"That Ain't No Wilderness, That's My Backyard!"
Connecting Students with the Natural, Built, and Human Environments

Patricia Tarry-Stevens

In Annie Dillard's *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*, she writes in the first chapter, "I am no scientist. I explore the neighborhood. An infant who has just learned to hold his head up has a frank and forthright way of gazing about him in bewilderment. He hasn't the faintest clue where he is, and he aims to learn" (11). This unit approaches that idea of making students really look at their neighborhoods again, becoming backyard observers. Too many adolescents believe they live in a world that is not within their control or power to change. By beginning to observe their immediate environments (the natural, built, and human factions of those environments), students will hope-fully engage in a lifelong process of responsible interaction with their environments. By coming into contact with nonfiction, poetry, and film that present natural, built, and human elements of an environment, students may be better able to connect and thus convey their own clearer understandings of their "backyards." Through discussion, their own essays, and poetry, students may indeed start to look at their backyards as something more than merely "there."

The Academic Setting

Highland High School's student population (about 2,000 students in grades 9-12) in Albuquerque, New Mexico, is one of the most diverse in the state of New Mexico. No one ethnic group comprises the majority of students. The last percentage count of students was something like this: 35% Anglo, 35% Hispanic, 8% Native American, 5% African-American, 4% Asian American and a mixture of ethnic groups making up the remainder. At any given time, it is possible to hear several languages being spoken readily at the school; in just the past year, I have had students in my classes who fluently spoke Spanish, Tagalog, Chinese, Vietnamese, Bosnian, Hindi, and, of course, English.

The economic make-up is also very diverse; there are students from the wealthier sections of the area, recent refugees from Cuba and Bosnia, and then, students living in the "war zone." We have students whose parents graduated from Highland (now the oldest existing high school in the city), but a growing number of students who move frequently throughout the city and the U.S., sometimes once or twice a year. We have a small but active group of students whose parents are in the Air Force, moving almost every four years. Unfortunately, less than half of the incoming ninth graders will graduate with their class four years later. (Much of this is due to transfers to other schools as well as those who drop out to work or get their GEDs).

Academically, there is also a wide mixture. The majority of our incoming ninth

graders read several years below grade level, yet each year we have National Merit finalists. Our students who take the AP exams continually rank high city-wide. In any average English class, a teacher will have students reading at all levels, including newly-arrived immigrants who speak almost no English. Obviously, because of these diverse backgrounds, students bring a plethora of different (and sometimes differing) information to any text. Too often, if students aren't in the Honors English program (usually only 100 students in every class), they tend to be aliterate (readers who choose to be non-readers) and non-writers. This unit attempts to connect their readings and writings to the one thing that is most immediate — their own environments, even if those environments smack of urban sprawl, techno-laden living rooms, and constant noise.

Background

This particular unit revolves around a fairly specialized teaching situation: an English 10/Environmental Science block of classes. However, these ideas and projects could be taught or adapted to any secondary language arts classroom. The choice of nonfiction and poetry may differ with individual teachers and available materials, but the writing exercises and observational tasks can be used almost anywhere. (Because nonfiction/essay, poetry, and anthology choices differ greatly in schools, several choices will be given with the same general focus in each area).

General Goals

The general objectives of this unit are to acquaint students with nonfiction, poetry and film that lead to questions about the natural, built, and/or human elements of an environment. Many of the writing exercises will make students more observant of "their own backyards," but really show them how all parts of their environment interact to make their "home." Lilace A. Mellin, who teaches at The Outdoor Academy of the Southern Appalachians, believes that "nature writing" is one of the best ways to start talking about the many issues in which teenagers are involved: "Much of this writing frankly addresses the issues of place and belonging and is accessible to adolescents – who can feel intimidated by texts which are filled with complicated vocabulary, an archaic voice, and/or literary allusions" (80). Allowing students to examine their own backyards and cities legitimizes the importance and the

power of personal observation. The literary work and film study covered in the class will also complement the scientific work in the students' Environmental Science class. This unit promotes careful observation, analysis of literature, and varied and creative venues for student writing. Students will come to realize that even their own backyards have a cornucopia of delights for those who will be patient enough to watch and study, that even teenagers have a place in their environment. As Ralph Waldo Emerson said, "nature and books belong to eyes that see them" (qtd. in Leavitt and Sohn, Introduction).

This language arts unit brings students to a clearer understanding of that

interconnectedness in their own worlds, in essence to make students better observers of their environment. Not only does Albuquerque have an advantage with so many different "natural" environments to observe and study, but students in New Mexico have grown up with the three major cultures impacting the state's environment: the Native American, the Hispanic, and the Anglo. Each culture's impact can be seen in architecture, food, language, customs, economies, and literature. This leads to a myriad of opportunities for discussing and writing about different environments.

Narrative

Interdisciplinary Literature and Science

In my particular block-teaching situation, the reading and writing of environmental issues helps students integrate the science curriculum into everyday observation, and at the same time incorporate literary themes into their readings. The same topics from the environmental science class (e.g., predator-prey, atomic energy, biomes, indigenous people) are being addressed in the English classroom through nonfiction and poetry. The variety of nonfiction and poetry used in the unit will be the beginning step to broaden students' own backgrounds and knowledge of what the term "environment" really means.

For a long time now, interdisciplinary studies have been proposed for high schools. Logistically, it is sometimes difficult to manage, but almost no one disputes the increased learning, for both students and teachers, that occurs (Gardner and

Southerland, Mellin, Tchudi and Lafer, Westcott and Spell). For teachers, it is a chance to "grow in the process, sensing the richness that different perspectives bring to a subject" (Gardner and Southerland 34). Although English and Environmental Science seem like an odd union, the two types of learning can mesh together nicely. In their article, "Tearing Down the Wall: Literature and Science," Westcott and Spell give a similar observation: "The common thread that holds imaginative works and scientific works together is a celebration of the sense of wonder and awe that comes with addressing big questions…" (70). Tchudi and Lafer in their article about interdisciplinary curriculums give the example of using a poem by Bill Cowee about the mining operations in their area and the mercury problem that presently exists due to these same mines. Tchudi and Lafer believe that the best learning experience "…is to frequently make use of poetry and prose that touch the local scene and/or deal directly with local issues" (23-4). When college instructors, Susan Gardner and Sherry Southerland wrote about four faculty members who devised an inter-disciplinary course of English and science at the college level, they concluded that "the interconnectedness of nature [with scientific disciplines] came through clearly to students. They appreciated the use of examples from everyday life, the importance of personal learning..." (34-5).

An emphasis on easily-understood details is the one criterion that drives the choice of content. If we truly want students to become "backyard" Thoreaus, we need to

give them several different styles and formats through which to relate experiences and observations but at the same time not completely overwhelm them with complex philosophies and difficult vocabulary. Mellin believes that "much of the good nature writing now is nonfiction based on the author's life experiences – stories of real individuals dealing with real questions of place" (81). She describes a workshop she attended led by the eco-theologian and historian, Thomas Berry. He began the workshop by asking three questions: "Where are we? How did we get here? What can we do about it?" (81). These are also the three questions that guide this unit. Mellin furthers adds in this article, "Helping Adolescents Make It Home" that "without a sense that they belong, that they are important to the group, young people have no reason to act responsibly, no motivation to learn…" (81). All content chosen for such a unit, whether it be in conjunction with an environmental science curriculum or not, should be weighed with these ideas in mind.

