

Department of English & Writing Studies

**Reading (North) America Now:
WHAT IS LITERARY ACTIVISM?
English 3480F-001
Fall 2021**

Western University is located on the lands of the Anishinaabek, Haudenosaunee, Lūnaapéewak, and Chonnonton (Neutral) peoples.

Instructor: Prof. Kate Stanley
Office: UC 3430
Office Hours: Monday 10:00-11:30am & by
appt
TA: Ariana Potichnyj

Instructor email: kate.stanley@uwo.ca
Class Time: Monday, 2:30-5:30pm
Class Location: TC 341
TA Email: apotich3@uwo.ca

Prerequisites: At least 60% in 1.0 of English 1020-1999 or permission of the Department.

Course Description

Can literature help us confront the most urgent injustices and pressing crises of our time? Can aesthetic responses to racial, colonial, and ecological violence motivate interventionist action? Is there such a thing as “literary activism”? These are some of the questions that will guide our study of art and activist movements in Canada and the US. In this course we will examine aesthetic strategies employed by authors, artists, and critics who frame their creative work in activist terms. In particular, we will ask what applicable resources literature and criticism can offer when confronting structural inequality, systemic racism, and climate upheaval as interconnected humanist failures. Drawing on such resources, we will endeavor to test both the limits and possibilities of literary activism in the context of climate justice.

Objectives:

In this class we will learn to:

- Analyze various aesthetic strategies that Canadian, American, and Indigenous authors from the past and present have used to convey urgent social, political, and aesthetic experiences and aspirations.
- Cultivate a critical awareness of knowledge systems and positionalities that shape a text’s worldview, as well as our analysis of the text.
- Develop persuasive ideas and arguments in writing, drawing on appropriate textual evidence, literary terms, scholarly criticism, theoretical concepts, and historical contexts.
- Communicate with clarity, respect, and care in class discussions and written work.

Course Ethos

Our class will honour the principles of equity, diversity, and inclusion. We will use each other’s preferred and chosen names and pronouns; we will engage in respectful and generous conversation with each other; we will avoid language that is hurtful, violent, or exclusive. We will also acknowledge that we may make mistakes, and that learning from each other and questioning ourselves is part of the EDI process.

Course Materials

Cherie Dimaline, *The Marrow Thieves* (Cormorant Books 2017)

Tommy Pico, *Nature Poem* (Tin House 2017)

Jesmyn Ward, *Salvage the Bones* (Bloomsbury 2011)

Secondary and selected primary readings available on OWL

Methods of Evaluation

Students have two major assignment options for this class:

Option A: Review-Essay

Pitch and draft a review-essay focussed on a climate-change-oriented book for a public-facing literary journal like publicbooks.org or the [Los Angeles Review of Books](http://LosAngelesReviewofBooks.com).

Option B: Climate Action Project

Propose and undertake a climate-action-oriented project that culminates in report or presentation (format to be determined in consultation).

ASSIGNMENT	%	DUE
Participation	15%	Mid-Term (Oct 25) & End-of-Term (Dec 6) Check-ins
Seminar Facilitation	5%	TBD - Discussion Questions/Quotes + Note-taking
Reading Posts / Journal	15%	TBD - 6x over the term (150-300 words)
Slow Reading Exercise	10%	September 27 (750-1000 words)
Article Pitch (opt. A) OR Project Proposal (opt. B)	5%	October 4 (Project Proposal – 500 words) OR October 18 (Article Pitch – 500 words)
Critical Conversation (opt. A) OR Process Reflection (opt. B)	15%	November 5 (1200-1500 words)
Article Rough Draft (opt. A)	5%	November 22 (2500-3000 words)
Article Final Draft (opt. A) OR Project Report/Presentation (opt. B)	30%	December 6

Participation & Preparation:

Regular attendance, appearance on time, participation in discussions, and doing all the required reading are crucial to doing well in this course. Please come to class with your assigned reading in hand, ready to discuss your thoughts, questions, and passages that struck you as important.

Please note: After your self-reported absences, every absence without accommodation will result in a 3% deduction in your participation grade.

Assignment Protocols:

Papers must follow current MLA format. Assignments are due at the beginning of class. Late assignments will be deducted by 2% per day without accomodation. Submit late assignments on OWL and drop a hard copy in the box outside of UC 2401. Notify me by email when you've handed in the paper.

Technology:

Computers are not permitted in class. Please print out your readings and bring them with you. If you require your computer and/or are not able to print your reading, just let me know in advance. Keep your phones away during class.

