

English 171 - Literature of Science & Nature

MWF 1:30 pm – 171.001 – CRN 85513 – Woodburn G4



“I sat there and forgot and forgot, until what remained was the river that went by and I who watched.” –Norman Maclean

Instructor: Dr. Michael Buso (mbuso@mix.wvu.edu)

Office: 317 Colson Hall

Office Hours: MW 10:30am – 11:15am, or by appointment

Required Texts

- Bryson, Bill. **A Walk in the Woods.**
- Garland, Alex. **The Beach.**
- Holleran, Andrew. **Chronicle of A Plague, Revisited.**
- Kincaid, Jamaica. **A Small Place.**
- Maclean, Norman. **A River Runs Through It (and other stories).**
- Preston, Richard. **The Hot Zone.**
- Skloot, Rebecca. **The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks.**
- Stewart, Amy (editor). **The Best American Science and Nature Writing 2016.**
- **Selected PDFs**, available via eCampus or handed out in class

Course Policies & Procedures

Course Overview & Goals

Welcome to English 171, focusing on Literature of Science and Nature. In this class, we will explore how literature reflects and challenges the ways that we imagine science and nature in throughout the past and present. Specifically, this course will engage modern mythologies surrounding science, nature, wilderness, disease, and the body. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines mythology as “the received wisdom concerning a particular subject; the collective or personal ideology or set of beliefs which underpins or informs a particular point of view” and this course is immediately concerned with the way in which 20th & 21st Century literature creates and (re)shapes a distinctive mythology involving science and nature.

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

1. describe and discuss the complex relationship between literature, science, and nature
2. construct thematic connections across works of art by examining (and critiquing) key concepts like wilderness, the virus, the human, technology, solitude, and epidemics.
3. create and revise experimental writing assignments that demonstrate close readings and critical analyses of literature
4. evaluate interdisciplinary methods of studying English literature, thereby testing the limits of said disciplines in order to imagine a methodology that accounts for our enmeshment and ethical engagement with “endless forms” (as Charles Darwin put it) textual and embodied

Additionally, we will pay close attention to literary periods, trends, themes, genres, and approaches to studying literature of science and nature. Of course, we can't read *everything* written about this vast topic and I don't want to us to put such restrictions on it. I do, however, want us to engage in the complexities and messiness of culture through the lens of literature while giving you a strong foundation for your future interests in this subject. I am looking forward to a great semester.

You must have the required textbooks for this course, as you will have assigned readings for almost every class period. Please bring the assigned book to class every day, unless I indicate otherwise. You are responsible for printing and reading any assigned PDFs prior to class-time. I strongly suggest also having a folder and notebook that you bring to class every day. Keep all materials for this course (notes, quizzes, responses, tests, etc...) until the course is over.

Attendance Policies

This class is primarily discussion-based, and is one that encourages collaborative learning through critical discussion of the assigned readings. Because the course depends on your active participation for every class and your active involvement during every class meeting, regular and on-time attendance and active participation are critical to your success in this class.

Please note: You are responsible for making up any work you may miss by failing to attend class, even if the absence is necessitated by illness or personal emergency. If you are absent (or even if you are just late to class), any quizzes missed cannot be made-up. Additionally, I do not accept late response papers (I will take them early though!). Scheduled tests may be made-up based on specific medical concerns, on a case-by-case basis. If illness or personal emergency requires you to miss multiple class periods, I will probably advise you to drop the course and take it again in a semester when you can be present to do your best work. Multiple absences will necessarily limit your academic success in this class. Please keep track of your own attendance, and if you notice it is becoming a problem, please visit me during my office hours, or send me an email and we discuss it further.

Academic Integrity

You are responsible for the integrity of your work. This means that all of your work for this course must be your own and must be created specifically for this course. Failing to maintain the integrity of your work will have serious consequences. We will discuss academic integrity as part of our course, but here are a few things you need to know right away:

Submitting someone else's paper, including papers you obtain online, as your own writing is fraud. It will result in a failing grade for the course and may result in additional action by the Office of Student Conduct.