Judging which literature to use in this kind of science-English block leads to a myriad of choices. "Good literature does not necessarily contain the best science; good science does not necessarily inspire the best literary art" (Westcott and Spell 72). With environmental literature, is the aim, as Susan Fenimore Cooper claims in *Rural Hours*, "to persuade a careless, indolent man to take an interest in his garden, and his reformation has begun" (qtd. in Buell 31) or is it to understand the "external and interior landscapes" that Barry Lopez speaks of for modern man (qtd. in Buell 83)? What most educators believe today is that no matter what the result, "a curriculum grounded on students' experiences establishes a linkage between what they already know and what they study" (Gamson et al. 127). Mellin believes, "Issues, as every teacher knows, are not only in the texts. They are in our students" (80).

My Backyard – The Sense of Place

The first line of Theodore Roethke's poem, "The Rose" states, "There are those to whom place is unimportant" (qtd. in Dunn and Scholefield 111), but Roethke continues in his long poem to say just the opposite. So it is with many people. Notice students in a classroom and they soon become possessive of "space" as they unconsciously go to the same desk every day. The editor of an anthology of short stories about youth, appropriately titled *Coming of Age*, says to the reader on the first page of the book: "What adolescent hasn't wondered about his or her place in the classroom, in the grade, in the school—and in the larger world?" (Emra 1). He goes on to say that one of the most universal questions of young people is "What will be my place in this world?" (1) The rationale for teaching some of these questions with environmental literature is to expand the implications of place in the environment.

Hy and Joan Rosner of *Albuquerque's Environmental Story: Toward a Sustainable Community* state in their preface, "May those young people find here that this focus on their own community offers a deep understanding of the interrelationships that are part of their own experience." Lawrence Buell writes of our "comfortable

inattentiveness toward the details of our surroundings" (261). This inattentiveness, Buell believes, is due to "laziness or a desire for security" (261); add to this the pressures of growing up that teenagers are uniquely up against and it becomes even more important to bring high school students back to the environment. Barry Lopez in *Crossing Open Ground* mentions that our modern culture is seeped in "the most insidious of human anxieties, the one that says, you do not belong here, you are unnecessary" (qtd. in Mellin 80). Teenagers, just by being the age they are, can be some of the most displaced and ignored people in society.

The Rosners in *Albuquerque's Environmental Story* talk of the parts of any environment: the natural, the built, and the human. In this unit, nonfiction and poetry will be chosen to highlight each of these areas, as well as "connect" with adolescents. This connection can be made initially either through place recognition or simple themes. The student writings will help to encourage writing for a purpose, heighten observational skills, and hone basic writing abilities. With peer editing, conferencing, and word processing with computer programs, the writing process will also be strengthened. An ending film unit will consolidate many of the ideas presented in the nonfiction and poetry previously read and discussed. As the authors of a current environmental science high school textbook write, "To have any meaning, it [environmentalism] must come down to our personal lives, our lifestyles, and how we personally affect the environment" (Nebel and Wright 13).

Specific Goals

1. Students will read a variety of nonfiction articles from contemporary American writers. (NM Language Arts Standards 2: Students will analyze, understand, and use the connections between Language Arts and other disciplines; and 3: Students will listen to, analyze, evaluate, and react to all forms of oral discourse delivered live and through technology).
2. Students will read a variety of poems that emphasize the natural, the built and the human impact on environment. (NM Language Arts Standards 4: Students will analyze and evaluate knowledge of structural elements including rhetorical devices, figurative, descriptive, and visual language; 7: Students will analyze how language is used to present differing perspectives; and 8: Students will analyze, evaluate, and use social and interpersonal skills to understand and communicate effectively within their own cultures and with the cultures of others).
3. Students will make observations of their own urban environment through journal writings, response writings, observational exercises, and field trips. (NM Language Arts Standards 4: Students will use a variety of study methods appropriately and successfully; and 3: Students

will use print and non-print sources to apply and evaluate options to solve problems and to help meet the challenges of life).

4. Final student writings will include essays and poetry which will be produced into a class book. (NM Language Arts Standards 5: Students will use the most appropriate writing skills to fit a particular purpose by writing on a regular basis; and 10: Students will develop documents and presentations using multiple types of technology).
5. Students will submit writings for further publication to outside sources such as the school's literary magazine, the Albuquerque Journal or Tribune, the Southwest Writers Contest, etc. (NM Language Arts Standards 5: Students will express facts, ideas, and opinions clearly, articulately, and appropriately for a specific purpose or audience; and 6: Students will write legibly and use technology skills to enhance written products).
6. Students will finalize the unit with the viewing of the foreign film, *Pathfinder,* noting how all elements of an environment affect each other and determine humans' responsibilities to a community. (NM Language Arts Standards 3: Students will listen to, analyze, evaluate, and react to all forms of oral discourse delivered live and through technology; and 8: Students will analyze universal themes and patterns in the literature and oral traditions of other cultures; and Students will demonstrate understanding of a variety of different cultural perspectives).

Why Nonfiction?

Many teachers might prefer to teach fiction such as *Nectar in a Sieve* by Indian writer, Kamala Markandaya or even the more well-known *The Good Earth* by Pearl Buck to start the process of students looking at many of the factors that influence a person's environment. Both novels tell the story of farmers in India and China, respectively, and what happens to them and the land when political, natural, and human forces come into contact. Both novels are good choices; they give very personal looks at agrarian lifestyles and what happens to those lifestyles when the changing, technological world collides with those lifestyles. However, at the end of novels such as these, many students still tend to believe that India or China's environment has nothing to do with theirs. And it doesn't need to be this remote; even a story set in Ohio or Nebraska relates little to today's students in the Southwest. Although students learn a lot about a different culture, the environmental issues of culture and resources remain "over there." And, the seemingly insignificant problems of one family in a faraway country are less

dramatic than a *Jurassic Park*-like disaster. Sara Dunn in her introduction to the collection of poems, *Poetry for the Earth*, concurs with this idea. She even states that the "fundamentals of environmentalism – the affective relationships between each of us and our individual surroundings – are lost in the vision of global apocalypse" (xv).

Nonfiction (essays, in particular) also has received a bad reputation, even from literature teachers. Susan Allen Toth in her preface, "Modern Nonfiction" in one current high school literature textbook writes, "Until fairly recently, 'nonfiction' had a negative connotation. It meant whatever was *not* fiction – suggesting that 'nonfiction' was a nonliterary form and a non-art" (qtd. in Anderson et al. 984). The term "essay" is sometimes perceived as synonymous with "boring" even though many teachers can readily show that "nonfiction is rapidly gaining in popularity with young readers" (Culp and Sosa 60).

