



CW 58: Observers of the Natural World
Wednesday 6:30 to 9:20 P.M.
January 12 through March 16
Instructor: Peter Fish

Course Summary:

What are the elements that create powerful nature writing? That's what *Observers of the Natural World* explores. We'll start by training our senses to register the natural world around us. Then we'll hone the literary skills that will enable us to turn our thoughts and impressions into memorable sentences, scenes and polished personal nature essays. The goal of this class is for each student to produce two nature essays of publishable quality.

Note About Live Attendance and Recording:

This class operates as a writing workshop—or, given the instructor's long career as a magazine editor, an extended magazine story conference. We will be regularly analyzing and critiquing each other's work and analyzing and critiquing the work of the authors on the course reading list.

For that reason, live attendance at each of our class sessions is strongly encouraged. However, we will be recording the class sessions. If you can't make one or two classes (or want to revisit a class discussion) the recordings will be accessible to you.

STUDENT EXPECTATIONS

- Completion of reading assignments and participation in discussions
- Completion of two personal nature essays of 600-800 words, the first due February 14, the second due March 14
- In-class and take-home writing exercises designed to help in the research and writing of your essays
- Weekly engagement with your fellow students' writing

GRADE OPTIONS AND REQUIREMENTS:

Students have three grading options for Continuing Studies courses:

1. Letter Grade (A, B, C, D, No Pass) – written work is required In this class, letter grades will be determined as follows:
Participation in discussions: 20%
Weekly writing assignments: 20%
Completed travel essay: 40%
Response to fellow writers' workshop submissions: 20%
2. Credit/No Credit (CR/NC) - participation is required. You must receive at least 70 percent according to the letter grade formula to receive credit.
3. No Grade Requested (NGR) - no work is required; No credit shall be received; No proof of attendance can be provided. (Not suitable for those requiring proof of attendance/completion.)

Please note that you can change your grading status at any point before the final class meeting, by contacting the Stanford Continuing Studies program.

MAJOR DEADLINES

February 14—First essay of 600-800 words due to instructor

March 14—Second essay (or revised first essay) of 600-800 words due to instructor

Other short in-class and take-home assignments as announced in class.

PRELIMINARY WEEKLY OUTLINE

WEEK ONE: JANUARY 12

Observing the natural world, putting it on the page

Readings for following week:

Margaret Renkl, “Red in Beak and Claw”
Helen Macdonald, “Winter Woods”
Terry Tempest Williams, from Refuge

WEEK TWO: JANUARY 19

What makes a personal nature essay?

Readings for following week:

Annie Dillard, “Total Eclipse”
Louise Erdrich, “Big Grass”

WEEK THREE: JANUARY 26

Scenes and structure

Honing your ideas

Readings for following week:

Barry Lopez, “A Presentation of Whales”
Peter Fish, “Howl”

WEEK FOUR: FEBRUARY 2

People in nature

Readings for following week:

Alison Deming, "Spotted Hyena"
Robert MacFarlane, "Burial"

WEEK FIVE: FEBRUARY 9

The world of facts

FEBRUARY 14: FIRST ESSAY DUE

WEEK SIX: FEBRUARY 16

Workshop essays

Reading for following week: TBA

WEEK SEVEN: FEBRUARY 23

Politics/Reckonings

Writing action

Mastering metaphor

Reading for following week: TBA

WEEK EIGHT: MARCH 2

Guest Speaker

Reading for following week: TBA

WEEK NINE: MARCH 9

Voice and endings

MARCH 14: SECOND ESSAY DUE

WEEK TEN: MARCH 16

Wrapping up

Sharing final essays