Copying paragraphs or other passages of someone else's writing without properly citing them is plagiarism. It may result in a grade reduction or failing the course. It, too, may result in additional action by the Office of Student Conduct.

The Eberly College of Arts and Sciences provides a helpful online resource for undergraduate students on understanding and avoiding plagiarism (<http://eberly.wvu.edu/undergraduate/ug-studies/preventing-plagiarism>). If you have any questions about when and how to document sources, or any other question that will help you avoid unintentional plagiarism, please talk with your instructor, a librarian, or one of the Writing Studio tutors in Colson Hall.

Computers and Cell Phones

Classroom activities require your full attention, so please turn off your cell phones, put them out of sight, and refrain from texting in class. I should not see or hear your cell phone during class time. If you are ever using technology in a way that is distracting or unrelated to the work of the class, you will be asked to put away the device. If you have to be asked more than once, you will be counted as absent for that day, and you may even be asked to leave. If there is an unusual circumstance where you must leave your phone on, please just speak to me privately *before* class. **Use of electronic or web-linked devices during a quiz or exam will result in failure of the course.**

Social Justice & Accommodation

The West Virginia University community is committed to creating and fostering a positive learning and working environment based on open communication, mutual respect, and inclusion. If you are a person with a disability and anticipate needing any type of accommodation in order to participate in this class, please advise me and make appropriate arrangements with the Office of Accessibility Services (293-6700). For more information on West Virginia University's Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion initiatives, please see <http://diversity.wvu.edu>.

Writing Studio

The Eberly Writing Studio is a free resource that can support you in all aspects of the writing process. It is located in Colson G02. For more information about the Eberly Writing Studio visit speakwrite.wvu.edu/writing-studio.

Office Hours

Office hours are a vital component of this course because they provide me with an opportunity to talk to you one-on-one. My office hours are on the top of this syllabus. Please drop in to see me at the listed times, or make an appointment with me to talk at other times. I can confer with you via email, too. I will try to respond to you (in email or in class) within 24 hours, Monday through Friday.

Assignment & Grading Overview

Comprehensive Tests (30% each, 60% total)

You have two tests in this course: a mid-semester test (30%) and one towards the end of the semester (30%). Each test contains multiple choice questions, short answer questions, true/false questions, and an essay component. We will review in class for each major test. Your quizzes, any handouts, and class notes will also be valuable study sources for these tests.

Written Responses: A Wilderness Journal (15%)

Throughout the semester you must complete a series of written responses called a Wilderness Journal. *Wilderness journals* are regular responses (at least one FULL page, double-spaced) in which you will meditate on the relationship between environment and imagination. I would like you to pick a wilderness area of any size – be it a patch of forest near your home, a shrubbery around campus, some mold – return to it throughout the semester, and note the weekly changes you observe. How does this ecology make you think differently (or not) about the concept of “wilderness” – e.g., the indistinguishability of rural from urban? Be creative; feel free to be personal. Each submission will be graded pass/fail according (1) to length and (2) relevance to the reading: i.e., if you cite and expand on the text rather than simply summarize it. In general, your responses are meant to ask intelligent questions about your recent readings and, I hope, address your own sense of enmeshment. At the end of the semester, you will combine all of these short responses into one larger Wilderness Journal where you will provide one last meditation on your specific patch of wilderness and how its transformation over the semester relates to your experiences in this course, and in college in general. Responses should be printed and brought to class on or before the due-dates listed on the syllabus. They should not be emailed. Late responses will not be accepted, and they must be turned in on time in order to be counted in the final journal collection.

Quizzes (15%)

Expect reading quizzes often. They are unscheduled and will generally occur at the start of class. The purpose of reading quizzes is two-fold. First, the quizzes ensure that you are reading the required material. Secondly, the quizzes will help you gauge your reading practices. Are you reading critically and closely? Your quiz grades will be averaged at the end of the semester (I will drop your lowest quiz grade) and comprise 15% of your overall grade. Please note that there are no “trick” questions on these quizzes. Put simply: if you read *carefully*, you should pass the quiz. If you find that you are having trouble with this aspect of the course, despite reading the assigned materials, come talk to me. We can go over strategies for reading critically and retaining what you read. Quizzes cannot be made-up if you are absent or late to class.

