

Literature and the Environment

ENGL 30

Fall 2025 Section 01 In Person 3 Unit(s) 08/20/2025 to 12/08/2025 Modified 08/26/2025

Contact Information

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Course Information

A Beautiful World

Knowledge is power. And it seems the more we know and learn about our environment, the more complex it becomes. But before we start our conversation about the many factors and complications of our environment, let's first begin with the environment itself. What comes to mind when we think of our environment? Is it our natural surrounding—whether our immediate area and region or our larger planet and astronomical space? Is it our intellectual realm? Is it our physical dwelling? Is it both? What about the importance of nature in our philosophical ideals and theories? As we ponder these questions, it also becomes clear that *the environment—as complex as it is—is also quite simply beautiful.*

In this course, let's explore these ideas and notions together—the intricacies and nuances that make our environment and world *beautiful*. By voyaging through canonical and non-canonical texts by some of the most profound nature writers such as Emerson, Thoreau, Muir, Leopold, Carson, Dickinson, Whitman, Frost and others, and by exploring concepts including ecocriticism, ecofeminism, environmental justice, and the anthropocene, we will aim to discover a deeper understanding of our natural environment and what makes it uniquely, quintessentially, and incredibly spectacular.

Course Description and Requisites

Explores the ways in which writers and literary texts engage environmental issues and represent the natural world and humanity's place in it, paying close attention to issues of ecology, the landscape, conservation, sustainability, and human intervention/interference. Possible areas of inquiry include nature writing, ecofeminism, ecocriticism, environmental justice, postcolonial environments, and the Anthropocene.

* Classroom Protocols

Attendance

Come to class—you know that. Roll will be taken at the beginning of class, every class. If you arrive after roll has been called, it's your responsibility to notify me. It's a good idea to make friends and exchange contact information with one or more of your classmates to confer about that day's lessons. You should also contact me to review details of the class lecture. University policy F69-24: "Students should attend all meetings of their classes, not only because they are responsible for material discussed therein, but because active participation is frequently essential to ensure maximum benefit for all members of the class."

Participation

Participation is key to classroom success. I encourage you to interact, ask questions, provide insightful comments and contribute to the overall classroom discussion. *While attendance is mandatory, just attending doesn't automatically accrue participation points. A participation grade is unique to your attendance record.* Please be courteous and respectful of others while in the classroom and practice proper classroom etiquette and refrain from using mobile devices and laptops during lectures and discussions. You may use these devices for certain in-class activities when appropriate.

Conferences

In lieu of regular class meetings on days when individual conferences are scheduled, we will instead prepare to meet one-on-one to discuss your current performance and grades in private. These meetings serve two primary goals: to critique a paper draft and to evaluate your overall progress as a writer. As with your attendance, these conferences are also mandatory. Please schedule a conference when dates and times are announced in class.

Canvas and Technology

If you have not already done so, please visit SJSU's Canvas software. Here you will be able to find a special site devoted exclusively to our course. On this site, you will find files containing this syllabus and other class handouts as they become available. Additionally, we will regularly use the Discussion Board. You will also be able to communicate with fellow classmates, providing insight, answers or compounding questions when necessary. I will keep track of your participation and may use some of the material, including any linked texts, you and your classmates post as a starting place for in-class discussions.

Late Policy

Assignments are due at the beginning of the class for which they are due. NO LATE PAPERS WILL BE ACCEPTED.

University Policies:

The following link contains university-wide policy information relevant to all courses, such as academic integrity, accommodations, student success resources, etc. <http://www.sjsu.edu/gup/syllabusinfo>.

Program Information

Welcome to this General Education course.

SJSU's General Education Program establishes a strong foundation of versatile skills, fosters curiosity about the world, promotes ethical judgment, and prepares students to engage and contribute responsibly and cooperatively in a multicultural, information-rich society. General education classes integrate areas of study and encourage progressively more complex and creative analysis, expression, and problem solving.

The General Education Program has three goals:

Goal 1: To develop students' core competencies for academic, personal, creative, and professional pursuits.

Goal 2: To enact the university's commitment to diversity, inclusion, and justice by ensuring that students have the knowledge and skills to serve and contribute to the well-being of local and global communities and the environment.

Goal 3: To offer students integrated, multidisciplinary, and innovative study in which they pose challenging questions, address complex issues, and develop cooperative and creative responses.

