Dear Students:

Greetings! If you have an affinity for fully experiencing and appreciating the natural world and an interest in creatively sharing as much through writing, you have enrolled in what may prove to be one of the most enjoyable experiences in your academic career. As the instructors, we know we are excited about this course, and we hope you share our enthusiasm.

Enclosed, you should find the following: the course syllabi; a list of items to bring; assorted reading materials; a map to Silver Gate; and a class roster with contact information (for those who wish to carpool.)

Though we will not meet as a class until 2 p.m. on Friday, June 2nd, at the Pine Edge Cabins in Silver Gate, Montana, you should immediately
1) purchase the course texts at the Casper College Bookstore,
2) review the course syllabi, paying close attention to selected readings, journal entries, and a quiz that should be completed in advance of class,
3) write and Xerox 12 copies of the assigned essay (relax, this is just a draft, a work in progress),
4) review/gather the list of items to bring with you,
5) start walking daily to prep yourself for our first hike, and
6) call Terry (265-2712) to confirm that you have received all of these materials and that you understand what needs to be done before we meet as a group.

The enclosed map offers directions to Silver Gate, Montana, located just a few miles from the NE entrance to Yellowstone. While some construction is scheduled for the Chief Joseph Highway into Silver Gate, this should still be a much quicker route than through the park. (To ensure you make it to Silver Gate by 2 p.m., we suggest leaving at 6 a.m.) Also, please note that any independent travel through Yellowstone will require the purchase of a park pass, whereas when the class travels together into the park, the fee will be waived.

For now, welcome to the class! We look forward to our time together -- to a week of sharing not just Yellowstone’s wonderful backcountry but also our writing, our meals, and our lodging in the good company of fellow naturalists and writers.

Have a safe trip to Silver Gate, and we’ll see you soon.

Sincerely,

Terry Rasmussen and Dr. Will Robinson, Instructors
Yellowstone Experience Course Syllabus
Summer 2006

ENGL 2055: Creative Writing in the Wild (3 cr)
BIOL 2110: Yellowstone Field Science (3 cr)
PEAC 2084: Outdoor Skills (1 cr)
All three courses must be taken concurrently.

Instructors:  Terry Rasmussen, PS 336, 268-2480 or 265-2712, trasmuss@caspercollege.edu
            Dr. Will Robinson, LS 201, 268-2359 or 358-3936, wrobinson@caspercollege.edu

Class Meeting Schedule and Location:  The class will stay at Pine Edge Cabins in Silver Gate, MT.
Students should arrive by 2 p.m. on Fri., June 2nd for a welcome orientation.  Class concludes following a morning session on Sun., June 11th.  Students should arrange their own transportation to and from Silver Gate.  Transportation for daily field trips will be in a college van.

The Yellowstone Experience:  This multi-disciplinary, student-centered field trip encourages students to experience – through body, mind, and spirit – the backcountry of Yellowstone National Park. During daily hikes, students gather journal observations and impressions with what Rebecca McClanahan calls the “naked” and the “imaginative” eye.  The former involves accurately naming and engaging in research that informs; the latter involves sharing insight by exploiting the senses and applying the imagination.  The field journal collects the raw material for verse and prose that falls into what is called the nature writing genre.  This is a genre that softens the boundaries between objective science and subjective art and, as Thomas Lyon explains, allows for “the rise of a new, subjective interpretation of the ‘hard’ facts.” This is a genre that “seeks to learn not just about nature,” but also, as Roy Barton states, “to learn from nature” and, in so doing, to “communicate the wisdom of life,” which is why nature writing “always returns to the personal observations of the writer.”  The course culminates in the electronic submission of a nature writing portfolio on or before July 15th.

ENGL 2055 Catalogue Description:  Student-centered, weeklong field experience focuses on reading and writing imaginative prose and verse inspired by nature, specifically in Yellowstone National Park.  Class is devoted to collecting journal observations on the trail, engaging in a variety of focused writing exercises, and discussing readings and each others’ writing.