Email Policy:

Email is meant for brief inquiries only; make an appointment for more substantive queries. Please consult OWL before sending me a question that might be addressed on the FAQ page. Allow two days for a response. Email received over the weekend will be answered on Monday.

WESTERN UNIVERSITY RESOURCES & POLICIES

Intellectual Property/Copyright

All instructor-written materials (e.g. PowerPoints, lecture notes, oral lectures) for this course are created solely for students' personal use within the course, and remain the instructor's intellectual property. Further reproduction, fixation, distribution, transmission, dissemination, communication, or any other uses, without securing the consent of the copyright owner (the course instructor) may be an infringement of copyright. You may not distribute, email, or otherwise communicate these materials to any other person. These limitations extend to recording, photographing, or sharing lectures (online or in-person) and lecture material without permission. Posting the instructor's content from this course to online course sharing sites like OneClass or Course Hero without permission is both an infringement of intellectual property law and a violation of academic integrity guidelines. The instructor will pass these cases on to the Western University Ombudsperson or their Department Chair as appropriate.

Accommodation Policies

Students with disabilities work with Accessible Education (formerly SSD) which provides recommendations for accommodation based on medical documentation or psychological and cognitive testing. The accommodation policy can be found here: [Academic Accommodation for Students with Disabilities](#).

Academic Consideration for Student Absence:

Students will have up to two (2) opportunities during the regular academic year to use an on-line portal to self-report an absence during the term, provided the following conditions are met: the absence is no more than 48 hours in duration, and the assessment for which consideration is being sought is worth 30% or less of the student's final grade. Students are expected to contact their instructors within 24 hours of the end of the period of the self-reported absence, unless noted on the syllabus. Students are not able to use the self-reporting option in the following circumstances:

- absence of a duration greater than 48 hours,
- assessments worth more than 30% of the student's final grade,
- if a student has already used the self-reporting portal twice during the academic year

If the conditions for a Self-Reported Absence are *not* met, students will need to provide a Student Medical Certificate if the absence is medical, or provide appropriate documentation if there are compassionate grounds for the absence in question. Students are encouraged to contact their Faculty academic counselling office to obtain more information about the relevant documentation.

Students should also note that individual instructors are not permitted to receive documentation directly from a student, whether in support of an application for consideration on medical grounds, or for other reasons. **All documentation required for absences that are not covered by the Self-Reported Absence Policy must be submitted to the Academic Counselling office of a student's Home Faculty.**

For Western University policy on Consideration for Student Absence, see:

[Policy on Academic Consideration for Student Absences - Undergraduate Students in First Entry Programs](#)

For the **Student Medical Certificate (SMC)**, see:

http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/medicalform.pdf

Religious Accommodation:

Students should consult the University's list of recognized religious holidays, and should give reasonable notice in writing, prior to the holiday, to the Instructor and an Academic Counsellor if their course requirements will be affected by a religious observance. Additional information is given in the [Western Multicultural Calendar](#).

Academic Offences

Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, at

http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_undergrad.pdf

Plagiarism:

Students must write their essays and assignments in their own words. Whenever students take an idea or passage from another author, they must acknowledge their debt both by using quotation marks where appropriate and by proper referencing such as footnotes or citations. Plagiarism is a major academic offence.

Plagiarism Checking:

All required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism detection software under license to the University for the detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted for such checking will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system. Use of the service is subject to the licensing agreement, currently between The University of Western Ontario and Turnitin.com <http://www.turnitin.com>.

All instances of plagiarism will be reported to the Chair of Undergraduate Studies. Proven cases of plagiarism will result in a grade of zero for the assignment. Subsequent offences will result in failure for the course.

Support Services

Registrarial Services <http://www.registrar.uwo.ca>

Student Support Services <https://student.uwo.ca/psp/heprdweb/?cmd=login>

Services provided by the USC <http://westernusc.ca/services/>

Academic Support & Engagement <http://www.sdc.uwo.ca/>

Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to MentalHealth@Western:

http://www.health.uwo.ca/mental_health/ for a complete list of options about how to obtain help.

