

Semester at Sea Course Syllabus
Colorado State University, Academic Partner

Voyage: Fall 2017
Discipline: English
Course Number and Title: E 339 Literature of the Earth
Division: Upper
Faculty Name: Sarah Sloane
Semester Credit Hours: 3

Meeting: B 1700-1820, Lido Terrace
Prerequisites: One (1) college composition course

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Students interested in a hybrid course in reading and writing essays about travel will find a home in this course. We will essay or “assay” the earth, traveling with our minds and bodies across root of essay, and in such a way we will read and write about our voyage. We will take the measure of, evaluate or weigh our experiences. We will travel by ship, by rail, by bus, by car, and on foot. To write an essay is to forge a trail, to make an effort, to undertake a test or a trial. To read an essay is to understand someone else’s path, to peruse both the story on the ground (body; the literal) and the story in the sky (mind; and where meaning really is), according to *Colorado Review* editor Stephanie G’Schwind’s famous metaphor. In all senses, we will walk through the world as we walk through this course.

This writing-intensive course centered on travel literature and travel, students will spend their time in three primary activities: **critically reading** nonfiction, fiction, poetry, and hybrid forms about landscape, climate, ecology, physical place, and psychological location; **mapping** through writing our own travels and the shifts in our consciousness and the new cultural knowledge that result; and **critically reflecting** on our actual travel through all the ports, attending to the forms of writing that best capture our experience of the water, the land, and the voyage itself.

Through all of these activities we will also be attending to the means of travel, primarily walking and the walking life, exploring how the physical act of picking up and putting down a foot to create a forward motion reveals our own identity to ourselves, gives us a rhythm, creates a metaphor and a way of thinking that helps sustain us in unfamiliar cultures. We will explore through our writing and reading how our bodies encounter the earth, how our minds encounter a place, and where the meaning lies between the two experiences. While a substantial part of the course will be connected to the literature, writing, and action of walking, students of any level of physical ability are, of course, welcome in this class.

This course will focus on reading and writing true stories in forms ranging from the personal essay to literary journalism. We will experiment with collage essays, the “new journalism,”

memoirs, autobiographical writing, cultural critiques, interviews, profiles, braided essays, hybrid forms, flash nonfictions, literary essays, and more. By reading examples of these genres, students will complement their writing practice by seeing how contemporary writers have navigated similar forms, preoccupations, questions, and reader expectations. Students will read to understand the techniques and possibilities of craft, as well as write to understand how words produce meaning and, in their most intriguing arrangements, something approaching literature.

Students will be expected to complete weekly reading assignments and essay writing exercises, choosing three to expand and polish for their final grade. Students are expected to keep a portside writer's notebook and an shipboard reader's notebook where they collect observations, transcribe conversations, write down favorite lines or literary insights, and reflect on what they see or experience in each port as it might tie to larger questions of form (both the form of their writing and cultural forms), perspective (personal, cultural, objective, or multiple), and evolving understanding of cultural nuance and norm.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- To practice reading and writing essays about walking and the world;
- To develop a sensitivity to the craft of writing essays, honing one's own writing process to produce the best work possible;
- To read with a sensitivity to language and an awareness of the forms and craft used by contemporary writers;
- To develop close reading skills;
- To gain an awareness of the wide range of possibilities for creative literature today, including digital storytelling, speculative essays, the video essay, and writing in and about movement or travel;
- To learn the difference between motion and action in essays and in person;
- To enrich their experiences of Semester at Sea ports with specific literary exercises beforehand and in the port;
- To learn how to write compelling long-form essays about assaying the world and traveling, understood in their broadest senses.

