**Context Note:**

The following is a syllabus for an Outdoor Literature Seminar course. In designing this class, I imagined myself as a teacher at one of a number of humanistic high schools in New England. Class is typically held 3-4 days a week at these institutions, with an extra day to be spent in some experiential fashion (ie. Working a school farm, providing community support, participating in adventure activities, etc.). Most of these schools are private/charter schools, so funding would be sufficient to support transportation for the outings I have planned.

I have drafted this syllabus with the intention of presenting it to both students and administrators. For this reason, the tone of this document varies. At times, the language is intended to be professional and directive—this, namely in the course description and the discussion of course and administrative policies. Other sections are more personal, allowing me to infuse the syllabus with a bit of my own personality. The result hopefully conveys my passion for the course and the materials in it. This more personal voice comes out most notably when detailing daily assignments, papers, and projects. I want students to understand that the class is intended to be fun and free-form; but I also want them to know that the course is to be taken seriously. I also wrote knowing that the balance of professionalism and casualness would have to be equally acceptable to administrators as it is to students. Intending to use this syllabus as a guideline for classes I may teach in the future, I tried to construct the schedule and the class structure (with outings) in such a way that readings and assignments could be added and subtracted to adapt to the schedules and policies of different institutions.

**Outdoor Literature Seminar**

Fall 2015-Spring 2016

MTW 10:30-11:45, F (bi-weekly) time varies

Instructor: Nicholas D'Amore

Contact: xxx-xxx-xxxx; damoren@school.edu

Office Hours: MWTh 2:45-5:00

**Course Description**

In this Outdoor Literature course students will engage with selected readings from major Nature Writing figures and go on bi-weekly outings to help them cultivate and examine their own connection to the natural world. The focus on a variety of environmental works--from science journals to poetry--is aimed at making students consider the creation and dynamic quality of social structures, with an emphasis on human's effect on the world that surrounds them. The final goal is to make students discover and exercise their personal ways of making sense and interacting with the world.

Class time will be managed in seminar format. Each period, students will come in having read the assigned works, prepared with ideas and at least three questions they have about the readings. Discussion of the texts, both literary and conversational, will occupy the period, interspersed with short lectures on relevant context for each writer’s ideas. Bi-weekly outings will relate to recent readings, so that students may experience that which inspired these works, and begin to formulate their own ideas about the environment. Participation in both aspects of this class will be an important piece of students' final assessment, as will the two assigned papers and the final project.

**Course Materials**

Students are asked to buy a journal and a preferred writing device to bring into the classroom. Laptops and other electronic devices will remain in students’ bags. All reading materials will be provided in PDF and/or print format. However, if students take a particular interest, or express desire, to read from books, I will provide information on where books may be purchased at a manageable rate.

One text, *Norton Book of Nature Writing* (ISBN: 0393027996) by Robert Finch and John Elder, is recommended to those students who take a particular interest in Nature Writing as a field of interest. Some readings will be taken directly from this collection.

**Learning Objectives**

Outdoor Literature is offered to senior-year students looking to benefit from a combination experiential and traditional, classroom-based learning. The objectives for this course are a direct result of this kind of experience.

1. To work on students' relationship-building processes with themselves, their peers, and their own convictions.
2. To give students the opportunity to apply in-class knowledge to out-of-class settings in order to add a degree of practicality to their learning.
3. To provide students with time and access to distance themselves from the stresses of a classroom for both personal and intellectual growth.
4. To make students engage critically with reading materials so that they may internalize information and ideas, and feel comfortable with those ideas.
5. To introduce students to Nature Writing literature as a means of examining, philosophically rather than scientifically, man's connection to nature.

**Course Policies**

*Attendance*: Students are required to attend all scheduled classroom periods throughout the year. Lateness will not be tolerated as it disrupts class and takes away from valuable classroom time. Any foreseeable absences and late arrivals must be communicated to the teacher before the time class begins. Two excused absences (with a doctor’s note, etc.) are allotted to each student, each semester. Any further absences or late arrivals will result in exclusion from outings and a message to the student's parents.

Outings are also mandatory, but considerations will be made to those students who are physically unable to participate. Planning of outings will take these circumstances into consideration.

*Assignments*: Daily assignments, such as responses to readings, are to be completed each day that readings are assigned. There will also be written assignments, such as papers and journals. Any late assignments will be reduced a full letter grade for each day the assignment is not handed in. For the final project, students may be on different timelines. Throughout the last few weeks of spring semester, each student will meet with the instructor to track progress. While there will be a final due date, that day may be looked at as more of a guideline. Final projects, however, must be completed and presented before grades close.

*Use of Technology*: All the technology needed for class time will be papers and pencils. For class, you need only to bring your reading materials and those devices needed to take *handwritten* notes. Cell phones, laptops, and all similar electronic devices must be powered down before the beginning of class. Any students found using these devices without explicit permission from the teacher will be credited with half an absence for each instant of usage.

Roughly the same policy applies to outings: no cell phones, no laptops. Journals are encouraged, as well as cameras--though the instructor will be photographically documenting each trip. Before each trip, students will be informed as to what items need to be packed. Any other extra items must first be approved by the instructor.