In the literary canon, nonfiction barely appears, and it is only in the last part of the twentieth century that credit has been given to the quality found in the writings of "nature writing." In a 1986 book review of Barry Lopez' *Arctic Dreams* in the *New York Times Book Review*, the book reviewer pointed out that "allegiance to life…[is] at the heart of nature writing, whether by scientists like…Aldo Leopold or rhapsodists like Mr. Lopez and John Muir. It infuses the fine angry essays of Edward Abbey and the lilting meditations of Annie Dillard, the rage of Farley Mowat…" (qtd. in Anderson et al. 986). Lawrence Buell in *The Environmental Imagination* praises the term "environmental nonfiction" (397) as though it is one genre. He then goes on to show that within that "genre" there is a whole range of writing and purpose. The "aesthetic of relinquishment in the long run fits environmental non-fiction better than lyric poetry and prose fiction" (Buell 168). In other words, if we mean to move from an egocentric view of our environment to an ecocentric one, the parameters of nonfiction are more easily adopted to this purpose than others. With fiction, too much can be egocentric: dialogue, characterization, and action, for example. Today's nonfiction can get students to thinking in ways that fiction doesn't allow. In fact, characters and plot might sometimes confuse students in fictional works as to the real question at hand, at least environmentally. With nonfiction, students *can* get "caught up" too, as in Annie Dillard's *An American Childhood* with her childhood memory of running through the backyards of Pittsburgh, PA. trying to escape an angry motorist after she'd pelted his car with snowballs, or in Jack Kerouac's *Lonesome Traveler* and his first-night fears of a huge shadow in a national park. (Kerouac was sure it was a bear…it was the shadow of a mountain). "Perhaps the commonest attraction of environmental writing is that it increases our feel for both places previously unknown and places known but never so deeply felt" (Buell 261).

The nonfiction used in this unit to help students understand the natural environment will be selections from Annie Dillard's *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*, Gary Snyder's *The Practice of the Wild*, and Mary Austin's *The Land of Little Rain*. For

the built environment, selections from *Semi-Native*, written by Albuquerque's journalist, Jim Arnholz, will be used along with some of Barbara Kingsolver's book, *High Tide in Tucson*. Media and exploitation of nature as a commodity will be discussed with Jennifer Price's chapter in *Flight Maps: Adventures with Nature in Modern America* titled "The Greening of Television." The article "Urban Design" by Manjeet K. Tangri in *Albuquerque's Environmental Story* not only tells about Albuquerque's basic design in urban planning but also gives basic urban design principles and the design process for most cities. The human element will be discussed with Abbey's "Polemic" chapter against tourists in *Desert Solitaire*, essays from Arnholz's *Semi-Native*, and interview excerpts from William Least Heat Moon's *Blue Highways.*

Why Poetry?

Now, after extolling the virtues of nonfiction, it may seem contradictory to add in poetry reading and writing. Poems dealing with any one of the aspects of the environment are a good way to teach any age level students about poetic devices, poetic forms, tone, and language, but they are also a good way to focus in on just one or two ideas. Even though Lawrence Buell states that nonfiction fits environmental literature better than poetry or fiction, for adolescents poetry sometimes makes an easier, quicker connection. To the reluctant reader, poetry, at least as perceived initially, can be less threatening. For example, in Mary Austin's *The Land of Little Rain*, her chapter entitled "The Scavengers" gives vivid descriptions of the buzzards in the California desert. Austin goes on to tell of other scavengers such as crows and coyotes. Austin's text is easy for most students to understand but Mary Oliver's poem "Vultures" gives the same type of vivid description of a predator in about a hundred words. Because of a poem's usual shorter length, students can sometimes more readily grasp the whole. Oliver says in her book, *A Poetry Handbook*, that today's contemporary poetry also sounds familiar because of the language used. "The familiarity of the language itself – not very different from the language that we use daily – gives confidence" (17).

Poetry reading and poetry writing can help students "reperceive the familiar" (Buell 261) and claim a part of place. Young people sometimes *know* a neighborhood, for example, better than the adults who drive in and out quickly. Many tenth graders are on the verge of getting that most coveted of treasures, a driver's license, and hence, soon forget the neighborhood they walked or biked as a child. When Mellin speaks about the students who come to the Outdoor Academy, they arrive frequently disillusioned about their own homes. "The objective of the Outdoor Academy is to teach these students that making a home out of a place takes effort, and that connecting oneself to the land and community can be a strong antidote to the teenage despair they express" (80). Mary Oliver in her poem "Wild Geese" writes, "Tell me about your despair, yours, and I will tell you mine./Meanwhile the world goes on." Oliver and Mellin both realize the "despair" that people may have, but also hope to re-connect these people to the world. In "reperceiving the familiar" (Buell 261) through poems like Oliver's, teenage

readers can become children again, the neighborhood explorers Dillard mentions.

Many of the poems suggested for use in this unit help students identify immediately with the poet or subject. Some of the poems selected for this unit have a desert setting, sometimes even Albuquerque. All of our students daily see the rose-tinted, ever-changing west side of Sandia Crest which rises to 10,000 feet, but the "best environmental writers continually recalibrate familiar landscapes" (Buell 261); thus, the poem "The Sun on Sandia Crest" by Penny Harter may "recalibrate" more quickly than a nonfiction piece about the same place.

But why poetry to help adolescents "recalibrate" and find their sense of place? Mellin says, "It takes effort to make a home, even if you are born into a traditional community where your extended family lives nearby and the local cemetery is filled with your ancestors" (84). In this age when many teenagers are not born into a traditional community, poetry, both reading and writing it, can be that basic source that helps adolescents find their place. The move from rural setting to urban setting which has been fairly constant for the past century in America "breaks down regional ties and many of the responses to this landscape are the same whether the writers live in Albuquerque or in Los Angeles…The cities are signatures for the cultural perceptions of rejection and alienation (Rebolledo 107). Sara Dunn in her intro-duction to *Poetry for the Earth* says that the poems chosen for her anthology will "re-emphasize the concept of environment as constant and contiguous, not a 'bundle of issues' but something all of us experience, in our daily 'toing and froing on the earth', and have a right to some control over" (xv).

Some poems emphasize that interconnectedness mentioned previously; some will introduce readers to new ideas and climes. For the student who likes poetry to begin with, this section of the unit enhances the nonfiction readings. For the student who sees poetry as sweet and syrupy love songs, poems such as Theodore Roethke's "Slug" will have even the most anti-poetry reader smiling.

Why a Foreign Film?

