

ENGL 2070 Topics in Rhetoric
Sample Syllabus 1

●**Course:** ENGL 2070-XX Topics in Rhetoric: Environmental Rhetorics

●**Course Description:**

There is a rich literary and rhetorical history in the United States surrounding the subject of nature and the natural environment. The texts that punctuate this history—film, speeches, poetry, essays, letters, works of fiction as well legal treatises and policies—are the focus of this special topics course. That said, the focus for our course is on American conversations about environmental issues.

This course is designed to challenge students to read and analyze a variety of texts that fall under the rubric of environmental rhetoric. Likewise, students will be challenged to recognize and analyze key rhetorical concepts—e.g., audience, context, style, exigence, and media. In terms of course expectations, students will become proficient at analyzing past and current environmental conversations as they read historical documents, as they study environmental organizations and campaigns, and as they will read works of fiction and non-fiction to determine how rhetorical patterns within these environmental texts have influenced mainstream and marginal cultures.

Environment: Whether natural or manufactured (or digital) spaces, an environment is an aggregate of external surroundings and conditions that influence the lives and well-being of individuals, as well as the lives and well-being of local and global communities.

Rhetoric: A symbol system (verbal or nonverbal) which may intentionally or unintentionally impact the beliefs, values, attitudes, and/or actions of others. Rhetoric, then, is social action; it employs symbols—e.g., words, signs, gestures, objects, etc.—that impact others.

Environmental Rhetorics: Symbol systems (i.e., language or “sign” uses) which are deployed in such a manner as to construct or constitute understandings of the environment, relationships within the environment, and actions toward the environment.

●**Course Outcomes:**

Upon completion, students will be able to:

Read and comprehend environmental rhetorics within in a wide range of genres, forms, or medium.

Recognize different elements, genres, and forms of writing and articulate how they inform content and meaning in texts.

Identify and discuss multiple levels of meanings in texts, including analyzing figurative language and imagery.

Evaluate and arbitrate competing interpretations of texts from your own readings, from class discussions, and from readings of secondary sources

Connect texts to historical, intellectual, and cultural contexts

Articulate commonalities and differences among the goals, ideas, and forms of authors of environmental rhetorics.

Write textual analysis and criticism by constructing a thesis, gathering evidence, integrating sources and organizing elements of an argument

●Course Requirements

Readings/Participation: Complete readings on time and participate in class discussion. 20%

Informal (but typed) Writing and Portfolio: Writing prompts will be provided regularly throughout the term. The prompts are intended to be thought-provoking, and the work you produce in response to these prompts will be fodder for class discussion. You should keep all of your informal writing responses in a portfolio. This portfolio of informal writing will be submitted in the last week of the term. 20%

Photo Essay: Assemble a collection of images (photographs of your own, images found in magazines, images found online, etc.) and either construct a narrative (i.e., which tells a story) with a focused and clear environmental message or construct an argument (i.e., which aims to persuade others by using a variety of appeals) with a focused and clear environmental message. 10%

Midterm Essay: Because our course readings are many, and because we have little time in this summer term, I'll ask that you take time around midterm to reflect on what we've covered up to that point. I'll specifically ask you to focus your ideas on a narrow topic and synthesize a variety of our course readings in your coverage of that topic. 15%

Writing Workshop: In preparation for the final paper (see below), we'll have an in-class writing workshop. The point of this workshop is to collaborate with your peers and seek guidance for revision. 5%

Final Paper—Critique from a Rhetorical Perspective: Identify, get approval for, and then critique a text that fits within our course focus—viz. environmental rhetoric. In doing so, you must 1) describe the text and its author/s, 2) analyze its parts, patterns, major features, its audience, the context in which it is produced, etc., 3) interpret the design, order, or intent of those parts, patterns, features, and 4) assess the text either in terms of its effect or by your own judgment or determination of its value. 30%

●Schedule of Readings and Assignments

Monday, 6/22

Course introduction
Hawthorne and Emerson – depictions of the natural environment and human/nature relations in the early 19th Century

Wednesday, 6/24

Ralph Waldo Emerson's "The Transcendentalist" from *The Essential Transcendentalists*, edited by Richard G. Gelard (Course Reserves)

Margaret Fuller's *Summer on the Lakes in 1843*, Chapter 1 (Course Reserves)

Walt Whitman's *Preface to Leaves of Grass* (Course Reserves)

Finish Emerson's essay on nature and language (distributed in class as a handout but also available in our *Saving Place* book, pp. 2-9)

Monday, 6/29

Pages 11-56 in *Saving Place* (includes the following)

- * William Cronon's "The Trouble with Wilderness"
- * Ted Kerasote's "What We Talk about when We Talk about Wilderness"
- * Barry Lopez's "Landscape and Narrative"
- * Gary Snyder's "Cultured or Crabbed"

Wednesday, 7/1

from *The Norton Book of Nature Writing* (Course Reserves)

Aldo Leopold's *A Sand County Almanac*, excerpts

Annie Dillard's "Living Like Weasels" from *Teaching a Stone to Talk*

The Wilderness Act of 1964 and "Is the Wilderness Act Still Relevant?" by Rebecca Oreskes, *Appalachia*, Winter/Spring 2008. (Course Reserves)

Film: We'll view in class portions of the film *Wild by Law: The Rise of Environmentalism and the Creation of the Wilderness Act* (featuring William Cronon and more)

Monday, 7/6

Michael Calvin McGee's "The 'Ideograph': A Link Between Rhetoric and Ideology" from *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 66 (1980): 1-16. (Course Reserves)

Shaul Cohen's "Taking Control of Nature" and "The National Arbor Day Foundation: Modifying the Natural World" from *Planting Nature: Trees and the Manipulation of Environmental Stewardship in America* (Course Reserves)

Kevin DeLuca and Anne Demo's "Imaging Nature: Watkins, Yosemite, and the Birth of Environmentalism" from *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 17 (2000): 241-260. (Course Reserves)

Wednesday, 7/8

Midterm Essay Writing Workshop

Selected Readings from *Saving Place*

Part I of Carolyn Merchant's *Reinventing Eden*

Monday, 7/13

Midterm Essay Due

Selected Readings from *Saving Place*

Part II of Carolyn Merchant's *Reinventing Eden*

Wednesday, 7/15

Selected Readings from *Saving Place*

Part III of Carolyn Merchant's *Reinventing Eden*

Monday, 7/20

Selected Readings from *Saving Place*

Wendell Berry (Course Reserves – packet)

“A Practical Harmony” from *What Are People For?*

“The Ecological Crisis as a Crisis of Character” from *Unsettling of America*

Select poems

Wednesday, 7/22

Photo Essay Due

Selected Readings from *Saving Place*

Monday, 7/27

Final Essay Writing Workshop

Selected Readings from *Saving Place*

Kevin DeLuca's *Image Politics*, Chapter 1-4

Wednesday, 7/29 (final night of regular term)

Writing Portfolio Due

Kevin DeLuca's *Image Politics*, Chapter 5-7

Monday, 8/3

Final Essay Due