Timetable

DATE	DISCUSSION	READINGS	DUE
Week 1: Sept 13	<p>Introductions:</p> <p>What is Climate Fiction?</p> <p>What is Literary Activism?</p>	<p><u>Benjamin Kunkel, "Inventing Climate Change Literature," <i>New Yorker</i> (Oct. 24 2014)</u></p> <p><u>Katy Waldman, "How Climate-Change Fiction, or 'Cli-Fi,' Forces Us to Confront the Incipient Death of the Planet," <i>New Yorker</i> (Nov. 9 2018)</u></p> <p>Beth Miller, "Literary Activism," <i>American Book Review</i> 41.4 (May/June 2020), p. 3 (I also encourage you to poke around in the <u>full issue</u>)</p> <p>Matthew Schneider-Mayerson, "Climate Change Fiction" in <i>American Literature in Transition: 2000 – 2010</i>, ed. Rachel Greenwald Smith (Cambridge 2017).</p> <p><i>Recommended:</i> <u>David Wallace-Wells, "The Uninhabitable Earth," <i>New York Magazine</i> (July 9, 2017)</u></p>	
Week 2: Sept 20	American Nature Writing	<p>ELECTION DAY</p> <p>Ralph Waldo Emerson, from <i>Nature</i>, "The Poet"</p> <p><u>Robin Wall Kimmerer, "Speaking of Nature," <i>Orion</i> (June 2017)</u></p> <p>Tommy Pico, <i>Nature Poem</i> (2017)</p>	
Week 3: Sept 27	Native Nature Writing	<p>Pico, <i>Nature Poem</i>, cont.</p> <p>Brian Teare, "The Earth is Full of Men," <u>21 19 : <i>Contemporary Poets in the Nineteenth-Century Archive</i></u> Eds. Kristen Case and Alexandra Manglis (Minneapolis: Milkweed Editions, 2019).</p>	SLOW READING EXERCISE
Week 4: Oct 4	Attention as Action	<p>GUEST SPEAKER: Min Hyong Song</p> <p>Min Hyong Song, "The Practice of Sustaining Attention to Climate Change," from <i>Climate Lyricism</i> Amitav Ghosh, "Stories," from <i>The Great Derangement</i>.</p>	PROJECT PROPOSAL (opt. B)

		<p>Rob Nixon, "Introduction," <i>Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor</i>, p. 1-44.</p> <p>Song, from "Artful Things of Climate Change," from <i>Racial Ecologies</i> (first 2 + last 4 pages)</p>	
Week 5: Oct 11	THANKSGIVING		
Week 6: Oct 18	What is Cli-fi? What is Literary Activism?	<p>Cherie Dimaline, <i>The Marrow Thieves</i> (2017)</p> <p>Armstrong, Jeannette. "Land Speaking." <i>Introduction to Indigenous Literary Criticism in Canada</i>, eds. Armand Garnet Ruffo and Heather Macfarlane (Broadview 2016): 146-159.</p>	ARTICLE PITCH (Opt. A)
Week 7: Oct 25	Decolonizing Dystopia	<p>GUEST SPEAKER (to be confirmed): Jeannette Armstrong</p> <p>Dimaline, <i>The Marrow Thieves</i> cont.</p>	PARTICIPATION CHECK-IN
Week 8: Nov 1	Reading Week		<p>CRITICAL CONVERSATION (opt. A) – Nov 5</p> <p>PROCESS REFLECTION (opt. B) – Nov 5</p>
Week 9: Nov 8	Rising Waters of Realism	<p>Jesmyn Ward, <i>Salvage the Bones</i> (2011)</p> <p>Ward, "On Witness and Respair," <i>Vanity Fair</i> (2020)*</p>	
Week 10: Nov 15		<p>Ward, <i>Salvage the Bones</i> cont.</p> <p>Ward, from <i>The Fire This Time</i> (2016)</p>	
Week 11: Nov 22	Active Reading	<p>Zadie Smith, "Elegy for a Country's Seasons," <i>New York Review of Books</i> (April 2014)*</p> <p>Smith, "The Dialectic," "The Lazy River," "Blocked," from <i>Grand Union</i> (2019)</p> <p>Lauren Groff, "Ghosts and Empties," <i>New Yorker</i> (July 2015)</p> <p>Green Peace #ClimateVisionaries</p>	ARTICLE ROUGH DRAFT (opt. A)

		<p><u>Project</u></p> <p><u>"Lauren Groff on Climate Change and Ugly Feelings," <i>Electric Lit</i> (June 2013)</u></p>	
<p>Week 12: Nov 29</p>	<p>Future Readers</p>	<p><u>Katie Paterson, "Future Library" (2014-2114)</u></p> <p>Michaela Bronstein, "Today's Books for Tomorrow's Readers: Taking the Future into Account," <i>PMLA</i> (2019)</p>	
<p>Week 13: Dec 6</p>	<p>Wrap-up</p>		<p>ARTICLE FINAL DRAFT (opt. A)</p> <p>FINAL PROJECT REPORT/ PRESENTATION (opt. B)</p> <p style="text-align: center;">+</p> <p>PARTICIPATION CHECK-IN</p>