

Nicole Seymour  
Rachel Carson Center for Environment and Society  
Sample Syllabus

**English 369.01 –  
Minority Traditions  
in American Literature**

**Topic: Environmental Justice**

Time: TR 11-12:15  
Place: Davidson 204  
Spring 2012

Professor Nicole Seymour  
Office: Bingham 312D  
Office Hours: W 11-12:55 and by appt.  
Email: [nicole.seymour@louisville.edu](mailto:nicole.seymour@louisville.edu)

Notes on email: I will likely communicate with the class via email at several points during the semester. **You MUST check your U of L email account regularly (or have it forwarded to your preferred email address).** If you miss class, you are still responsible for any announcements or information imparted, and it is also your responsibility to get any graded assignments back from me when you return.

For these reasons, it may be helpful to know the name and email address of at least two people in this class. You can also contact your classmates through Blackboard. But please don't abuse their goodwill! (See "Attendance" below.)



Photo courtesy of the New Jersey Office of  
Environmental Justice

**Course Description and Student Learning Outcomes**

This course fulfills the first Cultural Diversity requirement (CD1), which aims to help students understand and appreciate cultural diversity. As a 300-level English course, it will also require you to develop your skills in literary analysis, including close reading and argumentation. We will focus on environmental justice – the activist paradigm that insists that experiences of environmental risk are shaped by inequalities of race/ethnicity, class, gender, and sexuality – and study literary and filmic works that emerge from communities of color concerned with this issue.

We will look at a mix of “high literary” texts and more popular ones, especially from the mystery/detective genre. This will allow us to survey a variety of approaches to environmental justice, and to consider the unique capabilities of each approach. In particular, our inclusion of the mystery/detective novel, in that it focuses on epistemological problems, will allow us to consider such questions as, How accessible should environmental justice literature – both fictional and non-fictional – be? How do community expertise, traditional beliefs, and “women’s intuition” function alongside institutional knowledges when it comes to environmental health risks? What kinds of epistemologies (ways of knowing) do environmental risks require, and how do threatened communities and individuals act on their knowledge when larger structural forces seek to suppress it?

**Teaching Statement**

I believe in building classroom communities that are both welcoming and challenging. You,

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the student, play a vital role in this community: your contributions help the rest of us evaluate and develop our ideas. In turn, I ask that you be open to the examination of your own ideas. I also believe that learning should be a transformative experience for all involved; I expect to leave this course with a richer perspective than when I entered, and I hope the same will be true for you.

I practice an inclusive pedagogy: I value differing experiences of and perspectives on religion, sexual orientation, race, class, sex/gender, (dis)ability, and nationality, as well as different approaches to learning. I do, however, reserve the right to challenge any set of beliefs around those issues, and I welcome you to do the same. I pledge to treat all students fairly. I will not tolerate hate speech or harassment of other students inside or outside of this classroom. If you have concerns about the above, please feel free to see me at any time.

### Required Texts

Texts #1-4 and 6 are all available at the U of L bookstore. **You must obtain #5 from Amazon.com, Powells.com or another source.**

1. Octavia Butler, *Parable of the Sower* ISBN-10: 978-0446675505
2. Ana Castillo, *So Far from God* ISBN-10: 0393326934
3. Lucha Corpi, *Cactus Blood* ISBN-10: 1558851348
4. Cherríe Moraga, *Heroes and Saints* ISBN-10: 0931122740
5. Barbara Neely, *Blanche Cleans Up* ISBN-10: 0140277471
6. Karen Tei Yamashita, *Tropic of Orange* ISBN-10: 1566890640

All other readings will be posted on Blackboard. **You must print these out or bring them to class on an electronic device. Likewise, you must bring whichever novel we are currently reading with you to class.**

### Basic Course Requirements (see further details below)

- Reading quiz(zes): 5 points
- Extracurricular activity: 5 points
- Attendance: 10 points
- Participation: 10 points
- Response papers: 20 points
- Mid-term exam: 20 points
- Final exam and essays: 30 points

### Final Grade Scale

100-97: A+	92-90: A-	82-80: B-	72-70: C-	62-60: D-
96-93: A	89-87: B+	79-77: C+	69-67: D+	59-00: F
	86-83: B	76-73: C	66-63: D	

### Participation

Regular verbal participation in class-wide discussion = 10 points; occasional verbal participation = 5 points; infrequent participation or lack thereof = 0 points

### Attendance

3 or fewer absences = 10 points; 4-6 absences = 5 points, 7 or more absences = 0 points\*

\*The only exceptions to this rule are absences owing to religious observance or participation in

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university-sanctioned events and activities (example: if you are an athlete traveling to a game). Please contact me if you will miss class for either of those reasons.

Students who stop attending class without officially dropping before the drop date (see the weekly schedule below) will remain on the class roster, and will receive a grade of “F.” You cannot seek an administrative withdrawal based on poor attendance after this date.

Finally (phew!), we will abide by the University’s Severe Weather Policy. You should sign up for U of L alerts at <http://louisville.edu/alerts> to stay informed; you will receive an email and/or text message if school is cancelled or delayed. In the event of a cancelled class, I will email the class ASAP about revising our schedule. While I would not encourage anyone to travel in unsafe conditions, I cannot excuse weather-related absences if U of L is officially operating.

### **Quizzes**

We will have at least one reading quiz in this class, worth 5 points. A quiz may be given without prior notice. If you have completed the reading and given it some thought, you should do well.