More information about the General Education Program Learning Outcomes (PLOs) can be found on the [GE website \(https://sjsu.edu/general-education/ge-requirements/overview/learning-outcomes.php\)](https://sjsu.edu/general-education/ge-requirements/overview/learning-outcomes.php).

Course Goals

GE Learning Outcomes (GELO):

Reading and discussing assigned texts will focus on enduring human concerns, and allow students to

1. Examine significant works of the human intellect and imagination
2. Understand the historical and cultural contexts in which such specific texts were created
3. Recognize the accomplishments of women and diverse cultures reflected in such texts

Upon successful completion of this course, students will be able to do the following:

GELO 1. Recognize how significant works illuminate enduring human concerns: This course will examine how writers have used fiction, poetry, theater, essays, and film to make sense of their relationships with the landscapes and ecological networks they inhabit. Along with examining the political life of U.S. nature writing, this class will ask how literature has both contributed to and challenged popular thinking that locates "nature" as something separate from the daily realities of modern life.

GELO 2: Respond to such works by writing research-based critical analyses and personal responses: The class' first textual analysis paper and seminar facilitation based papers will use research-based critical analyses. The term's final project, as well as various in-class assignments such as reflections, will assess students' personal responses to the texts.

GELO 3: Write clearly and effectively (writing will be assessed for correctness, clarity, and conciseness): Students will hone their writing through weekly responses, sustained analysis papers, and a final project.

Course Learning Outcomes (CLO):

Upon successful completion of this program, students will be able to do the following:

1. Analyze significant works of literature that both represents and responds to humanity's relationship to nature.
2. Understand the varied and diverse historical/cultural contexts in which specific texts were created
3. Recognize the accomplishments and issues related to women and diverse cultures as reflected in the assigned texts.

Departmental Learning Objectives ("E" in syllabus)

English 30 serves four of the five learning objectives of the Department of English and Comparative Literature, by having students demonstrate the ability to do the following:

E 1. Read closely in a variety of forms, styles, structures, and modes, and articulate the value of "close reading" or close analysis in both the study of literature and the study of film;

E 3. Write clearly, effectively, and creatively, and adjust writing style appropriately to the content, the context, and the nature of the subject;

E 4. Develop and carry out research projects, and locate, evaluate, organize, and incorporate information effectively; and

E 5. Articulate the relations among culture, history, and texts.

Course Learning Outcomes (CLOs)

GE Area C2: Humanities

Area C Arts and Humanities courses help students to respond subjectively as well as objectively to aesthetic experiences and to develop an understanding of the integrity of both emotional and intellectual responses. C2 Humanities courses encourage students to analyze and appreciate works of philosophical, historical, literary, aesthetic, and cultural importance.

GE Area C2 Learning Outcomes

Upon successful completion of a C2 course, students should be able to:

1. analyze and understand works of philosophical and humanistic importance, including their temporal and cultural dimensions;
2. explore and articulate their own subjective aesthetic and intellectual responses to such texts;

3. analyze and assess ideas of value, meaning, and knowledge, as produced within the humanistic disciplines; and
4. research and write effective analyses of works of the human intellect and imagination

Writing Practice: Students will write a minimum of 1500 words in a language and style appropriate to the discipline.

Course Materials

Required and Recommended Texts and Resources:

1. Weisser, Christian R. *Sustainability: A Bedford Spotlight Reader*, 2nd edition. (ISBN 978-1-319-05661-2).
2. Emerson, Ralph Waldo. *Nature and Selected Essays*. (ISBN: 978-0142437629). (*Recommended*).
3. Thoreau, Henry David. *Walden; or, Life in the Woods*. (ISBN: 978-0393930900). (*Recommended*).
4. Carson, Rachel. *Silent Spring*. (ISBN: 978-0618249060). (*Recommended*).
5. Leopold, Aldo. *A Sand County Almanac: And Sketches Here and There*. (ISBN: 978-0197500262). (*Recommended*).
6. Whitman, Walt. *Leaves of Grass*. (ISBN: 978-1573920407). (*Recommended*).
7. Dickinson, Emily. *Selected Poems*. (ISBN: 978-0345472410). (*Recommended*).
8. Oliver, Mary. *Devotions: The Selected Poems of Mary Oliver*. (ISBN: 978-0399563263). (*Recommended*).
9. PDFs and Links (You may print them if you prefer).
10. Access to the Purdue OWL: <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/>
11. Printing and viewing resources for course readings, videos, assignments, and other material that are posted on Canvas.