BIOL 2110 Catalogue Description:  Immersion in the ecology, natural history, and politics of Yellowstone National Park (YNP).  It is aimed at educating students on scientific facts that may complement their writing.  Concentration is on plant, animal and fungus identification, natural history, animal behavior and ecology.  Political issues in the park – for example, snowmobile use, bison control, wolf restoration – are also discussed.

PEAC 2084 Catalogue Description:  Daily hikes on trails of easy to moderate difficulty in YNP.

Prerequisites:  English 1020 and Biology 1010 or permission of instructors; alert senses; ability to hike moderate (5-12 mile) distances over uneven terrain; discipline to independently complete course requirements before and after class meets.

Course Fee:  Nonrefundable advance course fee of $400 covers meals and lodging.
General Objectives/Outcomes:
• to view the natural world as a source of inspiration for “exploratory and reflective” writing
• to enhance our appreciation of the beauty of language and science
• to immerse ourselves in the range of literature that falls into the nature writing category
• to stimulate “exploratory and reflective” writing that “fuses” art and science
• to recognize writing, reading, and discussion as interrelated activities

Specific Objectives/Outcomes:
• to actively participate in daily hikes, discussions, and writing activities
• to keep a field journal to record detailed observations of the natural world with the “naked” and the “imaginative” eye and for various additional writing and reading exercises
• to acquire and apply the elements of creative verse and prose
• to acquire knowledge in regard to the natural history, ecology, and politics of YNP
• to demonstrate the ability to juxtapose literary, scientific, and philosophical discussions in writing
• to apply the above to the development of a nature writing portfolio submitted on time

Methods: Mini-lectures, discussions, reading and writing activities, and guest speakers.

Required Texts, Readings, and Materials
• Spiral-bound field journal
• See attached pre-class readings and assignments (additional readings distributed during class)
• See attached list of “What to Bring”

Office Hours: The instructors will not keep office hours this summer but will be happy to schedule an online or telephone conference at a mutually convenient time to assist with any questions or concerns.

Disabilities: Anyone with a known or suspected disability that may prevent the fullest expression of abilities should contact the instructors before class meets to discuss accommodations.

Medical Conditions: Anyone with a known or suspected medical condition must contact the instructors before class begins.

Last Date to Change to Audit Status or Withdraw from Class: Last day of class.

Students’ Rights and Responsibilities: All are expected to treat others in the class and their opinions with civility and respect, to avoid language or behavior that disrupts or dampens individual or class spirit. Please refer to the CC Student Conduct and Judicial Code (in the CC Catalog and Student Handbook) regarding students’ rights & responsibilities.

Chain of Command: If you have any problems with this class, first contact the instructors in order to solve the problem. If you are not satisfied with the solution offered by the instructors, please take your problem through the appropriate chain of command, starting with the department head, then the division chair, and lastly the vice president for academic affairs.

Academic Dishonesty: Plagiarism is defined as failure to credit the source of borrowed information or ideas; failure to place another’s exact words within quotation marks, copying or buying someone
else’s material or work and presenting it as your own; distorting or misrepresenting someone’s material or thoughts through a sloppy paraphrase or an incomplete direct quote; inaccurately presenting a source’s name or bibliographic information. If you have doubts as to what constitutes plagiarism, contact the instructors before you submit questionable material. Evidence of plagiarism may result in failure of the paper, failure of this class, and possible disciplinary action by the college. See attached documentation guidelines.

Weather Forecast: Spring weather in Yellowstone is highly unpredictable and subject to extremes. Early mornings will be cold, with temperatures near or below freezing. By mid-morning, we may find ourselves hiking in pleasant 70-degree weather. When afternoon mountain storms roll in, cold rain, hail, and snow are all possible. Therefore, it’s smart to dress in protective layers that can be easily donned and removed throughout the day. Carefully review the “What to Bring” checklist.

