

ENG 290: Human Values in Literature

John Felice Rome Center

Spring 2025

Thursday | 10am – 12:30pm |

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Office Hours: By Appointment, W/Th

Course Description

This course aims to explore how writers and literary texts engage with nature, the environment, ecology, sustainability, human interference and conservation. We will reach a broader understanding of the human values attached to nature and the importance of nature in philosophy, imaginative literature and art, without forgetting the intrinsic values of nature and its beauty (it is quite a beautiful natural world!).

Nature has been the subject of literature in every country and age. The course will consider a broad range of literature (prose and poetry, fiction and non-fiction), imagery, philosophy, and film. We will examine the various ways that writers and philosophers have constructed nature as an idealized place or set of qualities, partly imaginary, partly concrete. Some authors found in the natural world a fit environment or a refuge and a confirmation of their faiths or spirituality; others studied nature with a scientific eye, as a neutral agent of transformation of life on this planet; and other writers described nature as an antagonist to mankind, unsympathetic to living beings and prone to inflict suffering. By exploring canonical and less canonical texts by Virgil, Rousseau, Thoreau, Leopardi, Hemingway, London, Calvino, poems from Native American folklore, and other writings, we will identify how human beings have experienced profound connections to nature.

Learning Outcomes

On completion of the course, students should be able to:

- Analyze significant works of literature that represent human relationship to nature.
- Analyze works of philosophical importance, including their temporal and cultural factors.
- Know major literary and philosophical works and key authors of world literature.
- Understand the relation of those literary and philosophical works to their society and culture.
- Explore and articulate their own subjective aesthetic and intellectual responses to such texts.
- Develop skills in reading, thinking, and writing critically through the composition of an academic essay and other homework assignments.
- Develop analytical skills and argue interpretations through class discussions.
- Identify different issues, authors, and works of art from a comparative perspective.

Required Texts / Materials

- *Among Grizzlies. Living With Wild Bears in Alaska*, Treadwell, Timothy, and Palovak, Jewel. (ISBN 10: 0345426053 and ISBN 13: 9780345426055). Available for delivery on Amazon.it
- Assigned readings and films posted on Sakai.

Attendance Policy

In accordance with the JFRC mission to promote a higher level of academic rigor, all courses adhere to the following absence policy. Prompt attendance, preparation, and active participation in course discussions are expected from every student.

- For all classes meeting once a week, students cannot incur more than one absence.

This course meets once a week, thus a total of one absence will be permitted. **Absences beyond this will result in a 1% lowering of the final course grade.**

The collective health of the JFRC is everyone's responsibility. Do not attend class if you are ill.

Assessment Components:

Participation and Close Reading Responses	20%
Presentation 1	15%
Presentation 2	15%
Nature Journal	25%
Paper	25%

The course will fulfill its learning outcomes if you comply with the following requirements:

Participation and Close Reading Responses (20%): This course is structured as a seminar and it is discussion-based. This means that it relies largely on class discussion, and the success of discussions depends upon your *active* presence, thus your presence and contributions are crucial - both to me and your classmates. To help stimulate class discussions, you should come to class prepared on the assigned readings and participate actively through your Close Reading Responses: for each reading, you will compile a list of important quotes (at least, two or three quotes per reading). The quotes could be of any length. With the quote, you will offer an analysis of the text and an explanation of the content and the style. For some readings, you will find a set of questions. These meditations allow you to consider the readings *before* coming to class.

Please, note that I will ask you to read or discuss your quotes and responses in class. Occasionally, I will ask that you submit your Responses to Sakai. I will evaluate your Responses in your final Participation grade. To receive a high participation grade, you should participate in class discussion at least once every class. Failure to complete the Responses accurately will negatively impact your final Participation grade. Please, see me at the beginning of the course if you struggle with speaking publicly in class.

The participation grade also includes a degree of 'professionalism': punctuality to all classes; no breaks out of class other than during the collective break; limiting the use of personal laptops only to take notes and for our class-related matters; and turning off cell phones. **Failure to adhere to the above class policies will negatively affect your participation grade.**

Presentations (30% or 15% of each presentation): Each student will prepare two presentations on two different texts chosen from the course readings. For each presentation, students will also lead a class discussion on the text, for which s/he will produce a series of relevant questions. See Assignments in Sakai for detailed instructions. In the case of large groups, the presentations will be in teams.

