

**English 309: Literature and Culture III: 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Centuries**  
**The American Environmental Imagination**

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Office Hours: T, Th 10-11

The Arranged Hour: W 2-3



A replica of Thoreau's cabin by Walden Pond. Photo by Ning Yu.

**Description:** This course will focus on the dynamic and dialogic interconnection between culture and nature, using American nature writing in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries as context. We will study the cultural patterns in American writers' imaginative conception of nature, including such ideas as the "virgin land," the "frontier," the "American pastoral," "the machine in the garden" and the "life in the woods." One mid-term, one final, several short writing assignments; the fifth arranged hour will be spent for the student to visit a place in nature. We will work together to contextualize our reading of American nature texts in connection with that place and especially your sense of that place. Henry David Thoreau boasted that the cabin he built by Walden Pond is "a better place for reading than any university." Do you agree or disagree with him? Do you think it matters at all where we read? Students will give an oral presentation of the

place to class, especially about the connection (or the lack of it) s/he has built (or failed to do so) between texts and environment.

**Text:** *The Norton anthology of American Literature* (Sixth Edition, Vol. B)

**Requirement:** 1. Careful reading. Students must read **all** the assigned texts carefully and be well prepared to discuss them in depth. Active participation in class discussion is a must for a successful student in this class. 2. Each student will find a place in nature where s/he feels comfortable to visit on a weekly basis and read some or all of the assigned texts. S/he will observe and even cultivate a connection between the texts and the place: are there special qualities in this place that make our reading of American nature writing there especially interesting? What are they? How do they contribute to our reading? Do they distract us? How so? Do the texts you read change your sense of the place? How? The student will keep a sort of a “field journal” about her/his experience of reading in nature. S/he will eventually make an oral presentation based on the field notes. 3. Each student is responsible for two thought-provoking, well-written questions with a page of responses to each of them about the assigned texts. S/he will submit the questions two days before the day of discussion so that the instructor can organize his lecture and discussion in response to them. 4. A mid-term. 5. A final. 6. Last but not the least, regular attendance is required. The student will lose 3% of their total grade for each unexcused absence. No student with more than three unexcused absences will get a grade higher than B no matter how well/s/he does in the class otherwise.

**Evaluation:** Class participation=20% of total grade; mid-term=20%; written questions and responses=12% (6% per question and response); oral presentation=18%; final=30%.

**Schedule:**

**Sept.**

25 Th Introduction; reading and discussing “To A Waterfowl” by William Cullen Bryant.  
Assignment: Read “Rip Van Winkle” (group 1 write questions and responses)  
The arranged hour for this week is to find your place.

30 T Discussion: Irving (using group 1 questions and responses).  
Read Cooper (pp.1013-1028)

**Oct.**

2 Th Discussion: Cooper (group 2 questions)  
Read Emerson’s *Nature* (Intro. and Chapters 1 through 3)

7 T Discussion: Emerson (group 3 questions)  
Read Emerson (Chapters 4 and 5)

9 Th Discussion: Emerson (group 4 questions)

Read Emerson (Chapters 6 through 8)

- 14 T Discussion: Emerson (group 5 questions)  
Read Hawthorne's "Young Goodman Brown"
- 16 Th Discussion: "Young Goodman Brown" (group 6 questions)  
Read Hawthorne's "Rappaccini's Daughter" and Poe's "Sonnet to Science" (group 7 write questions and responses which will focus only on "Rappaccini's Daughter")
- 21 T Discussion: Hawthorne and Poe, using group 7 questions  
Read Poe's "Raven"
- 23 Th Discussion: Poe (group 8 questions); **Mid-term**  
Read Thoreau's *Walden* ("Economy," "Where I Lived and What I Lived For," "Reading," "Sounds")
- 28 T Discussion: Thoreau (group 9 questions)  
Read Thoreau ("Solitude," "Visitors," "The Bean-Field," "The Village,")
- 30 Th Discussion: Thoreau (group 1 questions)  
Read Thoreau ("The Ponds," "Baker Farm," "Higher Laws," "Brute Neighbors," "House-Warming")
- Nov.**
- 4 T Discussion: Thoreau (group 2 questions)  
Read Thoreau ("Former Inhabitants," "Winter Animals," "The Pond in Winter," "Spring," "Conclusion")
- 6 Th Discussion: Thoreau (group 3 questions), presentations 1, 2, 3, 4;  
Read Whitman's "Song of Myself" (beginning on p. 2232; sections 1 through 26)
- 11 T **Verteran's Day (No Class)**
- 13 Th Discussion: Whitman (group 4 questions), presentations 5, 6, 7, 8;  
Read "Song of Myself" (sections 27 through 52)
- 18 T Discussion: Whitman (group 5 questions), presentations 9, 10, 11, 12  
Read Whitman ("Out of the Cradle")
- 20 Th Discussion: Whitman (group 6 questions), presentations 13, 14, 15, 16  
14  
Read Melville's *Moby-Dick* (Chapters I and XXVIII)

25 T Discussion: Melville (group 7 questions), presentations 17, 18, 19, 20  
Read Melville (Chapters XLI and XLII)

27 Th **Thanksgiving (No Class)**

**Dec.**

2 T Discussion: Melville (group 8 questions), presentations 21, 22, 23, 24,  
Read Dickinson (poems 130, 131, 241, 285, 314, 328, 348, 435, 501, 824, 986,  
1593)

4 Th Discussion: Dickinson (group 9 questions), presentations 25, 26, 27, 28

**8 M Final at 1 PM** Presentations 29, 30, 31, 32, 33



Lake Padden, one of Western students' favorite reading places. Photo by Ning Yu.