

Eco-literary Experience

One of the most important beliefs of the Romantics was the Nature had the capacity to restore the human soul by reconnecting it to a state of simplicity and beauty. For most Romantic writers, Nature was an idyllic retreat from the cares of the world and a place to reflect and think. In our modern world, we are even more removed from the natural environment, and many of us lack the time or inclination to marvel with wonder at the gifts nature has to offer. I've decided that you should take time for that experience. Your project is to create a work that combines insight about nature with insight about yourself.

The model for the assignment will be a literary journal, but you are not limited to this as an option. You can use photography, film, painting, poetry, music—any medium that allows you to explore your own feelings about nature and your relationship to it. The requirements are that the product:

- ✚ Develop over time. It should not be the product of one evening. Reflection and growth require time.
- ✚ Demonstrate your personal feelings about the natural world—from your appreciation of it to your alienation from it.
- ✚ Show a reflective, honest insight. Fight the urge to dismiss this as an educational experience. The purpose of this project is not to learn facts or meet my standards; the purpose is to learn about yourself and your feelings.
- ✚ Focus on nature in a meaningful and clear way.
- ✚ Be shared with the class in some way.

I will provide the model for what a journal might look like. The goal is to show you what kind of effort you can expect to put into each project. If you choose another format, your effort should be equivalent to this:

Get or make yourself a nice blank book for reading and writing the landscape in this class. Keep it with you often and write in it at least three times a week, dating each entry. In addition to observations and reflections, the journal can include drawings, photos, diagrams, and quotations. You'll be asked to share it with me and members of the class, so reserve private material for a different journal.

Here are some suggestions from The Sierra Club Nature Writing Handbook by John A. Murray

- ✚ Write a journal that covers a season, note changes in nature
- ✚ Take trip and record all impressions--focus on self as much as wild nature; find climax--revelation, decision, resolution, turning toward, turning away.
- ✚ Write journal entry in stream of consciousness mode; take object or occurrence in nature as point of departure. write till you've exhausted your theme and write more past that point
- ✚ Observe a process of nature and write a journal entry recording your observations in detail. e.g. snow falling in a woods, storm building over the prairie, tide coming in
- ✚ Write entry chronicling a powerful childhood memory about nature...relate it to events and perspectives in your life today.
- ✚ Keep journal to record your response to various nature writings you have read. Which are successful and which are not? Why? Which authors have something to teach you and which do not? and why. How would you approach the themes differently?

These beauteous forms,
Through a long absence, have not been to me
As is a landscape to a blind man's eye:
But oft, in lonely rooms, and 'mid the din
Of towns and cities, I have owed to them
In hours of weariness, sensations sweet,
Felt in the blood, and felt along the heart;
And passing even into my purer mind,
With tranquil restoration
-- William Wordsworth,
"Lines Composed Above Tintern Abbey"