REQUIRED TEXTS

AUTHOR: John Hersey
 TITLE: Hiroshima
 Publisher: Important Books
 ISBN: 978-8087888827
 DATE/EDITION: 2014 or any

AUTHOR: Bill McKibben, Editor
 TITLE: *American Earth: Environmental Writing Since Thoreau*
 PUBLISHER: Library of America
 ISBN #: 978-1598530209

DATE/EDITION: 2008, any

AUTHOR: Alain de Botton
 TITLE: *The Art of Travel*
 PUBLISHER: Hamish Hamilton or Pantheon or Vintage
 ISBN#: 978-0375725340
 DATE/EDITION: Any

AUTHOR: Robin Hemley
 TITLE: *A Field Guide for Immersion Writing: Memoir Journalism, and Travel*
 PUBLISHER: University of Georgia Press; ARC edition
 ISBN #: 978-0820342559
 DATE/EDITION: Any (March 1, 2012 may be the latest)

AUTHOR: Montaigne (Author) and Hazlitt (Editor)
 TITLE: *Essays of Montaigne*
 PUBLISHER: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform (January 22, 2017)
 ISBN#: 978-1542684538
 EDITION: Any

AUTHOR: Rolf Potts
 TITLE: *Vagabonding: An Uncommon Guide to the Art of Long-Term World Travel*
 Publisher: Villard Books
 ISBN #: 978-0812992182
 Edition: Any

Editors: Bill Bryson and Jason Wilson
 Title: *The Best American Travel Writing 2016*
 Publisher: Mariner Books
 ISBN#: 978-0544812093
 Edition: 2016

AUTHOR: Joan Didion
 TITLE: *South and West: From a Notebook*
 PUBLISHER: Knopf
 ISBN: 978-1524732790
 Edition: March 2017

AUTHOR: Annie LaMott
 TITLE: *Bird by Bird: Some Instructions on Writing and Life*
 PUBLISHER: Anchor
 ISBN: 978-0385480017
 Edition: Any

TOPICAL OUTLINE OF COURSE

Depart Bremerhaven, Germany — September 9

B1—September 12: What does it mean to have a body, to have a world, to walk one across the other? How do we travel on foot, advance in such a way that at least one foot is always on the ground but we continually are moving forward? Writing assignment: We all struggled to build our packing lists for this voyage, wanting to travel lean but also with all that we might need for the next four months. What's on your mental packing list? What preconceptions, ideas about a good life, and cultural norms or values have you packed? Let's take a look. Reading Assignment: Ralph Waldo Emerson's "Self-Reliance."

B2—September 14: Discussion of Emerson's "Self Reliance" and Botton's "On Anticipation." What is an essay? What does it mean to assay? Relationships between fiction, poetry, visual and conceptual art, and nonfiction. Writing the immersion memoir (Hemley). How to take notes in Barcelona. Starting your Walking Journal (or portside journal).

Barcelona and Valencia, Spain — September 15-18

B3—September 20: Discuss Henry David Thoreau's essay "Walking," first published in *The Atlantic* in 1862. Work together on making sense of the field notes we took in Barcelona. Look at Joan Didion's book for her discussion of her working from notebooks. Read the first short essay by Montaigne for this class period.

B4—September 22: Discussion of the cultural contexts of Ghana and the lives of rural and urban people there today. What are the primary identities, where does power lie, what are the social institutions that appear most popular in this culture? What is the best way to assay this culture? Read excerpt of *Desert Notes* by Barry Lopez and two essays from *Best Travel Essays*.

No Class — September 23

B5—September 24: First writing assignment due: Rough draft of a four-to-six page braided essay.

Tema and Takoradi, Ghana — September 27-30

B6—October 1: Discussion of collaborative creative writing projects and how Barcelona and Tema might represent different answers of the same cultural question. Discussion of how to turn field notes into essays. Shifting from observations into building meaningful essays. Form. Read first two essays in *Best Travel Writing*.

B7—October 4: Debrief about Barcelona and Tema and ongoing student collaborations. How

to introduce visual elements (photographs; video clips) into your writing. Review video essays online as well as read the first chapters of Rolf Potts' *Vagabonding*. Read "On Eye-Opening Art" in Botton.

B8—October 6: Continue discussion of Hemley's immersion writing, looking over "The Quest" and thinking about what kind of "quest" they might be on in Cape Town in two days. Practice "the quest" essay on the ship. Two essays in *Best Travel Writing*, one about Cape Town.

Cape Town, South Africa — October 7-12

B9—October 14: Practicing information-gathering techniques, from interviews to observations to collection of artifacts from the scene. Read more selections from *Vagabonding*.

