

# Writing the Earth

UHON 222-005 | T R | 11:00-12:15 | SHC 22 | 25068

Fulfills A&S Group V: Humanities

Dr. Ursula Shepherd

*Whether scientists or poets, nature writers make us aware that neither biology nor imagination by itself can illuminate the call of the last American timber wolf, the tossing meadow grasses in a mountain rainstorm, the strangely shining organisms that cruise the deep oceans, or the sweet tumbling notes of a thrush. But both disciplines, working together, may give us a new, more powerful lens of perception." ---Frank Stewart*

This course will introduce you to an array of nature writers and their works and at the same time will provide you the opportunity to produce your own works. We will focus primarily on modern American writers but will also deal with a few great British antecedents: Gilbert White, Darwin, Alfred Russell Wallace. I have chosen a wide selection from the genre: poetry, essays, and longer works of both fiction and nonfiction. We will read these works while at the same time discussing fundamentals of both natural history and biology. In addition to reading and understanding these works, you will keep a nature journal throughout the semester. We will do writing exercises and when weather permits, will work outdoors. From these efforts you will complete a substantive work of your own. You may interpret nature writing as broadly as we do in the course: i.e., fiction, poetry, or essay form will all be acceptable. Generally, your final product will grow from the nature journal and the exercises done in class. The class will take one field trip on a Saturday in early April.

## Readings

A Class Reader to be purchased from the Honors Program

Barbara Kingsolver, *"Prodigal Summer"*

Barry Lopez, *"Desert Notes"*

Terry Tempest Williams, *"Passion & Patience in the Desert"*

Yann Martel, *"Life of Pi"*

Carolyn Forché, *"Creative Non-Fiction"*

## Requirements

In addition to regular attendance and on-going participation in the class, there are several assignments. These include, one in-class presentation on the works of an author of choice, a nature journal kept throughout the semester, and a final written work of fiction, non-fiction, or poetry.

## About the Instructor

Ursula Shepherd received her Ph.D. in Biology at UNM. She also holds an MA in Communication Arts and Social Sciences from the University of the Pacific. She is the author of a book: *Nature Notes: A Companion to the Seasons*, and of several scientific articles. She is currently writing about the southwestern US and is in love with both the desert landscape that surrounds us and the ocean-scape of the Indo-Pacific region where she conducts research on coral reefs.