Instructor Disclaimer: Hiking in Yellowstone presents risks not usually present in the traditional classroom, given the presence of large animals (bison, moose, bear, etc.); the absence of man-made physical barriers designed to protect against the elements (lightning, snow, ultra-violet rays, etc.); and the natural obstacles strewn along the trail (downed trees, tree roots, or boulders poised to twist or break an ankle, etc.) In other words, you participate in this class at your own risk and we, your instructors, absolve ourselves of any and all responsibility should you hobble home in a leg cast; stumble into a boiling mud pot; become disoriented from a lightning strike or baseball-sized hail; suffer first degree sunburn or a painful buffalo goring, etc.

Field Journal: Your field journal is an important part of this class. “Journal,” derived from the Latin word “journie,” is a record of the day’s travels and of your intellectual and imaginative work. The journal is where you record, in an honest and informal fashion, all of your notes, observations, inferences, impressions, reflections, musings, sketches, and responses (to surroundings, assigned texts, writing prompts, mini-lectures, discussions, etc.) Your journal should provide the raw material for your portfolio. The instructors will not ask to see your journals because we want you to be free to honestly explore your thoughts, without censoring yourself in any fashion. Go ahead, write down that bizarre thought and see where it leads. It may lead to something brilliant.

Audience for Portfolio Assignments: Consider yourself the initial audience for everything that you write. (If what you write doesn’t engage, surprise, move, or satisfy you -- first and foremost -- it isn’t likely to achieve as much with readers!) The final audience -- to be considered during revision -- consists of the rest of the class, a group of educated and inquisitive adults who should be happy with a semi-formal register in prose and with whatever register best fits the speaker in your poems.

Late Work: No late work will be accepted.

IMPORTANT: After developing, revising, and polishing your best work within the following categories, submit your material in portfolio form on or before Friday, July 14th. All work must be typed and double-spaced (poetry may be single-spaced) and must include a return email and current snail mail address. Submit portfolios online both as a single attachment and as a document pasted into an email (in case the attachment doesn’t “fly”) to trasmuss@caspercollege.edu and wrobins@caspercollege.edu; request confirmation from both instructors that materials have been received.
Points Possible and Evaluation Guidelines

Pre-course materials (bring to class)
10 pts. – Two Copies of an Outline of Select Chapters of McClanahan
10 pts. – Quiz over “Introduction” handout.
Participation Points -- 12 Copies of Creative Nonfiction Essay (draft in progress)

Course Portfolio Materials – Submitted online on/or before Friday, July 14th
40 pts. -- Two Longer Creative Nonfiction Essays, min. of 1000 words each (20 pts. each)
40 pts. -- Four Shorter Prose Pieces, 250-750 words each (10 pts. each)

The above essays and prose pieces will be evaluated for material (a clear and interesting focus that incorporates both the “naked” and the “imaginative” eye, that both enlightens and informs through the juxtaposition of literary and scientific understandings to ultimately reveal something about the human condition), organization (a smooth flow through the use of transitions and the repetition of key words or ideas), expression (sentence rhythm and variety; precise and accurate diction; fresh and colorful imagery; appropriate tone), and professional presentation (grammar, spelling, punctuation, etc.)

40 pts. -- Five Poems, 15 line min. each (8 pts. each)

Poetry will be evaluated for sound (including meter and line breaks) & sense (particularly precise and accurate diction, imagery, originality, and impact), for how well it incorporate the elements of poetry covered in the “Poetry Guidelines” handout; and for its professional presentation (editing.)