No Class — October 16

B10—October 17: Background information necessary to be a good travel writer. How do we find information on the ship? What are all the research techniques we might need to learn to fill in the backstory? Finish reading and discussing Montaigne. If Montaigne were on this ship, what might he write about and how would he approach the subject? Imitation of Montaigne essay due.

Port Louis, Mauritius — October 19

B11—October 20: What did we see in Mauritius in terms of cultures crossing and mixing and blending? What are some ways that form can echo the dynamics of a multicultural society? The collage essay. Read sample essays from *Best Travel Writing*.

No Class — October 22

B12—October 23 Discuss ethics of writing nonfiction and truth, fact, and half-truth. Begin "Redo" assignment in Hemley for Cochin. Discuss "On the Exotic" and "On Curiosity" in Botton.

Cochin, India — October 25-30

No Class — October 31

B13—November 1: Discuss the difference between literary journalism, memoir, and fact-based writing more generally. Mixing genres. Read "On the Country and the City" and "On Habit" in Botton.

Yangon, Myanmar — November 4-8

B14—November 3: Hybrid essays. Sample essays from Hemley discussed. How to do

research, particularly historical research. Second essay due, about walking. Read *Hiroshima* by John Hersey.

No Class — November 11

B15—November 11: Continue discussing hybrid essays as well as selections from *Brevity's* online magazine. poetic traditions and how they infuse Vietnam. What is your working definition of “essay,” and how does it shift as you walk through different cultures? Read four essays in *Best American Travel Writing*.

Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam — November 14-18

B16—November 13: Writing Day, sharing drafts, peer review, meeting of collaborative writing groups, and preparation for expanding on the collaborative projects in China. Looking at Chinese visual art and poetry of ekphrasis. Discussion of how to do research before, during, and after country visits.

B17—November 20: Third essay due: A creative essay (story, series of poems, play, hybrid form) about what a student has learned about the cross-cultural reality and representation of an abstract concept such as memory, identity, systemic racism or sexism or homophobia, so far on the voyage. How does historical knowledge connect with these representations?

No Class — November 21

Shanghai, China — November 24-29

B18—November 23: Discussion of the collage essay and selections from both *Vagabonding* and *South and West*. Hemley on “Infiltration.” Introduction of infiltration writing exercise for Japan.

Kobe, Japan — December 2-6 FIELD COURSE

B19—December 1: Read short selection from Barry Lopez’s *Desert Notes* and two online essays: Robert Louis Stevenson and William Hazlett.

B20—December 8: Read about ethics and how to do fact-checking. The problem of pronouns. When to change the names.

B21—December 10: Pulling it together. Writing assignment due that synthesizes their walking journals, observations, and what we have read. *Finish South and West* and *Vagabonding selections*.

B22—December 12 Read the rest of LaMott’s *Bird by Bird*. How to continue one’s life as a writer after Semester at Sea. Approaching Hawai’i as a writer. Connecting the experience of overseas travel with the return to the US.

B23—December 14: Take-Home Exam: Comparing the methods of Montaigne and Didion, Hersey and Hemley and one other writer of your choice:. How does each writer connect with unfamiliar cultural contexts, implicitly and explicitly? With all this experience spent at ports around the globe under your belt, how do your own cross-cultural experiences inform what you are writing, what you are saying explicitly and implicitly about travel in your essays. going around most of the world on the MV Odyssey has been a unique pleasure and challenge for all of you, I imagine. What's your advice for other world travelers?

Honolulu, Hawaii — December 16

Study Day — December 19

B25—December 20 Read “On Returning” in Botton. Read the last chapter of Potts’ *Vagabonding*. Class readings of students’ best work. In-class writing and discussion of What does it mean to be going “Home”? What is the notion of “home,” nostalgia (etymologically, a pain or longing for home), and homesickness? Graded In-class writing: How does one’s new cross-cultural awareness inspire and infuse observations as a travel writer?
San Diego—December 23

FIELD WORK

Semester at Sea field experiences allow for an unparalleled opportunity to compare, contrast, and synthesize the different cultures and countries encountered over the course of the voyage. In addition to the one field class, students will complete independent field assignments that span multiple countries.