Course Requirements and Assignments

Writing Assignments:

Each of the three essays will be examples of polished, revised versions that have been peer- and instructor-reviewed. Essays should have a clear and concise thesis, a well-organized paragraph structure, and proper formatting.

1. Nature and Environment Narrative Reflection (2-3 pages): Please consider the larger theme of this course. What first comes to mind when you think of the term “environment” and about our place within it? How do you find it fits into the historical context of our era? Which authors or texts highlight these notions for you? In which ideas are you most interested?
2. Mini-Ethnography (Essay #1, 3-4 pages): Please visit any natural space of your choice—the beach, a park, hiking trail, garden, mountain, lake, etc. and provide a coherent, meaningful reflection and analysis of the environment and location.
3. Literature Review Paper (Essay #2, 4-6 pages): Consider a full piece of literature—a book of any genre—that captures a unique view of nature, and provide a full, thoughtful review detailing how matters, including the environment, are represented, its significance to our discourse, and how it furthers or challenges your formulated notions of our topic.

4. Final Paper (Essay #3, 5-7 pages): For this final assignment, please compose a thoughtful and thoroughly researched essay that details your views and perspectives on a particular notion or idea about nature and our environment. Have we encountered similar views in our class readings? Have we read texts that challenge these views? Find and discuss these concepts in your essay with supporting evidence from scholarly sources.
5. Reading Response Questions and Film Reflection.
6. In-class peer-review and critique of essays for revision.
7. In-class activities and writing assignments.

✓ Grading Information

Class Grades:

1. Nature and Environment Narrative Reflection (2-3 pages): 10%
2. Mini-Ethnography (Essay #1, 3-4 pages): 15%
3. Literature Review Paper (Essay #2, 4-6 pages): 25%
4. Final Paper (Essay #3, 5-7 pages): 35%
5. Reading Response Questions and Film Reflection: 5%
6. In-class peer-review, activities and assignments: 5%
7. Participation: 5%

*This above grade calculation is based on passing attendance. If a student has four or more absences, the given percentages may change. If a student has more than seven absences, the assignments may grade as incomplete. Please see me with any questions regarding attendances.

93-100% = A	73-76 = C
90-92 = A-	70-72 = C-
87-89 = B+	67-69 = D+
83-86 = B	63-66 = D
80-82 = B-	60-62 = D-
77-79 = C+	0-59% = F

Per [University Policy S16-9 \(PDF\)](http://www.sjsu.edu/senate/docs/S16-9.pdf) (<http://www.sjsu.edu/senate/docs/S16-9.pdf>), relevant university policy concerning all courses, such as student responsibilities, academic integrity, accommodations, dropping and adding, consent for recording of class, etc. and available student services (e.g. learning assistance, counseling, and other resources) are listed on the [Syllabus Information](https://www.sjsu.edu/curriculum/courses/syllabus-info.php) (<https://www.sjsu.edu/curriculum/courses/syllabus-info.php>) web page. Make sure to visit this page to review and be aware of these university policies and resources.

Course Schedule

Course Calendar and Schedule

This is a tentative schedule for this semester. Reading and writing assignments can and likely will change to better suit the needs of our class discussions. Please be sure to attend class regularly and visit our course information on Canvas to note any changes to the syllabus.

**In order to preserve course flexibility, only major assignment dates appear in the calendar below. A more detailed assignment calendar may be provided as the semester progresses, and these calendar dates may be adjusted. Additionally, if and when schedule permits, we will try to visit the university's Writing Center and the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Library.*

***In the schedule below, I have detailed a suggested and advanced reading schedule for you. It is very ambitious. I encourage you to read at this accelerated pace and dive deeply into these texts and ideas. Because they are indeed deep, we will focus on a selection of them and read at a much more expanded pace within the classroom, discussing major points along the way. This does not mean we are not intellectually covering all of these works and ideas comprehensively within the scope of this course; you and I can discuss any text in robust detail during office hours and conferences. Furthermore, as you do read ahead, if there is a text you would like us to focus upon in class, please let me know and I will make sure we do just that.*