### **Extracurricular Activities**

We will be taking a field trip early in the semester. You will earn 5 points if, before the second-to-last week of class, you report to the rest of us on how this experience has helped you connect to one of our texts. (I will provide time in class for such commentary, but please feel free to pipe up at any time.) If you cannot make the field trip, you are asked to attend or participate in a relevant public/community event over the course of the semester, and to report back to the class informally by the second-to-last week of class. For instance, you might attend an on-campus film screening or a cultural fair.

### **Response Papers**

Response papers (approximately 400 words) should focus on an aspect of the text for that day/week that you find troubling, thought-provoking, challenging, etc. What you write about is up to you, but it should be clear and thoughtful, and it should display your critical thinking skills. I will let you know if you’re not meeting those criteria. Each of the 4 response papers is worth 5 points.

### **Exams**

Further details will be given on the mid-term and final. Both exams will consist of short-answer/multiple-choice-type questions, and the final will consist of short essays that will be completed prior to the in-class exam. You will not be graded on writing, per se, but you should have a decent grasp on how to communicate in a clear, organized manner, and how to argue a point. I highly recommend visiting the Writing Center on campus – [www.louisville.edu/writingcenter](http://www.louisville.edu/writingcenter) – for help.

### **General Policies**

You are being held to the U of L Code of Student Rights and Responsibilities, so please familiarize yourself with it: <http://louisville.edu/dos/policies-and-procedures/code-of-student-rights-and-responsibilities.html>.

Two of the more important points from this code:

1) Academic dishonesty, such as plagiarism, is not cool (and it breaks Professor Seymour’s heart). You risk failing the entire course if you engage in it.

2) The University of Louisville is committed to providing access to programs and services for qualified individuals with disabilities. If you are a student with a disability, please contact the Disability Resource

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Center (Robbins Hall, 852-6938) for verification of eligibility and determination of specific accommodations, and then check with me to be sure I've received that info.

**Course Schedule\* (subject to change)**

**\*Please come to class having read the sections listed for the given day.**

**Introduction to Environmental Justice**

**Week 1**

Tu 10 Jan Syllabus and overview

Robert Bullard, "Principles of Environmental Justice," from *The Quest for Environmental Justice: Human Rights and the Politics of Pollution* (we'll look at this in class; also posted on Blackboard)

Th 12 Jan Bullard, "Environmental Justice in the Twenty-First Century," from *The Quest for Environmental Justice* (on Blackboard)

Murray Bookchin and Dave Foreman, "Racism and the Future of the Movement," from *Defending the Earth: A Dialogue between Murray Bookchin and Dave Foreman* (on Blackboard)

*(Fri 13 Jan: Last day to drop/add)*

**Week 2**

Tu 17 Jan Look over "Film Basics" handout on Blackboard before class  
Spike Lee, *When the Levees Broke* (in-class screening)

**Chicana/o Perspectives in Prose Fiction**

Th 19 Jan *When the Levees Broke*, con't.; Ana Castillo, *So Far from God* first 1/3

**Week 3**

Tu 24 Jan *So Far from God* second 1/3

Th 26 Jan *So Far from God* til end  
**Response paper 1 due**

**Week 4**

Tu 31 Jan Lucha Corpi, *Cactus Blood* first 1/3

Th 2 Feb *Cactus Blood* second 1/3  
*(Last day to apply for degree)*

**Week 5**

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Tu 7 Feb *Cactus Blood* til end

**African-American and Multicultural Perspectives in Prose Fiction**

Th 9 Feb Barbara Neely, *Blanche Cleans Up*

**Week 6**

Tu 14 Feb *Blanche Cleans Up*

Th 16 Feb *Blanche Cleans Up*  
**Response paper 2 due**

**Week 7**

Tu 21 Feb In-class mid-term exam prep

Th 23 Feb Meet in the **Chao Auditorium** (bottom floor of Ekstrom) for a talk by Karen Tei Yamashita. **Talk starts at 11:30 sharp** and goes til 12:30; if you must leave by 12:15 you may.

**Week 8**

Tu 28 Feb **Mid-term exam**

Th 1 Mar Karen Tei Yamashita, *Tropic of Orange* (first third)  
(*Last day to withdraw*)

**Week 9**

Tu 6 Mar *Tropic of Orange* (second third)

Th 8 Mar *Tropic of Orange* (finish)

**Week 10 Spring Break: No Class**

**Week 11**

Tu 20 Mar Octavia Butler, *Parable of the Sower* (first third)  
Vote on film to watch for Week 13  
**Response paper 3 due**

Th 22 Mar Octavia Butler, *Parable of the Sower* (second third)

**Perspectives in Other Media – Drama, Poetry, Art, Film**

**Week 12**

Tu 27 Mar Octavia Butler, *Parable of the Sower* (finish)  
Cherríe Moraga, *Heroes and Saints* Act I (just bring play to class)

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Th 29 Mar Cherríe Moraga, *Heroes and Saints* (finish reading on your own)

**Week 13**

Tu 3 Apr Simon Ortiz, selected poems (on Blackboard)  
Ester Hernández, *Sun Mad* (look at in class)  
Your examples – EJ in multimedia  
**Response paper 4 due**

Th 5 Apr EJ film of your choice (in-class viewing)  
**Final take-home essay prompts distributed**

**Week 14**

Tu 10 Apr EJ film of your choice (in-class viewing)  
**Complete class evaluations**

Th 12 Apr EJ film of your choice (discussion)  
**Complete class evaluations**

**Conclusion**

**Week 15**

Tu 17 Apr Extracurricular reports catch-up  
**Final essays due on Blackboard**

Th 19 Apr Wrap up  
**Final exam prep**

**FINAL EXAM TUES MAY 1 11:30 A.M. – 2 P.M.**