Field Class attendance is mandatory for all students enrolled in this course. Do not book individual travel plans or a Semester at Sea sponsored trip on the day of your field class.
Field Classes constitute at least 20% of the contact hours for each course.

Field Class and Assignment

The Field Class for this course will take place on Saturday, 2 December, in Kobe, Japan.

Class Title: Culture As A Deep Story We Walk Inside: Unlocking The Social Logic Of Temples, Ruins, and Land In Nara, Japan

Nara, Japan, affords writers a city steeped in histories, a place where cultural layers pile up in the form of well-tended gardens and temples, forgotten ruins, and the earth scored by centuries of careful land use. Reading Nara’s history as a story written in and on land helps us see how narratives can be constructed by spatial arrangements in a city. Even more mysteriously, as we wander around Nara we might read the cultural logic of this city’s selection and arrangement of memories (the monuments and temples and old buildings) as an organic model of a literary form we can try writing back on the ship.

All semester we have been talking about our encounters with place involving two kinds of travel: the travel on the ground and the peregrinations of mind. As we have used our bodies to walk and explore this semester, we have simultaneously considered the mind's encounters with culture, exploring, for example, how our own cultural baggage affects what we see. In the setting of Nara and its ruins, temples, restaurants, gardens, and streets, we will put to use what we have learned this semester by making close observations of place as well as being self-aware of the nostalgia, anticipation, imagination, and even fantasies that we experience as we travel.

We will blend our knowledge of the US “involvement” in the war with Japan, as we have read about it in John Hersey’s *Hiroshima*, with what we are seeing today in Nara. We will take photographs and write down observations, collect scraps of paper and memorabilia, look at local museums and cemeteries, and consider how the earth is written upon by history, how memories are reconstructed, and why there is this enduring human interest in retention, in retaining experience or ancestors with visible marks on the land. Beginning and ending the day with purposeful reflection, our cultural encounters with place, food, language, and spiritual monuments will culminate in a braided essay about what you saw and how the histories of each student’s home country intersects with the history of Japan.

We will look together at this braiding of first-person, present-day observation of Nara, and its twin strand, our reflection on larger cultural encounters or taking a wider perspective on what this place means. We will talk, too, about how the location of travel writers—their homes, experiences, sense of body, practice of self-definition, sexual identity, or their class, race, and ethnicities—always informs what is noticed and what is said. What happens when we learn to read traces of histories in places? What can we learn about making history visible by exploring Nara? What can we take away that will inform our own knowledge as essayists?

Field Class Learning Objectives:

1. To practice skills of close observation
2. To define story and explore how narrative might be represented visually
3. To reflect on how architecture, spiritual monuments, and ruins tell us a story about the present and the past
4. To develop a sense of how the past is contained in the present, and how such histories can be conveyed in writing
5. To practice taking field notes
6. To practice writing in the nonfiction form “the braided essay” about cultural identity and the way it traces on land.

Independent Field Assignments

Students will keep a journal with guided assignments for each port we visit, consolidating their observations with those made by two other students all semester long. In groups of three, students will define their central cultural questions early in the voyage and then make systematic observations around the world to answer it. Their final collaborative essay can be in the form of a podcast, photo or video essay, documentary, or blog, as well as other

options.

METHODS OF EVALUATION/GRADING SCALE

97-100%: A+	87-89%: B+	77-79%: C+	Less than 60%: F
93-96%: A	83-86%: B	70-76%: C	
90-92%: A-	80-82%: B-	60-69%: D	

All students will be graded according to the scale used at Colorado State University, as described above. In addition, the percentages of the final grade are as follows. Students will be evaluated according to their demonstrated abilities as writers engaging with primary texts, questions, and principles of writing creative nonfiction. The percentages for each assignment are as follows:

CNF Essay #1	15%
CNF Essay #2	15%
CNF Final Polished Essay, Long Form	15%
Ten Short Writing Assignments	30%
Twenty Lines a Day	20%
Midterm Take-Home Exam	5%
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In-class writing on last day	Possible Extra Credit 2%
TOTAL POSSIBLE	100% (plus two points for successful Extra Credit writing)

ATTENDANCE/ENGAGEMENT IN THE ACADEMIC PROGRAM

Attendance in all Semester at Sea classes, including the Field Class, is mandatory. Students must inform their instructors prior to any unanticipated absence and take the initiative to make up missed work in a timely fashion. Instructors must make reasonable efforts to enable students to make up work which must be accomplished under the instructor's supervision (e.g., examinations, laboratories). In the event of a conflict in regard to this policy, individuals may appeal using established CSU procedures.