The last part of the unit is something that successfully brings in all of these facets of environment and introduces students to a different culture. The film *Pathfinder* will be viewed in class. Not only does this film introduce students to the Saami people (the Lapps), but it is easy to see how the natural, the built, and the human factions of the environment are inter-related in order for a land and people to survive and prosper. In fact, the issue of what makes one person a part of a community and responsible for his environment is one of the central themes of the film. The old "pathfinder" tells the orphaned teenager, Aigin, about community: "In this way, everything is tied together…with invisible bonds. You cannot tear yourself apart from the whole, but you can lose sight of it; forget you're tied to it" (*Pathfinder).* In a simplistic way, this film can remind students of their place in a community. Film study is also an excellent way to teach new concepts with a media students know well. In "Teaching Film in the 1990s," the author states that a film experience today in the classroom is just part of the "re-emphasis on

importance of the *viewer* in the viewing process" (Fehlman 39).

To make students active viewers, with *Pathfinder* we ask students to watch and observe, to become more adept at seeing details in an environment. At certain intervals, the film can be stopped so students can discuss the natural, the built, and human elements of this ancient community. An added bonus is that because the film is in the Lapp language, students are required to read English subtitles. In most secondary schools, very few exercises or projects concentrate on improving students' reading rates (an overlooked skill). Too many students, because they're aliterate, have the same reading rate that they had in elementary school. This film is an effective way to work on this skill, while at the same time, seeing another example of the interconnectedness that this whole unit explores.

Implementation

As mentioned earlier, I teach an English 10 class in conjunction with an Environmental Science class. As an English class, the basic English 10 competencies are still taught (e.g., perfecting the five-paragraph essay, experiencing different literary genres, understanding literary terms, using critical thinking in writing); however, within that basic framework, my literature choices sometimes differ from the other English 10 teachers. For example, when the Environmental Science teacher teaches the predator-prey unit, I am fulfilling the English 10 competency of reading nonfiction as a genre with the book *Never Cry Wolf* by Farley Mowat. Many times, our assignments and work in both classes complement one another easily. Other times, such as when we read and study Shakespeare, our two "blocked" classes merely become an English class and a science class that happen to be first and second periods with the same group of students.

The Environmental Science teacher begins her course of study with students learning about their immediate environment. These beginning studies include plant and tree identification, the study of biomes (in the school's soccer field), and water and power resources for our area. For the English component at the beginning of the term, some informal and easy observation tasks will be done in the classroom. From there, students will "adopt" an empty lot for six different observational tasks and begin in-depth reading of nonfiction and poetry. The literature read for the unit will follow the order of *Albuquerque's Environmental Story*: the natural, the built, and the human "stories" of our environment.

Specifics of Content

As shown in the narrative section, both nonfiction and poetry chosen should be simple in initial presentation. In other words, extensive background or vocabulary should not be needed for students to understand an author's main intent. This does not exclude increasing students' vocabulary and analytical skills through the process of reading, but it does show an understanding of student skills. Almost all nonfiction and poetry will be read aloud in class; the writing assignments can be

done as homework, if needed. Reading aloud allows for frequent stops for clarification or discussion. Group work with poetry analysis (TRANSFER assignment) needs detailed modeling beforehand and frequent teacher/group interaction during the analysis, at least at first.

The natural environment observable here in Albuquerque, New Mexico provides a myriad of choices for observations and field trips. Not only could students start with their own backyards or nearby parks, but there are three distinct geographical features of the city and its natural environment: the mountains to the east, the river and bosque in the valley, and the west mesa with extinct volcanoes (Rosners). Even a simple observation of the Sandia Mountains would be an easy task for journal writing. "Albuquerque embodies tremendous contrasts. A thriving urban core in essentially rural New Mexico…" (Rosners, Preface). Edward Abbey's chapter "Water" in *Desert Solitaire* is another way to look at that most essential ingredient that we take for granted in our urban desert cities.

Poetry with the natural environment as its main focus abounds. Mary Oliver's poems are almost all good choices to begin the discussion and response writing about the natural environment; "The Sun," "Entering the Kingdom," and "Sleeping in the Forest" are especially good. Native American writer Alice Sadongei writes "What Frank, Martha and I Know About the Desert;" New Zealand writer Mary Ursula Bethell writes "Pause" which shows that all of our human efforts will one day return to the earth. The anthology *Poetry for the Earth* edited by Sara Dunn with Alan Scholefield is an excellent one-book source for many of these poems.

Theodore Roethke's poems "Bat" and "Slug" are good choices to show animals in the natural setting. In fact, "Slug" is actually an ode to a snail, an animal most students loathe to find in their backyards. Roethke, as well as the Chilean poet Pablo Neruda, wrote odes to "common things." "By writing an ode to the 'ordinary," the poet demanded dignity for the commonplace subject, commanding respect for things and people normally denied such respect" (Espada 23). So, without even leaving their backyards, students could begin to observe and write an ode to some creature, some thing that has been previously seen as part of the background. Espada goes on in his article to explain what happens when students write an ode to something in nature: "The Nerudian ode is a lesson in appreciation and students learn to appreciate their own landscape, as well as the people in it" (27-8). Neruda's *Full Woman, Fleshly Apple, Hot Moon* has a whole section of odes in it.

The built environment is as close as students' homes and classrooms. Not only should students know the history of their schools but asking "why" about their communities' structures and designs is also essential. In *Gaia: An Atlas of Planet Management*, the editor points out that every species adapts *to* the pressures of their environment; however, it is the human species only which adapts *their* environment, "overcoming many natural limitations, through the development of technologies and cultures" (Myers 174). Nonfiction choices applicable to this unit

are mentioned in an earlier section; some wonderful poetry selections can be found in the anthology *Reflections of a Gift of Watermelon Pickle* (Eds. Dunning et al.). Some specific titles "Apartment House" by Gerald Raftery, "Sonic Boom" by John Updike, and Dan Jaffe's "Forecast." Some well-known poets have also addressed the built environment with simplicity and beauty, even for objects that are not generally perceived as beautiful. Gwendolyn Brooks takes readers for a view of her urban environment with "A Street in Bronzeville"; Carl Sandburg gives us "Chicago," showing us a city realistically but majestically. William Carlos Williams in his *Selected Poems* has several poems that integrate the built environment with thoughts about nature and mankind, especially poems like "Pastoral." Allen Ginsberg lashes out at the mess humans have created with their 'Love Canals' and 'Agent Orange' in his poem "Homework." With New Mexican poets, students can read Simon J. Ortiz' "Washyuma Motor Hotel" and Peggy Pond Church's "Words for a Spring Operetta in Walgreen's Payless Drugstore" to really bring the images closer to home.

As mentioned earlier, the human impact is especially obvious to New Mexican students. Different cultural groups and their influences to New Mexican life can be seen in the food, architectural designs, and decision-making in the built environment. In Jim Arnholz's essay "What Did He See?" he simply asks what non-New Mexicans truly see when they look at New Mexico. Many nonfiction writers address other human issues with the environment. Barbara Kingsolver looks at living in the Southwest today with her collection of essays, *High Tide in Tucson*; Fabiola Cabeza de Vaca gives readers a wonderful look at the New Mexico eastern plains a hundred years ago. With poetry, New Mexican readers can usually identify with the poetry of Nora Naranjo-Morse in "The Living Exhibit Under the Museum's Portal," Peggy Pond Church's "San Felipe," and the art of making bread in Luci Tapahonso's "All I Want." Other good choices are Gary Soto's "Autumn With a Daughter Who's Just Catching On" and e.e.cummings' "nobody loses all the time." Other poets who do an excellent job of asking humans to question their environments and their lives are Robert Frost, Robinson Jeffers, and William Carlos Williams. These last three poets' works are easily available in most modern American poetry anthologies.

