (2006) in two parts at:

http://www.believermag.com/issues/200604/?read=article_price

http://www.believermag.com/issues/200605/?read=article_price

OR in the classes server in our Share Folder (must be registered for class and logged in to access).

Thurs. Feb. 16th: Extension day opportunity: The curators of the Museum of Art Exhibit, "Environment and Object: Recent African Art," will be speaking publicly about the exhibition at 4:30 p.m. in Room 221 of the MCA.

Fri Feb 17: Everything up to the mid-18th century:

Read: Jonathan Edwards, "The 'Spider' Letter," (1723); in share folder on classes server.

Week 2:

Mon Feb 20: From Edwards to Emerson

Read: Jonathan Edwards, excerpts from "Images and Shadows of Divine Things," (various dates, mid-18th century); in Share Folder.

Wed/Thurs Feb 22: Reading: Ralph Waldo Emerson, Nature (1836), first six sections

("Introduction," through "Discipline"), online at: <http://www.emersoncentral.com/nature.htm>

Fri Feb 24: Winter Carnival: No Class

Week 3: Emerson and Thoreau

Mon Feb 27: Reading: Finish Emerson, Nature (1836), last three sections, online at:

<http://www.emersoncentral.com/nature.htm>

Tues Feb. 28: Earn an extension day (and learn a lot in the process): Special Event: 7 pm, McCullough Social Space: Annual E.S. Margolin Lecture: **Jerome Nriagu, Univ. of Michigan School of Public Health: "With or Without the Science: The Case for Environmental Justice."**

Wed/Thurs Feb 29: Reading: In McKibben, American Earth: Henry David Thoreau, all excerpts, pp. 1-36: Read Thoreau, "Slavery in Massachusetts," 1854, at:

<http://thoreau.eserver.org/slavery.html> and "Succession of Forest Trees," 1860 address at:

<http://thoreau.eserver.org/foresttrees.html>

Fri Mar 2: From Thoreau to Muir and Darwin
By 5 pm, due by email: Essay #1 (5 pp.); details TBA.

Week 4:

Mon Mar 5: Introducing John Muir

Wed/Thurs Mar 7-8: In McKibben, American Earth, all John Muir selections, pp. 84-112; and W.E.B. DuBois, selections from Darkwater (1920)—share folder. “Of Beauty and Death;” Charlotte Grimke, selections--share folder.

Fri Mar 9: Context for Darwin and Marsh

Read: Charles Darwin, excerpts from On the Origin of Species (1859), in share folder on classes server; and in McKibben, George Perkins Marsh, Man and Nature, pp. 71-80.

Friday Mar 9 Lunchtime Event: Environmental writer/novelist Rick Bass reading in Hillcrest 103, 12:30. Earn an extra extension day!

Week 5:

Mon Mar 12: Gender and American Nature

Read Susan Schrepfer, Nature’s Altars, Introduction and Part One.

Wed/Thurs Mar 14-15: In McKibben, pp. 348-355, William O. Douglas, from My Wilderness (1960); In McKibben, 531-549, Annie Dillard, excerpt from Pilgrim at Tinker Creek (1974).

Fri Mar 16: In class Mid-Term exam, closed book. Details TBA.

Week 6:

Mon Mar 19: Aldo Leopold, His Life and Times

Wed/Thurs Mar 21-22: Reading: In McKibben, Aldo Leopold, Sand County Almanac, pp. 266-294; Sharman Apt Russell, “Gila Wilderness,” (1991)—share folder.

Fri Mar 23: Leopold through time

Lauret Savoy, “Alien Land Ethic,” unpublished manuscript, in share folder.

_____ Spring Break _____

Week 7:

Mon April 2: American Agrarianism: A Short History

Wed/Thurs April 4-5: Split reading #1: Half of each discussion section reads David Mas Masumoto, Epitaph for a Peach: Four Seasons on my Family Farm; half reads Helena Maria Viramontes, Under the Feet of Jesus

Fri April 6: Farming, Race, and Nature, continued....

Week 8:

Mon April 9: Turning to Wendell Berry.

Read: In McKibben, Wendell Berry, “Manifesto: The Mad Farmer Liberation Front,” 505-506.

Wed/Thurs April 11: In McKibben, American Earth, rest of Wendell Berry selections; pp. 507-530; In McKibben, American Earth, pp. 595-608, Wes Jackson, “Outside the Solar Village: One Utopian Farm,” from New Roots for Agriculture (1980).

Fri April 13: Into the Garden

Read: Michael Pollan, “The Garden Ethic,” from Second Nature (1995); in share folder

Week 9:

Mon April 16: Americans on the Road

Read: In McKibben, pp. 413-433: Edward Abbey, “Polemic: Industrial Tourism and the National Parks;” and Susan Sessions Rugh, “Vacations Without Humiliation,” chapter from Are We There Yet? The Golden Age of American Family Vacations (2008)—in share folder.

Wed/Thurs April 18: Read: Joni Adamson, American Indian Literature, Environmental Justice, and Ecocriticism, Introduction and Chapters 1-2; and In McKibben, pp. 582-89, Leslie Marmon Silko, selection from Ceremony (1977).

Fri April 20: Spring Symposium: No Class

Week 10:

Mon April 23: Environment and Inequality, continued

Read: Joni Adamson, American Indian Literature, Environmental Justice, and Ecocriticism chapters 3, 7, and conclusion.

Wed/Thurs April 25: : Read: In McKibben, pp. 295-311, Berton Roueche, “The Fog” (1950); In McKibben, pp. 365-376, Rachel Carson, from Silent Spring (1962); pp. 725-736, Robert D. Bullard, from Dumping in Dixie (1990);

Friday April 27: Toxic Landscapes:
Second short essay: Details TBA—5 pp. paper—due by email by 5 pm.

Week 11:

Mon April 30: Stories of Crisis: 1970s:

Read: In McKibben pp. 609-21, Lois Gibbs, “Love Canal: My Story;” Elizabeth Blum, Love Canal Revisited: Race, Class, and Gender in Environmental Activism, Introduction, chapters 1 & 2.

Wed/Thurs May 2: Read: Elizabeth Blum, Love Canal Revisited: Race, Class, and Gender in Environmental Activism, chapters 3-end.

Fri May 4: Bruce Braun, “‘On the Raggedy Edge of Risk’: Articulations of Race and Nature After Biology,” in Donald S. Moore, Jake Kosek, and Anand Pandian, eds., Race, Nature, and the Politics of Difference (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 175-203—in share folder.

Week 12:

Mon May 7: Into the Wild?

Read: Evelyn White, “Black Women and Wilderness,” (1995)—in share folder; Schrepfer, Nature’s Altars, Part Two (skim for major points).

Tues. May 8: Class screening (optional) of Into the Wild (2008), 7:30, MBH 220.

Wed/Thurs May 9: Read (as previously divided): EITHER Jon Krakauer, Into the Wild or Eddy Harris, Mississippi Solo.

Fri May 11: Further Debate and
Conclusions

Week 13: Mon May 14 (Friday schedule): Review and final thoughts.

Final Exam: Friday May 18, 7-10 pm, Place TBA.