LEARNING ACCOMMODATIONS

Semester at Sea provides academic accommodations for students with diagnosed learning disabilities, in accordance with ADA guidelines. Students who will need accommodations in a class, should contact ISE to discuss their individual needs. Any accommodation must be discussed in a timely manner prior to implementation.

A memo from the student's home institution verifying the accommodations received on their home campus is required before any accommodation is provided on the ship. Students must submit this verification of accommodations to academic@isevoyages.org as soon as possible, but no later than two months prior to the voyage.

STUDENT CONDUCT CODE

The foundation of a university is truth and knowledge, each of which relies in a fundamental manner upon academic integrity and is diminished significantly by academic misconduct. Academic integrity is conceptualized as doing and taking credit for one's own work. A pervasive attitude promoting academic integrity enhances the sense of community and adds value to the educational process. All within the University are affected by the cooperative commitment to academic integrity. All Semester at Sea courses adhere to this Academic Integrity Policy and Student Conduct Code.

Depending on the nature of the assignment or exam, the faculty member may require a written declaration of the following honor pledge: "I have not given, received, or used any unauthorized assistance on this exam/assignment."

RESERVE BOOKS AND FILMS FOR THE LIBRARY

I will be bringing some of my own materials to put on reserve at the library. In addition, it would be great if the ship would have available the following articles and films.

Download a free copy of *Going on Afoot: A Book on Walking* by Bayard Henderson Christy. League of Walkers, 1872.

<https://archive.org/details/goingafootabook00walkgoog>

Download from JSTOR:

Walking: An Essay on Writing Author(s): PETER LaSALLE Source: Agni, No. 70 (2009), pp. 8-20 Published by: Agni Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23009837>

Also download "On Going on a Journey" by William Hazlitt. One link to it:

<http://grammar.about.com/od/classicessays/a/OnGoingaJourneyessay.htm>

And "Walking Tours" by Robert Louis Stevenson,

<http://grammar.about.com/od/classicessays/a/walkingtouressay.htm>

If possible, a digital or paper copy of Barry Lopez's *Desert Notes* on reserve would be helpful.

FILMS AND EXTRA READINGS:

Longitude. BBC Horizon Special, 1999.

The Light at the Edge of the World: The Wayfinders. Wade Davis. National Geographic. 2007?

Winged Migration. 98 mins. 2001

Planet Earth. Richard Attenborough. 5 part DVD (instructor could provide)

An Inconvenient Truth. Al Gore.

AUTHOR: Martha Beckwith
 BOOK TITLE: *The Kumilipo*
 PUBLISHER: University of Hawaii Press
 ISBN #: 0824807715
 DATE: 1972
 PAGES: 55-60, 94-98.

AUTHOR: Loren Eiseley
 ARTICLE/CHAPTER TITLE: "Man the Firemaker."
 PAGES: 5.pp

AUTHOR: Chuangtse
 ARTICLE/CHAPTER TITLE: "The Man Who Spurned the Machine."
 JOURNAL/BOOK TITLE: *The Wisdom of India and China* ed. Lin Yutang
 PUBLISHER: Modern Library
 ISBN #:
 DATE: 1955
 PAGES: 1054-1055

AUTHOR: Samuel Taylor Coleridge
 ARTICLE/CHAPTER TITLE: "The Rhyme of the Ancient Mariner" (poem)
 DATE: 1798
 PAGES: 13 pp.

I'll also need a copy of R.W. Emerson's essay "On Self-Reliance," widely available as a free pdf online.