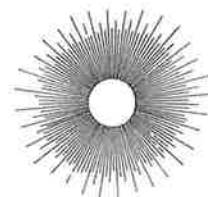


Mount Holyoke College, Fall 2025

Environmental Studies 333

## Landscape & Narrative — Finding Place, Finding Home



Lauret Savoy and Tim Farnham

Class Hours: W 1:30 – 4:20 pm in Clapp 327

Office Hours: By appointment (to be flexible)

Offices: Tim, Clapp 320, x3805 (tfarnham@mtholyoke.edu); Lauret, by phone, on Zoom,  
& Clapp 326, x2125 (lsavoy@mtholyoke.edu)

### Course Description

Different types of stories or narratives—whether myth, literature, maps, oral tradition, or scientific theory—have been created about nearly every region or environment on Earth as attempts to describe and understand that place and human connections to it. In this seminar we'll explore how braided strands of human history and natural history contribute to stories we tell *of* the land, and to stories we tell of ourselves *in* the land. We'll consider examples of how lifeways, homeplace, and identity are linked with environment or landscape. We'll also create written, visual, and/or aural narratives of our own.

### Texts and Other Materials

Readings on our Moodle site and class handouts

Robin Wall Kimmerer, *The Serviceberry: Abundance and Reciprocity in the Natural World*

Robert Macfarlane, *Is a River Alive?*

N. Scott Momaday, *The Way to Rainy Mountain*

Lauret Savoy, *Trace: Memory, History, Race, and the American Landscape*

Selected pieces from *The Colors of Nature* and Robin Wall Kimmerer (all on Moodle)

Pieces you bring in to share

Recommended: *Orion* (<https://orionmagazine.org/>) & *Emergence* (<https://emergencemagazine.org/>)

\*Readings other than the books are OCR searchable pdfs and Word files on our Moodle course site. The primary texts are available for purchase at many online sources. Our library has put physical copies on reserve and ordered ebook versions of as many as possible (we'll give you updates). Other multimedia will be available on the Moodle site.

### Learning Goals

The seminar will encourage you to:

- Reflect on many ways of understanding Earth and the land;

- Consider how different peoples recognize a “sense of place”;
- Step beyond conventions of academic term papers and lab reports to explore environmental “storytelling” that engages and educates general readers;
- Practice different modes of observation, argument, and narrative;
- Explore some of the intersections of language, environment, history, and justice;
- Think together on what it means to be a responsible citizen (especially regarding environment and history today);
- Engage artistic and literary forms of expression that are compelling to you;
- Create together a collaborative learning environment.



## Course Requirements and Policy

For this seminar to go well, everyone must come to each class prepared to discuss the readings as well as one another’s ideas, please. Weekly, punctual class attendance as well as active, prepared participation are essential and required. Everyone will be responsible for leading and joining in discussions, sharing your own work, and helping to create a community.

Writing is a major component of the course. Three short papers and one focused project *or* seminar paper (c. 15 pages) are required for an evaluation and must be submitted on time. Late assignments will be penalized.

Assignments and approximate “weight”:

Three (3) short essays/response papers (3 to 7 pages in length)	35%
Class attendance <u>each week</u> & informed active participation	35%
Seminar project and presentation	30%

*This is a course of exploration and craft; therefore, your reading, viewing, and listening should be intuitive and acquisitive rather than solely analytical.* Look for things that inspire your own writing or image-making, such as thematic questions, prose style, narrative voice or strategy. Please read as an image-maker and writer, paying attention to detail (in content and form), looking for what you can cull for your own work. The short response papers/essays will be opportunities to “play.”

**Our Expectations:** Class meetings will consist mostly of dialogue and discussion, with occasional “trips” (to the Art Museum and farther afield). We will read and talk about matters that might elicit strong opinions and feelings. How to listen carefully and respect the positions of others is central to our work all semester. Laptops used for note-taking, for viewing the works discussed, and for occasional in-class researching can be part of that respectful participation. But texting, being on email, checking social media, etc. are distracting and rude, undermining our collective endeavor. Please don’t. Please turn off your cell phone before class begins.

## Schedule of Topics

9/3            **Our Beholding Eyes: Coming to Landscape & Narrative**

9/10           **Elements of Landscape & Language**  
**Sensing & Perceiving Place**

Readings (on Moodle) -

Diane Ackerman, excerpts from *The Natural History of the Senses*

Rosalyn LaPier, "Land As Text: Reading the Land"

Tiya Miles, "'Bright Visions of Deliverance': Black Women's Space-Making through Stories"

Alfonso Ortiz, "Look to the Mountaintop"

Dale Ritter, "The Geological Perception of Landscape"

Anne Spirn, Chapters 1 & 2 in *The Language of Landscape* (p. 15-46)

