

## ENVS 215: Nature's Meanings: American Experiences: Fall 2014

Prof. Kathryn Morse/History & Environmental Studies/Office: Starr-Axinn 240

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KM Office Hours, Fall 2014: Mondays, 1:30-4; Fridays, 1:30-4, (except Fridays: 9/12, 10/10, 11/7), & by appointment (email or ask after class).

### Course Meeting Times:

Lecture: Mon/Fri 10:10-11:00 The Orchard, Hillcrest 103

Wed. Disc. X: 1:45-2:35, FIC FR2 (Freeman)

Wed. Disc. Y: 2:50-3:40, FIC FR 2 (Freeman)

Thurs Disc Z: 1:55-2:45, FIC FR2 (Freeman)

### 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 (ENVS 211) and the natural sciences (ENVS 112), as well as spatial analysis (GEOG 120). Nature's Meanings is centered on close analysis of primary sources and scholarly works which presents diverse ideas and stories about nature (however defined) in diverse American cultures over time. It is an interdisciplinary course to some degree, in that it attempts to integrate history, religion, philosophy, and literature, with more coverage in this version for history and literature. Students are expected to engage and develop their critical reading, thinking, listening, discussion, 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 12-14, 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 room with 40+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) Attendance:** Attendance at all classes is required, but **discussion section** attendance (on Wed/Thurs), in particular, will be recorded and counted as 10% of the final grade. Students may miss **one discussion section** during the semester, for any reason, without any penalty. **However, if you are experiencing a personal or medical emergency which leads you to miss class, please do notify all of your professors as well as your dean. The faster you inform relevant faculty and staff of the situation, the better we can work together to address missed work and other academic issues.** As per college policy, absence for athletic commitments are explained rather than excused absences (see further policy details below). Again, all students may take one unexcused absence from discussion section without penalty.

3) Active and engaged participation in discussion sections on Wednesdays/Thursdays.

4) Two essays on assigned topics, with details to be handed out ahead of time, due in Weeks 4 (due Friday Oct 3), and Week 14 (Friday of exam week, December 12), emailed by 8 pm both days to [kmorse@middlebury.edu](mailto:kmorse@middlebury.edu). For the second essay, there will be a few brief assignments, starting in Week 8 (Oct 31) to narrow your topic and develop your key themes for the paper.

5) Two in-class, 50-minute written exams (closed book) in Weeks 7 and 11 (in class Oct. 20 and Nov. 21).

**Books and Other Readings:** I have ordered 6 books, but each student reads only 5 of those. They are all available at the College Bookstore (and through on-line booksellers). Two of the books will be divided up: half of each discussion section will read Masumoto, Epitaph for a Peach and half will read Viramontes, Under the Feet of Jesus. 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 ordered books, and some others, will also be on 1-day reserve at the Davis Library. **Additional readings (many of them) will be found either on the web or in the Share Folder in our course classes folder.**

Susan Schrepfer, Nature's Altars: Mountains, Gender, and American Environmentalism (2005)

Aldo Leopold, A Sand County Almanac and Sketches Here and There (1949)

David Mas Masumoto, Epitaph for a Peach: Four Seasons on my Family Farm (1996)

Helena Maria Viramontes, Under the Feet of Jesus (1996)

Joni Adamson, American Indian Literature, Environmental Justice, and Ecocriticism: The Middle Place (2001)

Joe Moallem, Wild Ones: A Sometimes Dismaying, Weirdly Reassuring Story About Looking at People Looking at Animals in America (2014)—**not yet in bookstore (but easily bought online and elsewhere).**

Course 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). As best practices for honor code

encourage the professor to create contexts and conditions which provide the best possible environment for honoring the code, I do ask students, during in class, closed book tests, to place all backpacks, notebooks, smart phones, tablets, computers, and other possessions at the front or side of the room during tests (unless ADA compliance practices are in effect).

2) **Grades:** As the semester progresses, I will provide handouts and further information on specific criteria for evaluation on specific assignments. Final grades will be determined mostly by the following percentages, though there is always room for adjustment based on extenuating circumstances: Attendance and active engagement in discussion: 20%; first paper: 20%; first exam: 20%; second exam: 20%; final paper: 20%.