Week 1

August 21

Welcome to class

Introduction of Course & Syllabus

Introduce Favorite Work of Literature on Nature and the Environment assignment

Week 2

August 26 & 28

Review and present on Favorite Work of Literature on Nature and the Environment

Discuss ideas of Foundations of Sustainability and Nature Writing

Entering the conversation and understanding the context of nature and our environment

Read and discuss: Selection by Jeremy Caradonna, "From *Sustainability, A History*"

Week 3

September 2 & 4

Introduce Film Reflection: *Select any film or documentary which focuses upon nature, and write a brief reflection*

Continue discussing ideas of Foundations of Sustainability and Nature Writing

In-class activity

Read and discuss: Selection by Ralph Waldo Emerson, "From *Nature*"

Week 4

September 9 & 11

Introduce Nature and Environment Narrative Reflection

Begin draft work of Nature and Environment Narrative Reflection

Continue discussing ideas of Foundations of Sustainability and Nature Writing

Read and discuss: Selection by Henry David Thoreau, "Where I Lived, and What I Lived For"

Week 5

September 16 & 18

Continue draft work and peer critique of Nature and Environment Narrative Reflection

Continue discussing ideas of Foundations of Sustainability and Nature Writing

Read and discuss: Selection by Henry David Thoreau, "Where I Lived, and What I Lived For"

Week 6

September 23 & 25

Nature and Environment Narrative Reflection due

Discuss ideas of Environmental Justice

In-class activity

Read and discuss: Selections by John Muir, "The American Forests"

Week 7

September 30 & October 2

Introduce Mini-Ethnography Paper

Begin draft work: Mini-Ethnography Paper

Discuss ideas of Environmental Justice

In-class activity

Read and discuss: Selection by Rachel Carson, "From *Silent Spring*: 'The Obligation to Endure'"

Week 8

October 7 & 9

Continue draft work and peer critique draft of Mini-Ethnography Paper

Discuss ideas of the Anthropocene

In-class activity

Read and discuss: Selections by Aldo Leopold, "Thinking Like a Mountain," and Rick Bass, "Why I Hunt"

Week 9

October 14 & 16

Mini-Ethnography Papers due

Discuss ideas of the Anthropocene

In-class activity

Read and discuss: Selection by David Suzuki, "From *The Sacred Balance: Rediscovering our Place in Nature*"

Week 10

October 21 & 23

Introduce Literature Review Paper

Draft work: Literature Review Papers

Discuss ideas of the Anthropocene

In-class activity

Read and discuss: Julia Whitty, "Animal Extinction: The Greatest Threat to Mankind"

Week 11

October 28 & 30

Continue draft work: Literature Review Papers

Discuss ideas of Ecofeminism

In-class activity

Read and discuss: Selection by J.R. Thorpe, "What Exactly is Ecofeminism?"

Week 12

November 4 & 6

Continue draft work: Literature Review Papers

Discuss ideas of Ecofeminism

In-class activity

Read and discuss: Selection by Carolyn Merchant, "Earthcare: Women and the Environment"

Week 13

November 11 & 13

Veteran's Day: Academic Holiday

Literature Review Paper due

Discuss ideas of Ecocriticism

In-class activity

Read and discuss: Selection by Jared Diamond, "The Last Americans: Environmental Collapse and the End of Civilization"

Week 14

November 18 & 20

Introduce Final Paper

Draft work: Final Paper

In-class activity

Discuss ideas of Ecocriticism

Read and discuss: Selection by Elizabeth Kolbert, "The Sixth Extinction"

Week 15

November 25 & 27

Discuss ideas of Ecocriticism

Continue draft work and peer critique of Final Paper

In-class activity

Read and discuss: Selection by Fritjof Capra, "Ecology and Community"

Thanksgiving Day: Academic Holiday

****Thanksgiving Week: Academic Holidays, Wednesday, 26 November - Friday, 28 November***

Week 16

December 2 & 4

Discuss ideas of Nature Poetry

Read and discuss: Selections by Emily Dickinson, Walt Whitman, Robert Frost, and Mary Oliver

Review Learning Objectives: Now what can we do with what we have learned?

Wrap-up of course

Week 17

December (Finals Week)

Final Paper due

**Classes for the Fall 2025 semester end on Monday, 8 December 2025.*