With this unit, nonfiction and poetry choices could easily be substituted with others found in available textbooks. A teacher wanting to implement this unit wants to look at nonfiction and poetry pieces that students can readily identify with, either in theme or location. Articles, especially, should have lots of detail and observation ideas for students to model with their own Empty Lot writings and final essays.

Specifics of Writing Content

Journal and/or response writings are fairly well-known to most language arts teachers. However, with this unit there are some specifics that are suggested. The observation techniques with empty lots are loosely adapted from the ideas of Karen Werkenthin in "Following the Paths of Thoreau and Dillard." While she has her

students read and respond to specific sections of *Walden* and *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek,* the Empty Lot lesson plans in this unit are less dependent on literature for written responses. An observational writing book such as Leavitt and Soln's *Look, Think and Write* is a starting point for short observational writing exercises for students. The writing exercises emphasize looking for details, zeroing in on one section of an environment, and comparing and contrasting objects that are not usually viewed together. Helen Keller once wrote that each university should have a required course called "How to Use Your Eyes" because as she stated, "the seeing see little" (in Leavitt and Soln 17). Photography and even advertisements with contradictory messages are a good way for students to start noticing details.

This whole unit is also an excellent way to incorporate three different types of writing for students to experiment with: transactional, poetic, and expressive (Bishop). Much research supports the fact that most student-produced writing in classes is the transactional type of writing (short essays, book reports, etc.). With the writing assignments in this unit, students will go through expressive and poetic writing before actually producing the transactional writing that Bishop speaks of. Students will keep a response journal, responding before and/or after reading some essays or poetry on topics that will start students redefining environmental phrases. Some of the specific writing assignments are:

1. Students will "adopt" an empty lot in some location that they can observe easily. There will be six different writings required from students that center in on these empty lots. Each writing will draw on students' observations and creativity.
2. Students will write their own observational essays, modeling their format and style after one of the essays read. For instance, when Abbey's chapter, "Polemic: Individual Tourism and the National Parks" from *Desert Solitaire* is used, students could choose the same format for their essays, which is basically to a) present arguments against something in the environment (usually against commercialism), then b) give own proposals to make things better. Satire and social commentary are all appropriate in this format. Students' essays could also just give an interview-style essay similar to Least Heat Moon's *Blue Highways*.
3. With word processing, possibly informal research, and peer editing, students will write their essays. The final results will be "published" in a class booklet.
4. Three different poetic types will be studied: the Question poem, the Ode, and the Imagist Poem. Each student will write at least the Ode and the Imagist poem individually; the Question Poem will be achieved as a class poem. The same publishing process will be used as given in #3.
5. The final discussion and analysis will be centered around the

foreign film *Pathfinder*, the first film made in the Lapp language and an Academy Award nominee for Best Foreign Film. Response journals, group discussions, and evaluative writing will all be incorporated in this film section of the unit

An added part of this unit will be the "publishing" part. The unit could very well be taught with reading articles and poems; then, group or class discussions could extend ideas presented in readings. However, because the students' writings skills at my particular school are even lower (or nonexistent) than their reading levels, it seems paramount to bring student writing into this unit. When New Jersey teacher John A. Ianacone recalls his own adventure back into writing classes, he learned "that writing is physical and real and personal, if it is to be any good at all…that good writing is sap-rise in the midst of concrete" (18). Ianacone returned to his classroom and challenged his students to write daily and write often. "Our students can find that same power…And perhaps, once they have felt the power of words, and heard the rhythm of their own lives sing out, and see others respond to their arguments, then, and only then, can they become confident writers…"(22). And for some reason, writing for an audience – even if it's only a class of tenth grade students – is reason enough to write more and better. "Classmates applaud each other, help each other edit and revise, and listen to each other seriously" (Dow 86).

A class-produced book of essays and poetry is easy enough now in this day of computer technology. In almost any English class, with students at all degrees of abilities, there will be students who will want to be in charge of layout, design, cover, etc. And with even the most hardened, "sophisticated" students, rapt attention is given the minute *their* writing is shared, even if it is given out in a simple card-stock covered "book" stapled in one corner. "Class publication of student work can be one of the easiest and most satisfying ways of letting students undertake the full range of writers' activities from process to product" (Bishop 58). The mere production of students' works in a compiled format gives more credibility. From a science perspective, "through writing, students are forced to pull together multiple interpretations of a physical event, thus learning the scientific concept in a more meaningful manner" (Gardner and Southerland 31). With the computer literacy requirements mandated by most states, this type of publication meets many objectives. So, for our block of English 10 and Environmental Science, the publication of student writings is threefold: 1) to write about some of the environmental issues taught in a science class as they relate to the issues discussed in environmental writings by contemporary American writers, 2) give students worth and ownership of their own writing, and 3) to make them writers for a purpose.

Time for the entire unit varies because some of the activities really could continue all term. If at all possible, observation of the empty lots should be done for an extended amount of time to allow students different seasonal observations. Since our school is on the 4 X 4 block with 90-minute classes, the unit might be

interspersed with another unit during the semester (for us, nine weeks). The nonfiction readings, poetry analyses, and writing usually would be 3-4 weeks in length.

Lesson Plans

#1 *Introduction to the Natural, Built, and Human Environment* An easy and fun way to start this whole unit (and to get students writing from the onset) is the Question Poem. At the beginning of class, there should be three big sheets of paper on the walls of the room with labels of "Natural", "Built" and "Human." Explain briefly about these three elements of any environment. Then go into the poetry section. Chilean poet, Pablo Neruda, wrote *The Book of Questions*; give students some of Neruda's poetic questions, such as "What's the name of the flower that flies from bird to bird?/Have you wondered what color April is to the sick?/How do the seasons discover it's time to change shirts?" Then give about ten minutes of quiet time for students to write their own questions. Caution them only to avoid questions with an obvious yes or no answer.

Have students choose their favorite two or three questions, decide which area the questions "belong" to, and with large markers add them to the sheet. In this way, the class will end up with a Question Poem about the natural, the built, and the human environment. Later, with all student papers turned in, the teacher can select one question from everyone's paper to create the class's Environmental Question Poem.

The evaluation for this is merely participation and it's almost assured from each student because it's fairly non-threatening and easy. This meets NM Language Arts Standard 5: Students will analyze, develop, write, and participate in poems. (This exercise was adapted from Deborah Cummins' "Questions We Didn't Know We Wanted to Ask…Using Neruda.")