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 codicil: Students may consider a 12-hour extension a one-half (1/2) day extension. Papers turned in past the deadline without extension-day-benefits will lost 2 points (85 to 83) for each 24 hour period of lateness.

4) **Technology in the classroom.** Please turn off or at last utterly silence all cellphones and other hand held personal electronic devices during ALL CLASSES.

With so many digital readings (pdfs), many of you will use laptops and tablets (with sound alerts OFF) during class to refer to readings. I reserve the right to ask you to sit in the back or to limit laptop use if that use is distracting to myself or to other students. **For discussion:** We may all need to refer to our readings on electronic devices if we choose not to print them out; however, we must all take care to give out attention to discussion rather than to electronic device. In both large and small groups, I reserve the right to ask for device-free moments (“eyes up”) when it seems necessary to our group discussions in any particular situation.

5) **Technology outside of class:** BEFORE you call or email ANY professor with a specific question about details of the course (or about anything), ask yourself this important question: **Is there ANY other way to gain this information or answer this question? Is the answer on the syllabus or on other class handouts? Might a classmate know the answer. You will see your professor in class soon...might you ask the question then? Independent learning and inquiry is an important skill. THINK BEFORE YOU EMAIL.**

**That being said:** Students are welcome to email to make an appointment outside office hours, or to attend to course-related matters that need attention. Please be advised that I do not read and answer email constantly or immediately. I will attempt to return your email or call

within 24 hours during the week. During the semester, at 5 pm on Fridays, I usually declare an “email Sabbath” and take a break from email Sunday evening. If you need to communicate with me immediately (i.e. to change or set up a meeting in the very near future), send an email with the “urgent” exclamation point so that I will look at it quickly.

The above does not apply to true emergencies, such as those involving serious illness, personal crisis, or loss. In the event of such an event, I will respond as quickly as possible.

**I do assume that you read your Middlebury college email on a regular basis, several times a week. If you do not read your email with any regularity, please remember to ask me in class whether I have sent out any information or updates.**

**In addition, please familiarize yourself with our class folders on the server. All registered students will have access to the class folder. The “share” folder will contain necessary material for the class.**

**6) Classroom behavior.** I expect students to behave as professional adults usually do: to treat each other (and me) with courtesy and respect; to address all persons with the form of address they prefer (and to ask what that is, when you don’t know); to address emails in a polite and formal manner (no: “hey prof” or “hey there”). Although the classroom is open to vigorous and thoughtful debate, and to disagreement on topics under discussion (some of them contentious and difficult) 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, or feel that standards of professional and courteous behavior has been breached or compromised (by me or anyone else), please let me know in person or by email.

**7) Please avoid leaving during class.** 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 disruption.

**8) 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](mailto:litchfie@middlebury.edu)  
<http://www.middlebury.edu/studentlife/doc/ada/about>

9) **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 contests or artistic performances on a schedule which conflicts with our classes. 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.

**10) While not a Requirement (with some exceptions) the Environmental Studies Colloquium is a weekly gathering of ES Students, Faculty and Guest Speakers. The schedule is widely available and part of the college calendar of events: Every Thursday at 12:30 at Hillcrest in The Orchard (103)—our lecture room. I’ve noted a few particularly interesting speakers in the series below on our schedule, as well as other events planned for this semester.**

Schedule of Classes and Assignments (subject to change with advance notice). I will not change any deadlines to make them earlier than announced due dates; I will not add to the workload or assignments detailed here (if I do add, I’ll subtract something in compensation).

#### Week 1

Mon. Sept 8 : Introductions and Logistics; Storytelling.

Wed/Thurs Sept 10/11: Discussion. Read for Class: John McPhee, “The Control of Nature: Los Angeles Against the Mountains, Part I,” .pdf in share folder (and emailed).