10 pts. – Course Evaluation, 500 word min. (Letter)

Other

50 pts. – Daily Attendance and Participation
Daily attendance and full participation are expectations. You begin the course with the full 50 points. If you are not present at a scheduled meeting or van departure time, you lose a whopping 10 points, and, yes, the van will leave without you. Ill-preparedness, as evidenced by an inability to participate in any assigned activity (to discuss a reading, share your findings from a research or writing exercise, etc.), will also result in the loss of 10 points. Each evening, you should be prepared to “sing for your supper” and to “teach us all something interesting,” as follows:

1) share a draft-in-progress of a poem or prose passage that demonstrates the work of the “imaginative eye,” and

2) share at least one interesting scientific fact or phenomenon gathered from one or more field guides (visuals welcome), along with any related observations and/or inferences that demonstrate the work of the “naked eye.”

The above two may be juxtaposed in a single passage.

200 Total Points Possible
PRELIMINARY SYLLABUS to be completed BEFORE the class meets:

Day One: Read the first five chapters in McClanahan’s Word Painting. Annotate as you read by 1) highlighting key passages, and 2) writing notes in the margins regarding the meanings of any new words or difficult passages, your responses to disputable passages, or simply gut responses. Don’t worry about completing the exercises at the end of each chapter. Type an outline covering the chapter’s major points, your responses to the following questions, as well as any memorable passages. (Maximum length: four typed pages.)

Chapter 1 – What is Description? Identify and define the three parts of the “story-telling tripod.” Also, identify the four ways to write effective description.

Chapter 2 – The Eye of the Beholder. How does McClanahan distinguish between the “naked eye” and the “imaginative eye”? What five classifications does she make in regard to the latter?

Chapter 3 – From Eye to Word: The Description. Prepare a list what to do and what not to do in regard to descriptive writing, including explanations for each item.

Chapter 4 – The Nose and Mouth and Hand and Ear of the Beholder. What advice does McClanahan offer in regard to how to incorporate all senses in descriptive writing?

Chapter 5 – Figuratively Speaking: A “Perception of Resemblances.” Begin by sharing McClanahan’s definition of (and distinctions between) figurative language, metaphor, and simile. Throughout this chapter, McClanahan offers generous advice in regard to what does or does not contribute to an effective metaphor. List do’s and don’ts in this regard. Why does McClanahan make a distinction between “fancy” and imagination? Aside from metaphor and simile, identify other common figures of speech.

Bring two copies of your outline of these chapters to class. Finish McClanahan after class.

Days Two and Three: As Rebecca McClanahan states, “One of our duties as writers is to become surprised, to land in a different place from where we planned – a more difficult, provocative place.” Nothing could be truer when it comes to writing an essay, a story, or a poem, for that matter! If nothing surprises in the process of writing about a place or a person or an object, if we have relied solely on the “naked eye” and neglected the “imaginative eye,” we have, in fact, failed in our descriptions, particularly in regard to the nature writing genre. As creative writers, one primary objective must always consist of finding the extraordinary in the ordinary – which necessitates that we not only avoid clichés (tired phrases) in our writing but also clichés in our thinking. In addition, another objective of every creative writer serious about his/her art is to write as honestly as possible. And artistic honesty requires artistic integrity, a sincerity and a willingness to embrace (and not censor) one’s own unique vision and insights. Such honesty is not always easy. More importantly, the results are rarely predictable. Surprisingly, good nature writing, or nonfiction writing in general, contains many of the same elements as good fiction (a short story or novel.)

❖ an opening that hooks or engages the reader.
❖ a setting that reflects and/or influences the narrator
❖ a well-rounded (non-stereotypical) narrator or character who wants something
❖ in the process of pursuing that something, the narrator or character encounters external or internal conflict that moves the piece forward
❖ effective description that brings the narrator or character(s), the setting, the actions, the language, and the story, itself, to life by showing rather than telling
❖ a carefully crafted structure to keep readers oriented (rather than confused as to time and place and how they arrived at point B from point A)
❖ a provocative conclusion, often an image that shows rather than words that tell
that element of surprise covered above (surprise can be achieved not just through how you handle description, such as an original metaphor, but through your handling of setting, conflict, structure, and theme)

● insight into the human condition (theme)

Remember, good nature writing connects our observations of the natural world to observations regarding ourselves or others. If we focus only on the external world and fail to explore our inner worlds, our efforts will inform, much as an encyclopedia does, but will never enlighten (lead us to any new level of understanding.) Nature writers want to accomplish both.

