

Fall 2024

Selling the Earth: Literature and Storytelling in the Age of the Climate Crisis

Dr. Hannah Ashley

This course focuses on both hearing stories about climate change as told by climate writers, creative writers and artists, scientists, and members of frontline communities, and telling these stories ourselves. We will examine storytelling as it works across mediums and genres from literature to film to scientific reports, and students will produce their own. How do we make sense for ourselves and communicate to others the essential science and human impacts of the climate crisis? Whose ways of knowing and lived experiences do we privilege? How can the stories we tell move society towards just climate justice, resilience, and adaptation? As a comparative literature course, most of the reading and theory takes its cues from non-Western perspectives; the course will include cross-cultural, cross-genre and cross-era linkages and contrasts.

This is an alternative format course, meeting every other week in person (eight 4-hr class meetings/ 85% of meeting time) plus 15% asynchronously. Therefore, you should plan to be at every face-to-face class, since they are limited.

Critical Race Theory & American Literature

Dr. Rachel Banner

Description: What actually is Critical Race Theory [CRT], and how has it influenced U.S. literary and cultural studies? This seminar will give you some of the scholarly history behind the term to help you develop your own answers to these questions.

Long before the phrase “critical race theory” became a culture wars flashpoint in the 2020s, it actually applied to a multidisciplinary field of scholarship emanating from Critical Legal Studies, Ethnic Studies programs, and various other humanities disciplines in the 1980s and 1990s. This class will guide students through some of CRT’s foundational late 20th-century texts –including works by Derrick Bell, Kimberlé Crenshaw, Cheryl Harris, Neil Gotanda, and Mari Matsuda. We will pair the critical scholarship with various works of 19th-century and 20th-century U.S. literature and some legal case studies. Students will use these critical-literary pairings to investigate how CRT’s insights center issues like legacies of U.S. chattel slavery and histories of U.S. imperialism in cultural debates about what America is and means. In turn, students will consider why CRT has recently been weaponized in recent cultural discourse and to what political ends.

Space and Place in early US Literature

Dr. Carolyn Sorisio

How do the stories we tell about a “space” transform it into a “place” connected to peoples’ political and cultural identity, one that also fundamentally informs their relationship to the environment? This seminar explores (some) seventeenth and (mostly) nineteenth century “American” literature to help answer these questions, asking as well how that literature has been used to transform “space” into a territory, region, or nation. We will explore a diversity of authors and genres (origin narratives, captivity narrative, fiction, life writing, and poetry) from “New England,” the “South,” and the “West.” Drawing upon historicism, Native American Literary Studies, postcolonial studies, transnational studies, ecocriticism, and critical regionalism, we will ask if century-old texts can help us engage some of our moment’s pressing issues. Can they help inform our response to climate change, environmental racism, US colonialism, and the ongoing struggle to define, claim, transform, or refuse US national identity?

English Language Arts for a Sustainable Planet: Environmentalism, Equity, & Prosperity

Dr. Cheryl Wanko

Greta Thunberg, the young people suing our government¹, and others around the world² are demanding attention by asking a fundamental question about climate change, injustice, and other environmental problems: why educate for the future if we do not have a future? Our class approaches this question with optimism to ask how English Language Arts can address (and critique) this question and contribute to a more sustainable future for all human beings and other species. It is especially, but not exclusively, aimed at helping future educators find ways to incorporate sustainability content and experiences into unit and lesson plans as you move from pre-service to employed teachers of English Language Arts. We will examine the PA State Standards for Grades 6-12 English Language Arts to see where sustainability education can be infused; discuss texts that can be incorporated into lessons; consider relevant theoretical approaches; explore pedagogical methods of "Educating for Sustainability" (EfS); explore different types of writing; and participate in experiential activities to learn more active ways to engage secondary students. The final project will give you a researched unit plan or paper that you can add to your portfolio.

1 - *Juliana v. United States, Held v. Montana*

2 - Sunrise Movement, Extinction Rebellion