#2 The Empty Lot Observational Journal

Students should "adopt" an empty lot, one that they can observe freely and frequently. The journal observations should be written in this order: 1) Give a basic description of your empty lot. What does it look like? What kind of vegetation, terrain, purpose? Include exact directions for teacher to locate empty lot, if needed; 2) Describe your lot only in colors. Be specific, using analogies and similes when necessary. Use at least ten colors; 3) Imagine you're a small child on the lot. Why are you there? What do you see? Hear? What scares you? What interests you?; 4) Imagine your lot as it might have been 100 years ago. Who/what was there? What is terrain? Vegetation?; 5) Predict what your lot will look like in 100 years. Why?; 6) Write about a person lying on his/her back on your empty lot. Why is he/she there? What is he/she thinking?

Evaluation requires that students write on each of the six subjects given with a length of ½ page to full page for each, depending on teacher's specifications. Each

journal should be graded holistically and kept in their writing journals. This meets NM Language Arts Standard 2: Students will analyze, understand, and use the connections between Language Arts and other disciplines; Standard 5: Students will express facts, ideas, and opinions clearly, articulately, and appropriately for a specific purpose; and Standard 7: Students will evaluate and interpret print and non-print materials from a variety of perspectives. (This exercise was adapted from "Following the Paths of Thoreau and Dillard" by Karen Werkenthin in the *English Journal*.)

#3 TRANSFER Group Poetry Analysis

After reading one poem or even several poems with similar themes, assign this group analysis exercise. Students may get into their own groups, no larger than four people, and work on the TRANSFER for only one poem. **One** group paper per group is required, but students should be sure to put all names on the same paper to get credit. Appoint a Leader, a Facilitator, and Recorder(s). If the group has four students in it, one person should record the first four questions, the second recorder should write the last four. The Leader of the group should be directing the group discussion, making sure that all members are heard, appropriate decisions on analysis are made, and concise answers are given to the recorder. The Facilitator keeps track of time. If the teacher gives only 40 minutes, this student should be adding to the discussion as well as watching time spent on each question. The basic steps follow each letter of the word "transfer" in order to "receive further meaning" from the poet.

T = Look at **title** of poem. Before you read the poem, what did you think the title would be about, just from the title? Were you confused initially? Explain. After reading the poem, does the title bring the poem into focus? Explain. **R** = Briefly explain the **reading situation**. Did teacher read the poem aloud? Did another student? Did you read it silently? **A** = What is the **attitude** (tone) of the poet? Is the poet the speaker of the poem or are the poet/speaker different? Explain. Does the attitude of the speaker change in the poem? **N** = Give the **noteworthy line or words**. Choose the one line from the poem that best sums up the poem's meaning. Tell some of the most important words? Do you see any words repeated? Any unusual choice of words? Give some poetic devices such as metaphors, personifications, alliteration, etc. **S** = Choose three examples of **symbolism.** Look at colors, animals, weather, etc. **F** = What is the **form** of the poem? Metered? Free verse? An ode, a lyric, a sonnet? **E** = **Evaluate** the poem. Did your group overall like the poem? Why or why not? Is it relevant? Why/why not? **R** = **Reread** poem. Have someone in your group reread the poem aloud to your group. What new insights do you have?

With guided practice, students can become more astute with their analyses. With this exercise, the most important thing to watch for is that all students in a group are contributing. Students should be writing more with each TRANSFER. Completeness of answers should be taken into account when grading. Each student

in a group receives the same grade. These group exercise meets NM Lang. Arts Standard 4: Students will analyze and evaluate knowledge of structural elements including rhetorical devices, figurative, descriptive, and visual language. (This exercise is modified from a similar assignment given at an AP-NM English workshop.)

#4 Pathfinder - *Viewing of a Foreign Film*

Review the genre of legends (this one is 1,000 years old). Because most students have studied legends in before, this usually just requires a quick review of the elements in a legend. Give students some background to the Saami (the Lapps) today. The 88-minute film does contain violence and brief nudity but students relate immediately to it because of the teenage protagonist, Aigin, and the compelling action. Because of the added element of reading subtitles, it is best to stop the film at the natural breaks, usually when the scene changes. At each break, the teacher should ask students to identify the natural, built, and human elements seen in the film.

Evaluation will be a group analysis of incorporating their knowledge and observation about environment to this film and a test with paragraph essay questions. This meets NM Standard 3: Students will listen to, analyze, evaluate, and react to all forms of oral discourse delivered live and through technology, and NM Standard 8: Students will analyze universal themes and patterns in the literature and oral traditions of other cultures.

#5 *Response Writings with Edward Abbey's "Polemic" from* Desert Solitaire

Before reading Abbey's chapter "Polemic: Industrial Tourism and the National Parks" from *Desert Solitaire,* have students write a response writing to the following prompts: "Have you ever been to a national park? Describe your experience. How old were you? What did you see? If you haven't been to a national park, which park or forest would you most like to visit? Why?" The section that will be used for this exercise is Abbey's three lengthily-explained proposals toward the end of the chapter. For each proposal, students will respond after each.

After reading proposal #1: "Is this first proposal of "no cars" really workable? Do you agree with Abbey's reasoning? Why or Why not? After reading proposal #2: What in the national parks do you want as minimum requirements for your safety and comfort? Are Americans too high-maintenanced with wilderness? Explain. After reading proposal #3: What do you think the duties of a park ranger today should be? Why? After finishing the chapter: What part of Abbey's polemic do you totally agree with? Why? What do you disagree with? Why?

Each journal writing should be at least ½ page in length if not longer. Journal writings and response writings such as these should be kept in their own section of a notebook and graded at intervals. Grading should concentrate on three areas: a)

answering the question directly, b) using sound reasoning to explain ideas, and c) referring to experiential or literary knowledge to explain.

#6 Advertising and Nature

Have students cut out at least five different advertisements using nature as a setting or backdrop. Then, for each, have them answer these five questions: Name of Product, Type of Product, Nature Slogan or Reference, Implied Message, and Symbolism. Using Jennifer Price's ideas in *Flight Maps*, discuss why nature sells products.

Evaluation should be an oral presentation about findings with the examples of the advertisements used as visual aid. This meets NM Lang. Arts Standard 6: Students will deliver exemplary oral presentations using conventions of correctness and write legibly and use technology skills to enhance written product.

Works Cited

Abbey, Edward. *Desert Solitaire.* New York: Ballantine Books, 1968.

Arnholz, Jim. *Semi-Native*. Albuquerque, NM: UNM Press, 1986.

Anderson, Robert, John Malcolm Brinnin, John Leggett, Gary Q. Arpin, and Susan Allen Toth, Eds. *Elements of Literature*. Orlando, Fl.: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1993.

Austen, Mary. *The Land of Little Rain*. New York: Penquin Press, 1997.

Bethell, Mary Ursula. "Pause" *Poetry for the Earth*. Ed. Sara Dunn. New York: Fawcett Columbine, 1991: 141.

Bishop, Wendy. *Released Into Language: Options for Teaching Creative Writing.* Urbana, Il: National Council of Teachers of English, 1990.