Now it’s time for some free-writing in your journal. Free-writing is uninhibited stream of consciousness writing. Free-writing is honest and raw and uninterrupted. Don’t pause to think about what you’re writing. Don’t worry about spelling or grammar or structure or length. Just keep writing and let your thoughts leap where they may. In other words, if you start off talking about a childhood friend who taught you how to burn ants on the sidewalk with a magnifying lens and you end up talking about the secret love of your life in your college algebra class, that’s okay.

Journal Entry #1 – Read “Buckeye” by Scott Russell Sanders – paying careful attention to how this essay evolves and circles back upon itself: from a discussion of a buckeye, to the author’s father and his carpentry skills, to the Ohio woods and the many species of trees, to the author’s growing love for the earth, to his grief over an earth marred and a father lost, to his move and subsequent return to his native woods, to a spiritual reunion with his father. Freewrite on a particular experience or series of experiences with someone from your past (parent, neighbor, teacher, author, etc.) who acquainted you with some element of the natural world and, in so doing, continues to affect your attitude towards nature in some profound or surprising way.

Journal Entry #2 -- Read Wright’s excerpt from Black Boy. Freewrite your own collection of nature images and memories from your past. These may be drawn from various settings or a single place. Is there a place where, where, like Sanders, you “came to consciousness,” where you “fell in love with the earth” or acquired some different aesthetic towards nature? Do any of these memories still resonate today?

Day Four: Journal Entry #3 – Read “Natural Disasters” by Natalie Angier and, in the spirit of Angier’s essay, explore specific face-to-face experiences with the natural world, including at least one experience that triggered an unexpected emotional response. In other words, don’t write about the time you were (predictably) frightened by a rattlesnake on the trail but, instead, write about the time when, for example, a rattlesnake made you jealous or a bat struck you as an object of great beauty.

Day Five: Journal Entry #4 – Read David Quammen’s “The Same River Twice” and journal on how the author is able to juxtapose three seemingly disparate subjects – a philosophical discussion of Heraclitus, a scientific discussion of pteronarcys californica, and a personal discussion of his friendship with two people – into one unified essay.

Essay Assignment: In looking over your earlier journal entries, do any passages hold promise for further development through a similar kind of juxtaposition? Which passages hold the greatest potential for further development by both the “naked” and the “imaginative” eye? Which passages most surprised you as you were writing? Develop your selected journal passages into an essay. Think about all you have learned from McClanahan about good description as you revise. Would it add to your essay to add a few more examples, share a few more anecdotes, incorporate
more research? Bring 12 copies of this essay-in-progress to Yellowstone for your classmates and teachers to workshop.

**Days Six through Ten: “Classic” Nature Writing and Journal Exercises**

**Thoreau, Henry David.** “Walking” from *Walden Pond.* “In Wildness is the preservation of the World.” **Journal Entry #5:** Discuss Thoreau’s views regarding the effects of a “pure animal existence”; his concerns regarding the adverse effects of the destruction of the wild; and his call for more “wild” vs. “tame” literature by writers with uncensored imaginations.

**Thoreau, Henry David.** “Solitude” from *Walden Pond.* “There can be no very black melancholy to him who lives in the midst of Nature and has his senses still.” **Journal Entry #6:** Do you agree or disagree with Thoreau’s views regarding solitude and regarding his belief that nothing can bring one down in nature.

**Hudson, W.H.** “The Return of the Chiff-Chaff.” -- “Is there no escape, then, from this intolerable sadness – from the thoughts of springs that have been, the beautiful multitudinous life that has vanished?” **Journal Entry #7:** Compare Hudson’s view of the effects of nature to Thoreau’s views in “Solitude” and Emerson’s view in his “Introduction.” Explore the question of whether nature affects our moods or we project our moods upon nature.