*Classroom Conduct:* This will be a sophisticated course in comparison with some other high school classes. Classroom participation is a must, and all students should to do their best to contribute to the ideas being worked out each period.

Respect will be the prevailing code of conduct for this course. Students should discuss their ideas freely. In the words of Thoreau, "no man ever followed genius till it misled him." Respect for one another's ideas is obligatory in all forms of discussion and debate. This means an appreciation and listening ear for fellow students, the instructor, the environment, and other outdoor enthusiasts.

Students who do not follow these guidelines, and those guidelines outlined by the school's Code of Conduct, will be dismissed from the course.

**Grading Policy**

Assessment will be broken down into the following categories and their corresponding percentages. The teacher reserves the write to change these policies on a case-by-case basis in the event of any extenuating circumstances.

Class Participation: attendance, preparedness, discussion, conduct 15%

Homework: nightly readings and questions for class 25%

Written Assignments: Paper 1 15%

Paper 2 15%

Final Project: 30%

Grades for Class Participation and Homework will be final. Grades for Written Assignments can be changed *if* students appeal to the instructor for a re-write. The instructor will periodically check in with students to discuss their progress and their on-going assessment in order to ensure that students have a fair chance at a passing grade. Any students concerned about their grade are responsible for meeting with the teacher during office hours or by appointment.

**Assignments**

*Nightly Readings (See Appendix A for more detail)*

There will be selected readings each evening by different authors from different literary eras (see attached schedule). Students should take their time reading these materials and be critical in their approach. Writing notes in the margin, journaling, and using sticky notes, etc. are all great reading strategies. The following day, students will come to class prepared to discuss the readings *AND* with three questions about the readings written down. We will not get to every question during class, but these questions will be handed in to me at the end of class. These will be given back the following day with notes from me. Use these questions and notes to build on ideas and perhaps to formulate paper topics.

*Papers (See Appendix B for more detail)*

Throughout each semester, students will complete two papers on topics of their own choosing. What I am interested in is your own personal reading and rationalizing of the text(s) you choose to work with.

I will meet with students to help formulate ideas for paper topics. The only requirement is that the paper somehow responds to the chosen author’s ideas about the natural world and our place within it.

*Final Project (See Appendix C for more detail)*

This project is intended to be fun, creative, cumulative, and informative. Students have free reign to take this project in whatever direction they see fit. Projects may take the form of academic papers, creative writing pieces, artwork, custom-designed outings, presentation of a new writer/piece of writing not covered in class, etc.

The final should represent a culmination of the practices and experiences from the entire year—discussions, readings, and outings. The goal of this project is to have students apply course objective to their own ideas in a format that they feel comfortable with, proficient in, or desire to experiment with. I will meet with students to help them formulate their projects, and I will be periodically checking in on students’ progress.