Brooks, Gwendolyn. *Selected Poems of Gwendolyn Brooks.* New York: Harper Perennial, 1963.

Buck, Pearl. *The Good Earth.* New York: Washington Square Books, 1973.

Buell, Lawrence. *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, And the Formation of American Culture*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1995.

Cabeza de Baca, Faviola. *We Fed Them Cactus*. Albuquerque, NM: UNM Press, 1954.

Church, Peggy Pond. *This Dancing Ground of Sky.* Santa Fe, NM: Red Crane Books, 1993.

Culp, Mary Beth and Jamee Osborn Sosa. "The Influence of Nonfiction on Attitudes, Values and Behavior." *English Journal* 82 (December, 1993):

60-64.

Cummins, Deborah. "Questions We Didn't Know We Wanted to Ask." *Luna, Luna: Creative Writing Ideas From Spanish, Latin American, and Latino Literature.* New York: Teachers and Writers Collaborative, 1997: 87-93.

Dillard, Annie. "An American Childhood." *American Literature.* Mission Hills, Ca: Scribner Literature Series, Glencoe Publishing Co., 1989. 859-861.

Dillard, Annie. *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek.* New York: Harper Perennial, 1974.

Dow, Miriam C. "Autobiography: A Course That Never Fails." *English Journal* 85 (October, 1996): 85-88.

Dunn, Sara and Alan Scholefield, eds. *Poetry for the Earth.* New York: Fawcett Columbine: 1991.

Dunning, Stephen, Edward Lueders, and Hugh Smith, Eds. *Reflections on a Gift of Watermelon Pickle…And Other Modern Verse.* Glenview, IL: Scott, Foresman and Company: 1966.

Emra, Bruce, Ed. *Coming of Age: Short Stories About Youth and Adolescence.* Lincolnville, Il: National Textbook Company, 1995.

Espada, Martin. "Ode to Pablo Neruda: Using Neruda's Odes in the Creative Writing Classroom." *Luna, Luna: Creative Writing Ideas from Spanish, Latin American, and Latino Literature*. New York: Teachers and Writers Collaborative, 1997. 22-32.

Fehlman, Richard H. "Teaching Film in the 1990s." *English Journal* 83 (January 1994): 39-46.

Gamson, Zelda F. and Assocs. *Liberating Education.* San Francisco, Calif.: Jossey-Bass Inc., 1984.

Gardner, Susan A. and Sherry A. Southerland. "Interdisciplinary Teaching? It Only Takes Talent, Time, and Treasure." *English Journal* 86 (November 97): 30-36.

Ginsberg, Allen. "Homework." *Elements of Literature*. Eds. Anderson et al., Orlando, FL: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc. 1993. 1135.

Harter, Penny. "The Sun on Sandia Crest" *Saludos! Poems of New Mexico.* Eds. Williams and di Suvero. Salt Lake City, Utah: Pennywhistle Press, 1995: 130.

Heat Moon, William Least. *Blue Highways: A Journey Into America.* New York: Fawcet, 1984.

Ianacone, John A. "Passion and Craft in Writing: Finding a Balance." *English Journal 85 (October 96): 17-22.*

Jaffe, Dan. "The Forecast." *Reflections on a Gift of Watermelon Pickle… and Other Modern Verse.* Eds. Stephen Dunning et al., Glenview, Il: Scott, Foresman and Co., 1966: 117.

Kerouac, Jack. "Lonesome Traveler" *American Literature.* Mission Hills, Ca: Glencoe Publishing, Inc., 655-660.

Kingsolver, Barbara. *High Tide in Tucson.* New York: Harper Perennial, 1996.

Leavitt, Hart Day and David A. Sohn. *Look, Think and Write.* Lincolnville, Il.: National Textbook Co., 1985.

Markandaya, Kamala. *Nectar in a Sieve.* New York: Penquin Books, 1954.

Mellin, Lilace A. "Helping Adolescents Make It Home." *The English Journal* 86 (November 1997): 80-85.

Mowat, Farley. *Never Cry Wolf.* New York: Bantam Books, 1963.

Myers, Norman. ed. *Gaia: An Atlas of Planet Management.* London: Anchor Books, 1993.

Naranjo-Morse, Nora. "The Living Exhibit Under the Museum's Portal" *New Mexico Poetry Renaissance.* Eds. Niederman and Sagan. Santa Fe, NM: Red Crane Books, 1994: 148-9.

Nebel, Bernard J. and Richard T. Wright. *Environmental Science*. Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1998.

Neruda, Pablo. *The Book of Questions*. Port Townsend, WA: Copper Canyon Press: 1991.

Neruda, Pablo. *Full Woman, Fleshly Apple, Hot Moon.* New York: Harper Perennial, 1997.

Oliver, Mary. *New and Selected Poems.* Boston, Mass: Beacon Press, 1997.

Oliver, Mary. *A Poetry Handbook.* New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1994.

Ortiz, Simon J. "Washyuma Motor Hotel" *Elements in American Literature. E*ds. Anderson et al., Orlando, Fl: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1993: 1137.

Pathfinder. Dir. By Nils Gaup. Videocassette. IFEX International, Inc., 1988.

Price, Jennifer. *Flight Maps: Adventures with Nature in Modern America.* New York: Basic Books, 1999.

Raftery, Gerald, "Apartment House." *Reflections on a Gift of Watermelon Pickle*.

Eds. Dunning et al., Glenview, IL: Scott, Foresman and Co., 1966: 39.

Rebolledo, Tey Diana. "Tradition and Mythology: Signatures of Landscape in Chicana Literature." *The Desert is No Lady: Southwestern Landscapes In Women's Writing and Art.* Eds. Norwood and Monk, Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1987: 96-124.

Roethke, Theodore. *The Collected Poems of Theodore Roethke.* Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday and Co., Inc., 1966.

Rosner, Hy and Joan Rosner. *Albuquerque's Environmental Story: Toward a Sustainable Community.* Albuquerque, New Mexico: Albuquerque Conservation Alliance, 1996.

Sadongei, Alice. "What Frank, Martha and I Know About the Desert." *Poetry For the Earth. Ed.* Sara Dunn, New York: Fawcett Columbine: 1991.

Sandburg, Carl. *Harvest Poems*. New York: Harcourt, Brace Jovanovich, 1960.

Snyder, Gary. *The Practice of the Wild.* New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1990.

Soto, Gary. *A Fire in My Hands.* New York: Scholastic, Inc., 1990.

Tangri, Manjeet K. "Urban Design" *Albuquerque's Environmental Story: Toward A Sustainable Community.* Eds. Rosners. Albuquerque, NM: Albuquerque Conservation Alliance, 1996: 59-62.

Tapahonso, Luci. "All I Want" *Saludos! Poems of New Mexico.* Eds. Williams et al. Salt Lake City,Utah: Pennywhistle Press, 1995: 258.

Tchudi, Stephen and Stephen Lafer. "Interdiscriplinary English and the Contribu-

Tions of English to an Interdisciplinary Curriculum." *English Journal.* 86 (November 1997): 21-29.