**Emerson, Ralph Waldo.** “Introduction,” “Chapter I,” and “Chapter III” of *Nature.* “Nature always wears the colors of the spirit.” **Journal Entry #8:** How does Emerson define nature? Does this definition in any way contradict the passage quoted in the last sentence? How does Emerson describe “the lover of nature”? Any parallels here to McClanahan? In regard to beauty, the author claims that it can be found in what three realms? Why might some find the author’s conclusion controversial?

**Burroughs, John.** “The Gospel of Nature.” -- “To enjoy understandingly. . . is the great thing to be desired.” **Journal Entry #9:** Burroughs feels what is missing in classroom lessons on nature? How does he view natural processes? How does he differ from Emerson in regard to nature’s inherent qualities? How does he distinguish between the religious devotee and the naturalist?

**Burroughs, John.** “A Sharp Lookout” from *Signs and Seasons.* “One secret of success in observing nature is capacity to take a hint. . . .”; “man can have but one interest in nature, namely, to see himself reflected or interpreted there. . . .” When in Yellowstone, demonstrate your ability “to take a hint” by drawing inferences and recording them in your journal.

**Additional readings and a host of writing prompts will be distributed during class.**

**POST-YELLOWSTONE READINGS**

Read the rest of McClanahan’s book, regarding

**Character Development in Chapter Six** -- “We establish characters by direct physical description, by our choice of sensory and significant details about the character and his surroundings, and through description of a character’s movements and speech.”

**Pt. of View in Chapter Seven.** Pay particular attention to the notes on 1st person narration.

**Description of Setting in Chapter Eight.** Pay particular attention to ways to organize descriptions of setting and to the following point: “Even the most static story – one in which the character remains in the same location physically and mentally – requires us to describe more than one setting.”

**Plot and Narrative in Chapter Nine.** “Description shapes the narrative line by lending immediacy to scene and summary, controlling the pace of our story, and modulating narrative tension.”

And, finally, the “big picture” in Chapter Ten, paying particular attention to the section on the “big ear”: “When all is said and done, we want our descriptions to add up to something. No, not just add *up to.* We want to create something that’s more than the sum of its parts.”
What to Bring to Class

- required course texts, this syllabus, and all advanced readings
- spiral-bound field journal (w/completed pre-class entries) and several pens
- typed outline of first five chapters of McClanahan’s book
- 12 copies of essay-in-progress
- a good dictionary and thesaurus
- comfortable, lightweight backpack
- toiletries, bath towel, and washcloth (towels are limited in cabins)
- heavy socks and two pairs of comfortable, worn-in hiking shoes
- warm clothing (think layers!), waterproof jacket, hat, lightweight gloves
- case of bottled water or water bladder to refill daily
- favorite snacks/refreshments/coffee (each cabin is equipped with a coffee pot but no coffee)
- cash for incidentals (Terry occasionally stops for ice cream after a hike)
- curiosity, imagination, wonder, and enthusiasm

Additional Items to Bring/Keep/and Restock Daily in Your Backpack

- field journal and several pens
- Mathews’ text
- Ziploc baggies, toilet paper (we don’t leave anything on the trail)
- bottled water (4-6 bottles per day)
- hat and sunglasses
- pocket rain poncho (available at K-Mart for a few bucks)
- extra pair of socks and extra shoelaces
- if necessary for medical reasons, sealed snacks
- Course Trail Readings and Exercises Packet (provided)
- Additional flora, fauna, and tracking guides (provided)
- binoculars (provided)
- hand lens (provided)

Optional Items

- sunscreen
- insect repellent
- camera
- bear repellent (must be sealed in Ziploc baggie at all times except on the trail!)
- slip on shoes for traveling between the cabins and the lodge (think mud)

The instructors will carry a first-aid kit.
STUDENT CONTACT INFORMATION

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