\*Response Paper/Essay #1 due in class on 9/10

9/17           **Into the Field: Holland Glen**

9/24           **N. Scott Momaday, *The Way to Rainy Mountain***

\*Response Paper # 2 "The Way to Rainy Mountain" due in class on 10/1

10/1           **Personal Senses of Culture, Identity, and Homeplace**  
**To Be an Environmentally & Historically Literate Citizen**

Readings from *The Colors of Nature* (on Moodle) - including

Ofelia Zepeda, "Birth Witness"

Jamaica Kincaid, "In History"

Aileen Suzara, "Invoking the Ancestors"

Ray Gonzalez, "Hazardous Cargo"

Al Young, "Silent Parrot Blues"

Elmaz Abinader, "The Art Gallery"

Enrique Salmón, "Sharing Breath"

Louis Owens, "Burning the Shelter"

Jennifer Oladipo, "Porphyrin Rings"

David Mas Masumoto, "Belonging on the Land"

10/8           **Robert Macfarlane, *Is a River Alive?***

Paired reading (on Moodle) -



James C. Scott, excerpt from *In Praise of Floods*

**Fall Break! 10/11 - 10/14**

10/15 **Close Looking at the Mount Holyoke College Art Museum  
Visual Narratives of Place**

10/22 **Mythology and the Land**

Readings (on Moodle) -

“Skywoman Falling” from Robin Wall Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass*

“Genesis” (from the Bible) in “Western Philosophy of Nature: The Roots of Our Ecological Situation”

“Treebeard” from J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Two Towers*

10/29 **Robin Wall Kimmerer, *The Serviceberry: Abundance and Reciprocity in the Natural World* and Other Wisdom**

Additional readings by Robin that we will consider (on Moodle) -

“Learning the Grammar of Animacy”

“Ancient Green: Moss, Climate, and Deep Time”

<https://emergencemagazine.org/essay/ancient-green/>

“Corn Tastes Better on the Honor System”

<https://emergencemagazine.org/feature/corn-tastes-better/>

“Becoming Earth: Experimental Theology”

<https://emergencemagazine.org/essay/becoming-earth/>



11/5 **Reading the Land: Field Trip to the Quabbin Reservoir**

Sources (on Moodle) –

“The Dividing Scar: Massachusetts and Four Lost Towns” video

<https://www.nbcboston.com/news/local/the-dividing-scar-massachusetts-and-the-four-lost-towns/2702103/>

“Under Quabbin” video <https://www.pbs.org/video/wgby-documentaries-under-quabbin/>

“Lost Towns of the Quabbin” <https://vitabrevis.americanancestors.org/2019/09/lost-towns-of-the-quabbin/>

\*Response Paper # 3 “Marks of the Past in Your Present” due in class on 11/5

11/12 & ***Trace: Memory, History, Race, and the American Landscape***

11/19 **Considering Marks of the Past & Being a Citizen of the World**

11/26 – 11/30 **Thanksgiving Break**

**Projects Due 12/15 end of day**

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### Additional Course Information

#### **Office Hours & Appointments**

We both are very glad to speak with you about your interests in this material or about broader questions of language, nature, and the environment. The course will be most satisfying if you tailor its varied possibilities to your existing or emerging interests.

#### **Policy on Sources and Citations**

In your writing, please cite all sources fully—whether you quote word-for-word, paraphrase, or rely more generally on ideas from another source or use a source we have all read. This responsibility extends to both printed and online sources. There are many acceptable citation formats: at a minimum, a citation should include the author, title of the work, and place and date of publication. Our concern is not so much plagiarism as the need to take part in a mature discourse about ideas by acknowledging sources that shape your thoughts and by contributing to those ongoing conversations. **A word about AI:** You are not allowed to use any form of Artificial Intelligence to help in composing your papers. Please don't.

#### **Disability Services**

Anyone in need of accessibility accommodations has the right to have them met and kept confidential. Please contact Disability Services (call 413-538-2634; send an email to [disability-services@mtholyoke.edu](mailto:disability-services@mtholyoke.edu); go to 300A, 3rd Floor Mary Lyon Hall; or go to <https://www.mtholyoke.edu/directory/departments-offices-centers/disability-services>) as soon as possible. If you are eligible, staff in the office will provide you with the appropriate letter (outlining necessary accommodations) to give to your teachers early in the semester. If you have any questions, please feel welcome to speak with us.

#### **SAW Center**

The Speaking, Arguing, and Writing (SAW) Program is a good resource for student writers. It is staffed by students who are trained as peer writing mentors. Please see <https://www.mtholyoke.edu/saw/peer/saw-center> or call 413-538-2651. The SAW Center is located in the MEWS on the main floor of Dwight Hall. Its hours: Mon & Tues 3 - 9 pm; Wed & Thurs 9am – noon & 3 - 9 pm; Friday 9 am - noon; Sunday 11 am - 9 pm.