

A General Inquiry into Nature Writing
English 102
Richard Yost, Lecturer

Course Description

In this course students will learn about the methods writers have historically used to write about the natural world. The inquiry starts with eighteenth century writing—the age of Linnaeus who introduced a framework for classifying living things—and will culminate with a look at contemporary concerns, expressed in writing, about the sustainability of the natural world within the American economic system. Different viewpoints in regards to environmental conservation and the human use of natural resources will be encountered through essays, documentaries, films, at least one guest speaker, and a review of contemporary environmental issues as they are depicted in national politics.

Part of the course is designed to encourage students to look closely at the natural world. As Gretel Ehrlich writes, “Keenly observed, the world is transformed.” Students will broaden their knowledge of the relationship between human activity and the natural world. Just as important, though, students will learn about the ways in which this relationship has been discussed in serious writing. Thus, students will develop the foundation from which they, too, can write about nature.

In addition, students will be encouraged to craft their essays toward their majors or interests in life. Not only will this procedure offer a variety of perspectives to the class, but it will also encourage students to write about what they know—to a degree that is applicable, at least.