**Appendix A: Schedule**

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| Week | Readings/Assignments | Other/Notes |
| Week 1 (8/30-9/2) | Intro lecture; G. White: *Natural History* |  |
| Week 2 (9/7-9/9) | Linnaeus: *Philosophia Britanica* |  |
| Week 3 (9/14-9/18) | Linnaeus: *Systema Naturae* | Outing: Echo Lake, Sandwich, NH |
| Week 4 (9/21-9/23) | Darwin: *The Voyage of the HMS Beagle* |  |
| Week 5 (9-28-10/1) | Darwin: *On the Origin of Species* | Outing: Saco River watershed, NoCo, NH  **Paper #1 due** |
| Week 6 (10/5-10/7) | Intro to Romantics lecture; Wordsworth: “Tintern Abbey;” Coleridge: “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner” |  |
| Week 7 (10/12-10/16) | Keats: “When I Have Fears,” “Ode to a Nightingale,” “The Human Season,” “This Living Hand” | Columbus Day—NO CLASS    Outing: Seargent Center, NH |
| Week 8 (10/19-10/21) | Shelley: “Ode to the West Wind,” “Ozymandias,” “Mont Blanc;”  Lecture: Transcendentalists |  |
| Week 9 (10/26-10/30) | Emerson: “Nature,” Self-Reliance,” “Experience”  Thoreau: *Walden* | Outing: Walden Pond, Concord, MA |
| Week 10 (11/2-11/4) | Thoreau: “Civil Disobedience,” “Maine Woods,” “Cape Cod” |  |
| Week 11 (11/9-11/13) | Whitman: “Leaves of Grass,” “When I heard the learn’d astronomer”  Lecture: Review | Veteran’s Day—NO CLASS  No outing this week  **Paper #2 due** |
| Week 12 (11/16-11/18) | Lecture: American nature writers  Muir: *Our National Parks* |  |
| Week 13 (11/23-11/27) | Muir: *Travels in Alaska* | Thanksgiving—NO CLASS 11/25, 11/27 |
| Week 14 (11/30-12/2) | Muir: *Story of My Boyhood and Youth*  Burroughs: *Fresh Fields* |  |
| Week 15 (12/7-12/11) | Burroughs: *Ways of Nature*  STUDENT CHOICE: Reading TBD | Outing: Whiteface Mtn. |
| WINTER BREAK |  | NO FINAL |
| Week1 (1/18-1/20) | Lecture: Modernism/Modersnists  Dickinson: “A bird came down a walk,” “Two butterflies,” Besides the Autumn poets” | MLK Day—NO CLASS |
| Week 2 (1/25-1/29) | Yeats: “Gyres,” “Lake Isle Innisfree”  Moore: “An Octopus”  Doolittle: “Sea Rose;” Woolf: “Death of the Moth” | Outing (full weekend): Mount Desert Island, Acadia, ME |
| Week 3 (2/1-2/3) | Eliot: “The Waste Land” |  |
| Week 4 (2/-2/12) | Frost: “Mending Wall,” “Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening,” “Birches,” “Road Not Taken,” “Design,” “Hyla Brook,” “Directive” | Outing: Hyla Brook, Derry, NH |
| Week 5 (2/15-2/17) | Stevens: “Of Mere Being,” “Sunday Morning,” “Notes Towards a Supreme Fiction”  Lecture: summary of Modernists | President’s Day—NO CLASS |
| Week 6 (2/22-2/26) | Lecture: Great Depression and WW2; new nature writers  Snyder: “Cold Mountain Poems” | Outing: Stark Reservation, Portsmouth, NH  **Paper #3 due** |
| Week 7 (2/29-3/2) | Abbey*: The Monkey Wrench Gang* |  |
| Week 8 (3/7-3/11) | McKibben: *The End of Nature* | Outing: Mount Washington Weather Observatory, NH |
| Week 9 (3/14-3/16) | McKibben: *The End of Nature*  Dillard: “Living Like Weasels” |  |
| Week 10 (3/21-3/23) | Sagan: *Cosmos* | No outing |
| SPRING BREAK |  |  |
| Week 11 (4/4-4/8) | Hansen: *Storms of My Grandchildren* | Outing: Odeon Point, Rye, NH |
| Week 12 (4/11-4/13) | Heinrich: *Trees in My Forest*  Lecture: environmental/outdoor journalism | **Paper #4 due** |
| Week 13 (4/18-4/22) | Bryson: *A Walk in the Woods* | Outing: small section of AT |
| Week 14 (4/25-4/27) | Oliver: “The Swan,” “What I Have Learned So Far” |  |
| Week 15 (5/2-5/6) | Elder: *Reading the Mountains of Home* | Outing: Camel’s Hump, VT |
| Week 16 (5/9-5/11) | Krakauer: *Into the Wild* |  |
| Week 17 (5/16-5/20) | Film: “Into the Wild,” “River at Risk,” “An Inconvenient Truth”  Lecture: wrap up, discuss/work on finals | Outing: Androscoggin River, Gorham, MA |
| Week 18 (5/23-5/27) | FINAL PRESENTATIONS |  |

**Appendix B:** **Papers**

Students will be asked to complete two short papers per semester (4 papers total). Papers will be a personal response to class readings. They should go beyond simply paraphrasing the ideas of a given author—rather, they should take those ideas and use them in relation to their own in order to form an argumentative thesis.

Subjects may be, but are not limited to:

- a close reading of a text or section of a text, focusing on a set of ideas or tropes the student perceives throughout the reading

- a critical argument of a piece of writing in which students respond thoughtfully to the ideas put forth by a writer

- an analysis of patterns seen in a certain literary genre or by a certain writer, along with a discussion of the social and historical contexts that may have informed this pattern

Subjects for Paper 1 will be limited to our readings from Gilbert White to Charles Darwin

Subjects for Paper 2 will be limited to our readings from Wordsworth to Whitman

Subjects for Paper 3 will be limited to our readings from Dickinson to Wallace Stevens

Subjects for Paper 4 will be limited to our readings from Edward Abbey to John Elder

Papers are to be roughly 1500-2000 words in length. All should be printed out and handed in with the appropriate formatting: 12-point font, double spaced, 1” margins, with page numbers correct MLA citations

A formal copy of the guidelines of the papers will be provided as a reminder 3 weeks prior to the due date of each.

**Appendix C: Final Project**

At the end of spring semester, students will be asked to step away from their close attachments to course readings, and to develop their own ideas in terms of how *they* see themselves in relationship to one another and the environment. These ideas will inform each students’ creative final project. This might mean a piece or artwork, a critical essay or speech, a powerpoint presentation, a fully planned outing, etc. These will be individual projects unless otherwise approved by the teacher.

An extraordinary final project must

1) Formulate and apply students’ own ideas about class objectives

2) Present those ideas proficiently, and in an appropriate manner

3) Display care and serious commitment to the class and the assignment.

As projects may take many forms, an exact rubric will not apply. Rather, most of the grade will rely on effort, enthusiasm, and completion. YOU get to decide on the project, so make it fun as a way of ensuring that you will do well!

A formal copy of the guidelines for the Final Project will be handed out at a later date. On this handout, I will offer more ideas for project media and give students guidelines on the requirements for different types of projects.