**Thursday E.S. Colloquium, 12:30, Hillcrest:** Nicholas Roo, “Native Peoples and Landscape-Scale Conservation”

Fri Sept 12 : Storytelling, continued. Read: John McPhee, “The Control of Nature: Los Angeles Against the Mountains, Part II,” .pdf in share folder (and emailed).

#### Week 2

Mon Sept 15 : Puritans and Transcendentalists. Read (two .pdfs in share folder): Jonathan Edwards, “The Spider Letter” (all of it) (1723); and “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God,” (pp. 3-middle of 16), (1741).

Wed/Thurs Sept 17/18 : Read Ralph Waldo Emerson, Nature, (1836) all sections, online at: <http://www.emersoncentral.com/nature.htm>

**Very challenging reading...take your time, take brief notes on main points you can discern; and skip the poetry if that helps. Focus on the main question: what is nature for?**

**Paper Topics to be handed out in discussion.**

Fri Sept 19 : Re-read Emerson, Nature (1836), 2 chapters: “Language” and “Prospects,” online at: <http://www.emersoncentral.com/nature.htm> Topic: Emerson’s Story: Guest Professor, Resident Emerson Expert, Prof. Rebecca Gould:

Friday evening Sept 19: Clifford Symposium Performance: Paul Miller (DJ Spooky) at McCullough, 9 pm. His work as a multimedia performer includes “an experiential visual and acoustic portrait of Antarctica’s disappearing environment.” He will present: “Of Water and Ice,” a suite for string quartet, iPad, and video that explores the composition of ice and water, and our relationship to the vanishing environment of the arctic poles. All of the electronic sounds are generated by interpretations of either algorithms that mirror the geometry in ice crystals or the math of climate change data. Tickets required (box office).

Week 3:

Mon Sept 22 : From Emerson to Thoreau. No assigned reading, but feel free to launch on Walden and “Chesuncook” (easier reading than Edwards and Emerson...)

Wed/Thurs Sept 24/25: Read: Henry David Thoreau, from Walden, chapters as follows: “Where I Lived,” “Solitude,” “Baker Farm,” “Higher Laws,” “Spring,” and “Conclusion.” Walden is widely available in multiple forms and also online at: <http://thoreau.eserver.org/walden00.html> AND Thoreau, selections, “Chesuncook,” (published in Atlantic Monthly, Summer 1858, and later in The Maine Woods (1864) at <http://thoreau.eserver.org/mewoods.html>, click on and read: “Chesuncook” Part Two, paragraphs 17-23; Part Three, all paragraphs; Part IV, all paragraphs.

**Thursday 9/25: ES Core Panel, ES Colloquium (three profs teaching ES 112, 211, & 215 address a common topic (Technology) from different perspectives.**

Fri Sept 26: Read Thoreau essay, “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> Topic: Thoreau’s Evolution

Week 4:

Monday Sept 30: Read selection, Lydia Sigourney, “Niagara” (pp. 3-6) and “Fallen Forests,” (pp. 117-122) from Scenes in My Native Land (1844), courtesy of HathiTrust.org—pdf in share folder. Topic: Scenery, Forests, and the American Nation.

Wed/Thurs Oct 1/ 2: Read: Selections from Charles Darwin, On the Origin of Species (1859); George Perkins Marsh, Man and Nature (1864); John Muir, “Cedar Key,” from A Thousand-Mile Walk to the Gulf (1867); and Walt Whitman, “Song of the Red-wood Tree” (1874)--All pdfs in share folder (Whitman poem and Muir essay widely available online and in anthologies).

Fri Oct 3: No assigned reading: Topic: War, Death, and Nature

**Paper 1 Due by 8pm. See details on assignment sheet.**

Week 5:

Mon Oct 6: Read: John Muir, “A Windstorm in the Forest”--pdf in share folder  
Topic: John Muir is Always in the Room, or the Kingdom of Sequoia

Wed/Thurs Oct 8/9: Read: A Bevy of Conservationists (pdfs online). John Muir, Gifford Pinchot, Theodore Roosevelt, George Bird Grinnell, and others, all .pdfs in share folder

Fri Oct 10: No assigned reading, but start on Schrepfer, Nature’s Altars—a shift into reading scholarly secondary sources. Topic: Conservation, Class, and Race.

