

**Writing Seminar II: Writing the Environment**  
**K10.0662**  
**Gallatin School, New York University**  
**Spring 2009, TTh 9:30-10:45**  
**715 B'way, Room 501**

**Catherine Siemann**  
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**Office hours: TTh 11-12 & by appt.**  
**715 B'way, Room 416**

*Writing the Environment.* In this class, we will look at ways of imagining and approaching the natural environment through writing. Beginning with the Romantic engagement with the natural sublime, we will examine writing about nature in its various manifestations, from travelogue to activism. Topics for reading and writing might include wilderness, global warming, sustainable engineering and architecture, and species extinction. Readings will include Wordsworth, Thoreau, Rachel Carson, Edward Abbey, and Al Gore, as well as other contemporary nature and environmental writing. Papers will center on description and critical analysis, and the final research paper will be on a related topic of the student's own choosing. In addition to our analysis of the themes and structures of the readings, we will devote significant class time to the practice and mechanics of writing, including writing in stages, workshoping, and doing research.

### ***Course Information***

**Required Texts:** All texts are available at the NYU Book Center.

Thoreau, Henry David. *Walden; or, Life in the Woods*. 1854. NY: Dover Thrift Editions, 1995.  
McKibben, Bill. *American Earth*. NY: Library of America, 2008.

**Office Hours:** My office hours are Tuesday & Thursday from 11-12; I can also meet with you by appointment. I encourage you to make appointments to discuss your writing, and there will be at least one mandatory conference.

### **Course requirements:**

***Attendance and participation*** (20%). Your active participation is an important part of the course and will be included in your final grade. This includes keeping up with the assignments and participating in class discussions and other in-class activities such as in-class writing and workshops. Regular attendance is expected, and excessive unexcused absences (more than 2 classes) or chronic lateness will adversely affect your grade. If you do need to be absent, please email me about in-class work and assignments.

***Writing assignments*** (80%). There will be three short papers (3-5 pages) and a final research essay (8-10 pages). The papers will be written in stages, with in-class writing, workshops, and revisions all part of the process. There will be also be response papers and in-class writing keyed to various reading assignments.

You will frequently be asked to share your work with your peers, and to provide thoughtful responses to their essays and drafts.

Late work will be accepted only at my discretion and will be penalized by a grade reduction. Please note that plagiarism is a serious offense which will result in failure.

### **Syllabus:**

1/20 Introduction.

1/22 Wordsworth, "Lines composed a few miles above Tintern Abbey,"  
<http://www.bartleby.com/145/ww138.html>

1/27 Thoreau, *Walden*, "Economy," p. 1-52.

1/29 Thoreau, *Walden*, "Where I Lived and What I Lived For," p. 53-64; "Sounds," p. 72-84; "Solitude," p. 84-90. Guest speaker: Jeremy Friedman, Sustainable NYU.

2/3 Thoreau, *Walden*, "The Village," p. 108-112, "The Ponds," p. 112-130, "The Pond in Winter," p. 182-193.

2/5 Thoreau, *Walden*, "Spring," p. 193-206, "Conclusion," p. 206-216; McKibben, "Living Deliberately" (handout).

2/10 **Draft of first essay due.** In-class workshop.

2/12 Muir, "My First Summer in the Sierra," "Hetch Hetchy Valley" *AE*, 98-112.

2/17 **First essay due.** Olmsted, "Plans of the Central Park" *AE*, 120-125.

2/19 Leopold, from *Sand Country Almanac*, *AE*, 266-294.

2/24 Carson, from *Silent Spring*, *AE*, 366-76.

2/26 Abbey, "Polemic: Industrial Tourism and the National Parks," *AE*, 413-433. Workshop: Introductions.

3/3 **Draft of the second essay due.** In-class workshop.

3/5 Jacobs, from *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, *AE*, 359-364. Workshop: Conclusions.

3/10 **Second essay due.** Film: *An Inconvenient Truth*.

3/12 Film: *An Inconvenient Truth*. Gore, "Speech at the Kyoto Climate Change Conference," *AE*, 855-859.

#### Spring Recess

3/24 McKibben, from *The End of Nature*, *AE*, 718-724; Kolbert, "Shishmaref, Alaska" (handout). Workshop: Commas.

3/26 **Draft of third essay due.** In-class workshop.

3/31 **Third essay due.** Research paper topic due. Pollan, from *The Omnivore's Dilemma*, *AE*, 948-960.

4/2 Specter, "Big Foot" [http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2008/02/25/080225fa\\_fact\\_specter](http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2008/02/25/080225fa_fact_specter) ; Kolbert, "Greening the Ghetto" [http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2009/01/12/090112fa\\_fact\\_kolbert](http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2009/01/12/090112fa_fact_kolbert)

4/7 **Annotated bibliography, argument and outline due for research paper.** In-class discussion.

Friedman, from *Hot, Flat and Crowded* (handout).

4/9 Callenbach, from *Ecotopia* (handout).

4/14 Greenwashing project.

4/16 Weisman, from *The World Without Us* (handout).

4/21 **Research paper drafts due.** Presentations. Conferences.

4/23 **Response to research paper drafts due.** Presentations. Conferences.

4/28 Presentations.

4/30 Last day of class. **Research paper due.**