Nature Journal (25%): You will spend time in nature and write a journal (5-6 pages, double-spaced) providing a coherent, meaningful reflection and analysis of the environment, and your reaction to it. See Assignments in Sakai for detailed instructions.

Paper (25%): The paper (5-6 pages, double-spaced) will be the analysis of a literary text of your choice – other than the course readings. The paper will show your ability to choose a focused question and thesis to guide your discussion and to follow the conventions for writing about literature. See Assignments in Sakai for detailed instructions on the final paper.

Sakai: This course will be using Sakai. You are required to check the course site regularly for announcements, readings, and assignments posted there.

General advice: The kind of reading we will practice requires marking up a text and reading passages during all class discussions. **If it is a PDF file posted to Sakai, you can download it and save it on your device, highlight the important quotes in yellow, and/or take notes of the page numbers and your comments.**

Grading

94-100: A	87-89: B+	77-79: C+	67-69: D+
90-93: A-	84-86: B	74-76: C	60-66: D
	80-83: B-	70-73: C-	59 or lower: F

Academic Honesty

Plagiarism and other forms of academic dishonesty are unacceptable at the JFRC and will be dealt with in accordance with Loyola University Chicago's guidelines. Please familiarize yourself with Loyola's standards here: http://www.luc.edu/academics/catalog/undergrad/reg_academicintegrity.shtml. You are responsible to comply with the LUC Student Handbook.

I expect that all work you produce for this course will be your own and that you will not submit work you have already completed for other courses. **Submitting the same Responses of another student will be considered plagiarism. Paraphrasing or otherwise copying the work of another person without citing the source of the words and ideas will be considered plagiarism.**

Using AI for writing the final paper or for any of the assignments will result in an F in the assignment or even an F in the course and might jeopardize the rest of your studies at Loyola.

Late or Missed Assignments

Late or missed assignments will not be accepted for grading without the authorization of the instructor. *As per the JFRC academic policies, students who miss any scheduled exam or quiz, including a final exam at the assigned hours will not be permitted to sit for a make-up examination without approval of the Associate Dean of Academic Affairs. Permission is given rarely and only for grave reason; travel is not considered a grave reason. Make-up exams will only be given for documented absences.*

Accessibility Accommodations

Students registered with the Student Accessibility Center requiring academic accommodations should contact the Office of the Dean at the John Felice Rome Center, during the first week of classes.

And finally... Welcome to this class! I find the study of literature both intellectually and emotionally fascinating (as well as a lot of fun), and I look forward to exploring it together. Please do not hesitate to converse with me about the course or the readings throughout the semester. As far as possible, I want to make sure the class meets your own academic goals as well as those I have outlined in this syllabus.

Course Schedule

Date	Topic
Week 1 Th 1/23	Introduction to the course. The "Book of Nature." Schedule of presentations.
Week 2 Th 1/30	Aristotle's <i>Physics</i> (Book II). The Image of Nature in <i>Genesis</i> .
Week 3 Th 2/6	Beginning of project 'Nature Journal.' Native American writings on nature. St. Francis, <i>Canticle of the Creatures</i> .

**Week 4**

Th 2/13

The ancient tradition of ‘pastoral literature’. Virgil’s *First Eclogue*. The ‘green language’ in modern times: Emerson, *Nature*; Baudelaire, *Correspondences*.

Week 5

Th 2/20

More “green language”: Thoreau.

Week 6

Th 2/27

More “green language”: Keats, Ammons.

Week 7

Th 3/6

The myth of the ‘noble savage’ and reflections on the ‘state of nature’. Readings by Montaigne and Rousseau.

Week 8

Spring Break (March 7-16): no class on Thursday, March 13

Week 9

Th 3/20

The myth of the ‘noble savage’ and reflections on the ‘state of nature’. Readings by Alexander Pope and Melville.

Week 10

Th 3/27

Into the Wild. Readings by Calvino, Krakauer and McCandless.

Week 11

Th 4/3

The Sublime. Readings by Burke, P.B. Shelley, Leopardi.

Week 12

Th 4/10

Discussion of paper topics. Sublime or supernatural? Readings by Mary Shelley and Melville.

Week 13

Th 4/17

“Thinking like a mountain” and “calling animals by names:” notions of land and animal ethics. Readings by Leopold, Treadwell, Hearne.

Week 14

Th 4/24

Conference on the Papers. Course conclusions.

Week 15

4/28-5/1

Final exam week. Final papers due.