Updike, John. "Sonic Boom." *Reflections on a Gift of Watermelon Pickle.* Eds.Dunning et al. Glenview, IL: Scott, Foresman and Co., 1966: 79.

Werkenthin, Karen. "Following the Paths of Thoreau and Dillard" *English Journal* (October 1992): 26-29.

Wescott, Warren B. and J. Everett Spell. "Tearing Down the Wall: Literature and Science." *English Journal* 89 (November, 1999): 70-77.

Williams, William Carlos. *Selected Poems.* New York: New Directions Books, 1974.

Student Bibliography

Abbey, Edward. *Desert Solitaire*. New York: Ballantine Books, 1968.

Abbey's stint as a park ranger in Arches National Park, Utah becomes a menagerie of animal vs. man encounters, raft trips, observations on nature and national parks.

Arnholz, Jim. *Semi-Native*. Albuquerque, N.M.: UNM Press, 1986.
Albuquerque journalist Jim Arnholz freely takes aim at such targets as tourists who think it's "just too brown here," and highway construction crews that seem to be everywhere. Many of his columns from the *Albuquerque Journal* appear together in this book, sometimes sarcastic, sometimes sad, but all about the Southwest.

Austen, Mary. *The Land of Little Rain*. New York: Penquin Books, 1903.
This small book is a remarkable view of the desert and foothills between Death Valley and the High Sierras of California. Austen gives loving details to the plants and the animals of this land as well as giving descriptive accounts of some of the people who inhabit the land.

Brooks, Gwendolyn. *Selected Poems of Gwendolyn Brooks.* New York: Harper Perennial, 1963.
Pulitzer Prize winner Brooks brings together some of her best poetry from earlier volumes of poetry in this one. Concentrating on "A Street in Bronzeville," many of her poems go back to childhood in the urban environment.

Buck, Pearl. *The Good Earth.* New York: Washington Square Press, 1931.
In simple words, this story tells the epic tale of one simple farmer in turn-of-the century China. From poverty to wealth, from peace to revolution, Wang Lung is a man who values the earth.

Cabeza de Baca, Fabiola. *We Fed Them Cactus*. Albuquerque, NM: UNM Press, 1954.
Born on a ranch in northern New Mexico, Cabeza de Baca tells the story of the great plains of New Mexico as it was in the 1800's and early 1900's. It is the story of buffalo hunts, rodeos, sheep-herding and the ways of Hispano family life.

Church, Peggy Pond. *This Dancing Ground of Sky.* Santa Fe, NM: Red Crane Books, 1993.
Author of the nonfiction *The House at Otowi Bridge*, this collection of poems by one of New Mexico's finest (she has been called "the First Lady of New Mexico poetry) tells of the remarkable land, the woman's condition in the environment, and the human conditions that face us all.

Dillard, Annie. *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek.* New York: Harper Perennial, 1974.
In the 1970's Dillard decided to make her own Walden-esque journey into rural life with her solitary life and observations at Tinker Creek in Virginia. Filled with anecdotes from artists and scientists, she takes readers through floods, seasons, and her thoughts about nature.

Emra, Bruce. Ed. *Coming of Age: Short Stories About Youth and Adolescence.* Lincolnville, Il: National Textbook Co., 1995.
This anthology of short stories focuses in on the lives of adolescents. Written by

such well-known writers as Sandra Cisneros, Shirley Jackson, Jamaica Kincaid, Gary Soto, Richard Peck, and Amy Tan, these stories are arranged thematically into four parts: Do I Fit in?, Falling in Love, Families and Friends, and Out In the World.

Gillan, Maria Mazziotti and Jennifer Gillan, Eds. *Unsettling America: An Anthology of Contemporary Multicultural Poetry*. New York: Penquin Books, 1994.
A large collection of some of today's minority voices in poetry, expressing many different views and beliefs. Editors chose the best poems that show the basis of cultural conflict in the United States. Poets such as Louise Erdrich, Nellie Wong, Sherman Alexie, Jimmy Santiago Baca, Pat Mora, and many others are included in this moving anthology.

Markandaya, Kamala. *Nectar in a Sieve,* New York: Penquin Books, 1954.
A beautifully-told first person account of Rukmani married to a peasant farmer when she is twelve years old. Throughout the long union, she and her husband are faced with droughts, floods, starvation, and new changes to their simple community when a tannery moves in. Many of the issues of technology in agrarian societies come to this forefront in this bittersweet novel, told in flashback format.

Mowat, Farley. *Never Cry Wolf*. New York: Bantam Books, 1963.
After World War II, Mowat was given the assignment with the Canadian Wildlife Service to travel to the arctic and find out why so many wolves were killing the caribou. His solitary observations and research led to contradictory conclusions. The book did not meet with approval when it was first published because man was depicted as the ruthless killer in nature, not the wolf. Since that time, this account, which is sometimes humorous as Mowat becomes the subject himself for some experiments, is considered one of the "brilliant narratives on the myth and magic of wild wolves."

Neruda, Pablo. *The Book of Questions.* Port Townsend, Washington: Copper Canyon Press, 1991.
This 1991 translated text by William O'Daly bring to life the last volume of Chilean poet Pablo Neruda written before his death in 1973. With both English and Spanish texts, this collection of "questions" is a search for what makes the commonplace beautiful and challenges the reader to think about truth in the form of simple questions.

Neiderman, Sharon and Miriam Sagan, Eds. *New Mexico Poetry Renaissance.* Santa Fe, NM: Red Crane Books, 1994.
With poetry from New Mexican poets like Harold Littlebird with native roots in the state or Joan Logghe, "a New Mexican poet with a Pittsburgh heart," the range here is enormous. Whether the poet be native or recent immigrant to the state, the forty-one poets, each with a page biography and picture, give reflective thinking on a myriad of topics that relate to the Southwest.

Price, Jennifer. *Flight Maps: Adventures With Nature in Modern America.* New York: Basic Books, 1999.
Price declares early in this nonfiction: "I had never planned to become a Thoreau of the mall," but she becomes an acute observer of how America tries to re-connect with nature. She examines early societal events such as pigeon hunts which led to the extinction of the passenger pigeon, birds used in fashion, corporations such as The Nature Company, and television and their depiction of "nature." She adds wit and sarcasm to some of her findings, but all of her "discoveries" are fact-filled.

Williams, Jeanie C. and Victor di Suvero, Eds. *Saludos! Poemas of Nuevo Mexico, Poems of New Mexico.* Salt Lake City, Utah: Pennywhistle Press, 1995.
Claiming to be one of the first bilingual texts of today's New Mexico poets, the editors call it "a sampler" of poems. Over sixty poets contributed to the book's contents with poems from Joy Harjo, E.A. Mares, Nora Naranjo-Morse, and Luci Tapahonso. Some poems concentrate on New Mexican views such as the church at Chimayo and the mesas, while others deal with issues as varied as AIDS and mixed ancestry.