Participation (10%)

Participation is assessed based not only on attendance, but also on your investment in class activities and discussion and your ability to respect and work well with others. You are welcome to talk to me if you have questions about your progress in the class.

Please Note: The best way to be successful in this course is to do the readings, participate and attend class regularly, and to complete ALL of the course assignments. Failure to complete any of the course requirements will result in the failure of the course.

Course Schedule

What follows is the course schedule of readings and assignments. It is subject to change throughout the semester. In the event of a class cancellation (for any reason), please continue to follow the readings on the schedule unless otherwise indicated by me. *The Best American Science and Nature Writing 2016* is abbreviated on the schedule as *BASNW*.

****Readings are due on the day they are listed on the schedule.****

Monday	Wednesday	Friday
	August 16 Introductions Discuss syllabus Homework: Get textbooks	18 In-class handouts Homework: Get textbooks
21 “Total Eclipse” & “Thinking Like a Mountain” PDFs	23 “Trouble with Wilderness” & “Condition of Wilderness” PDFs	25 “Ktaadn” PDF
28 <i>Hot Zone</i> Part One	30 <i>Hot Zone</i> Part Two	September 1 <i>Hot Zone</i> Parts Three & Four <i>Wilderness Journal 1 Due</i>
4 LABOR DAY NO CLASS	6 <i>Chronicle of a Plague</i> pgs 1-86	8 <i>Chronicle of a Plague</i> pgs 87-172
11 <i>Chronicle of a Plague</i> pgs 173-end	13 “Virus, Viral” PDF	15 <i>BASNW</i> “They Helped Erase Ebola in Liberia...” <i>Wilderness Journal 2 Due</i>

Monday	Wednesday	Friday
18 <i>Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks</i> pgs 1-86	20 <i>Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks</i> pgs 87-176	22 <i>Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks</i> pgs 177-249
25 <i>Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks</i> pgs 250-328	27 test review Wilderness Journal 3 Due	29 Test One <i>In-class</i>
October 2 <i>BASNW</i> “The Man Who Tried to Redeem the World with Logic”	4 <i>BASNW</i> “Tracking Ivory”	6 <i>BASNW</i> “Lost Girls”
9 <i>A Small Place</i> <i>(read entire text for today)</i>	11 <i>A Small Place</i>	13 <i>BASNW</i> “The Really Big One” Wilderness Journal 4 Due
16 <i>A Walk in the Woods</i> Chapters 1-6	18 <i>A Walk in the Woods</i> Chapters 7-14	20 <i>A Walk in the Woods</i> Chapters 15-end
23 “Old Man and the Sea” PDF	25 <i>BASNW</i> “The False Gospel of Alcoholics Anonymous”	27 <i>BASNW</i> “A Very Naughty Little Girl” & “Why Are Sports Bras So Terrible?”

Monday	Wednesday	Friday
30 <i>A River Runs Through It</i> pgs 1-60(ish)	November 1 <i>A River Runs Through It</i> pgs 60-end	3 <i>A River Runs Through It</i> “Logging and Pimping and ‘Your Pal, Jim’” <i>Wilderness Journal 5 Due</i>
6 <i>BASNW</i> “The Siege of Miami”	8 <i>BASNW</i> “Rotten Ice” & “The Modern Moose”	10 <i>The Beach</i> pgs 1-112
13 <i>The Beach</i> pgs 113-223	15 <i>The Beach</i> pgs 224-322	17 <i>The Beach</i> pgs 323-end <i>Wilderness Journal 6 Due</i> Thanksgiving Break: No Class 11/20-11/24
27 <i>BASNW</i> “What’s Left Behind” & “Back to the Land”	29 test review <i>Wilderness Journal Final Collection Due</i>	December 1 Test Two Part One short answers in-class Homework: Complete Part Two take-home essay

Mon Dec 4: Test Two Part Two:

take-home essay due in my office (317 Colson Hall) during class-time