Week 6:

**Fall Break on Monday/Tuesday**

Wed/Thurs: Oct 15/16: Read Susan Schrepfer, Nature’s Altars, Introduction and Part One (Intro and chapters 1-3).

Fri Oct 17: Read WEB DuBois, selections from Darkwater (pdf in share folder); and Evelyn White, “Black Women and Wilderness,” (pdf in share folder). Topic: Discussion of Reading; Exam Review for Monday.

Week 7:

Mon Oct 20: Hour exam in class, details to be announced in advance.

Wed/Thurs Oct 22/23: Reading: Aldo Leopold, Sand County Almanac, chapters TBA; and Schrepfer, chapter 6.

Fri Oct 24: Reading: Leopold, Sand County Almanac, chapters TBA. Topic: Aldo Leopold’s World.

### Week 8:

Mon Oct 27: Topic: Post War Environments. Read Schrepfer, Nature's Altars, ch. 7; and "Vacations Without Humiliation" from Susan Sessions Rugh, *Are We There Yet?: The Golden Age of American Family Vacations*—pdf in Share Folder

Wed/Thurs Oct 29/30: Environmentalisms: Selections: Rachel Carson, Edward Abbey, Wendell Berry, Barry Commoner, Annie Dillard, Gary Snyder, Kai Erikson, and others (all pdfs in share folder). Details TBA.

Fri Oct 31: Topic: Earth Days. Bring to Class: One paragraph, written or typed, with proposed topic for final paper (more details TBA).

### Week 9:

Mon Nov. 3: Topic: The Ecological Indian. No assigned reading—get started on Adamson.

Wed/Thurs Nov. 5/6: Read Joni Adamson, American Indian Literature, Environmental Justice, and Ecocriticism, Introduction; Chapters 1-3, 7; and Conclusion.

Fri Nov. 7: No assigned reading. Cities, Toxics, Inequality.

### Week 10

Mon Nov. 10: Topic: Agrarian Thought. Read: Wendell Berry, brief selection (in share folder).

Wed/Thurs Nov. 12/13: 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

**Thursday Nov. 13: Perfectly timed colloquium topic:** Mary Mendoza, UC Davis and Middlebury College, "Building the Boundary: Race and the Environment at the U.S.-Mexico Border."

Fri Nov. 14: Topic: Moving Forward with Final Paper Topics: In class exercises. If planning to analyze a text of any sort, bring copy to class; if an audible text (film), bring a summary or review or transcript—something to work with.

### Week 11

Mon Nov. 17: Topic: Turmoil: Read excerpt, Devall and Sessions, Deep Ecology (1985); Ramachandra Guha, "Radical American Environmentalism and Wilderness Preservation: A Third World Critique," Environmental Ethics 11/12: 1 (1989-90), 71-83 (both in share folder).



Wed/Thurs Nov. 19/20: Read: Excerpts, Bill McKibben, The End of Nature (1989); Richard White, “‘Are You an Environmentalist or Do You Work for Living,’ Work and Nature,” in William Cronon, ed. Uncommon Ground (pdfs in share folder).

Fri Nov. 21: In class hour exam. Details TBA.

### Week 12

Mon Nov. 24: Reading: Sturgeon, “Penguin Family Values”—.pdf in share folder; further work on final paper projects.

THANKSGIVING BREAK: Take Wild Ones with you and enjoy reading on planes, trains, and buses!

### Week 13:

Mon Dec 1: No assigned reading: Topic: New Stories, Old Stories

Wed/Thurs Dec. 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup>: Read: Jon Mooallem, Wild Ones (2014), Introduction, Part One (Bears); and Epilogue. Read more if you would like, but other sections not required.

Friday Dec. 5: Final Papers, Last Stories.

### Week 14: Exam Week

Final Assignment: 7-9 page paper on individual chosen topic (with suggestions provided) due by 8 pm Friday December 12, by email, details TBA.